Fiction as a Genre

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(Final version – please see published version for corrections)

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ABSTRACT:
Standard theories define fiction in terms of an invited response of imagining or make-believe. I argue that these theories are not only subject to numerous counterexamples, they also fail to explain why classification matters to our understanding and evaluation of works of fiction as well as non-fiction. I propose instead that we construe fiction and non-fiction as *genres:* categories whose membership is determined by a cluster of non-essential criteria, and which play a role in the appreciation of particular works. I claim that this proposal captures the intuitions motivating alternative theories of fiction.

I. *Overview.* When philosophers talk about fiction, they typically have one of two issues in mind. Sometimes their interest is in fiction as a domain that poses certain puzzles, particularly about reference and non-existence. This is the standard focus in metaphysics and philosophy of language, where the relevant contrast is between fiction and reality. Alternatively, they might be concerned with the nature of fiction and our emotional and cognitive engagement with fictional representations, such as books and films. This is typically the focus in aesthetics, where the relevant contrast is between fiction and non-fiction. Although the two topics are related — for example, Kendall Walton's (1990) account of fictional characters flows from his theory of fictional representations — they call for different kinds of explanation. My focus in the present paper is on the second set of concerns, about the nature of fiction and non-fiction and our appreciation of works in these categories.

Why should we care about the difference between fiction and non-fiction? The main reason is that classification shapes our practices of understanding and evaluating particular works. If James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* (2005) had been published as fiction, no one would have minded that this first-person account of drug abuse was not written by a real addict; but because it was published as non-fiction, the discovery of the fabrication provoked not merely criticism but outrage. Conversely, if Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha* (1997) had been published as non-fiction, the revelations by a member of that traditionally secretive profession would have been stunning; but because it was published as fiction, the book was greeted with no more fanfare than any other well-researched novel. And whilst authors of both 'counterfactual history' and 'alternative history' imagine what might have been, only counterfactual history, as a genre of non-fiction, is controversial.[1]

As these examples make clear, the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is not simply the distinction between the true and the false, or between what is known and what is made up.[2] Of course we do use the term 'fiction', sometimes in a pejorative sense, to describe claims that are untrue or content that is invented.[3] In this sense we say that the politician's claims or the pseudo-scientist's experimental results are fictions, or that Frey wrote one long fiction. But deception or other kinds of invention do not turn a work of non-fiction into a work of fiction in the sense relevant to this paper, as the response to *A Million Little Pieces* demonstrates.

Although we cannot assume at the outset that ordinary responses to such works map onto a philosophically interesting distinction, we should expect philosophical conceptions of fiction and non-fiction to shed light on what is at stake. In fact any account of the distinction between fiction and non-fiction should address two questions: First, what are the criteria of membership in each category? And second, what are the effects of classification on our engagement with particular works? I take it that the answer to the first question should clarify the answer to the second: that is, our account of why a work belongs in a given category should shed light on why and how the category figures in our appreciation of the work.

Standard theories of fiction fail to answer either question adequately. The most popular position today defines fiction as necessarily involving an invited response of imagining or make-believe, with different versions offering different sufficient conditions. I argue that such theories are not only subject to numerous counterexamples, they also fail to

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[1] On the controversy within historiography see, e.g. Black 2008 and Ferguson 1997. Note that the debate is not over the status of counterfactual history as non-fiction, but rather its credentials as serious historiography.

[2] Deutsch (2000) takes being made up to be both necessary and sufficient for categorisation as a work of fiction, but this position is neither plausible nor popular.

[3] Thanks to David Wiggins for pressing me to distinguish this use of 'fiction'.

explain why classification matters to our engagement with actual works: our practices of reading, writing, publishing, criticizing and so on.

I propose instead that we construe fiction and non-fiction as *genres.* A genre, for my purposes, is a way of classifying representations that guides appreciation, so that knowledge of the classification plays a role in a work's correct interpretation and evaluation.[4] Although the notion of genre in general, and the fiction/non-fiction distinction in particular, cut across different media — for instance there are fiction and non-fiction films — I focus on written texts. I argue that regarding fiction and non-fiction as genres of text captures the intuitions motivating alternative theories of fiction, but within an explanatory framework that accounts for the essential role of classification in appreciation.

The use of the term *genre* is designed to draw attention to the relationship between fiction and non-fiction on the one hand, and the more specific categories of text typically described as genres: for instance, the historical novel or the celebrity biography. There are two key features of such paradigm genres that I maintain also characterize fiction and non-fiction. First, whilst membership in some genres, such as the villanelle, is determined by necessary and sufficient conditions, the vast majority are determined by a variety of non-essential conditions, including contextual and historical conditions. Second, classification generates expectations about the features of a work and thereby determines appropriate standards of evaluation. My claim is not, however, merely that fiction and non-fiction are *similar to* other genres. Instead, they typically constitute broader categories into which other genres fall. We could describe ordinary genres as *sub-genres* of fiction or non-fiction, or take the larger categories to be *super-genres*.[5] However I take these fluid distinctions to reflect relative specificity rather than a rigidified hierarchy, so that 'genre' is the simplest term to cover all such classifications.

In the next section I criticize standard approaches to the distinction between fiction and non-fiction. I then defend an alternative account according to which membership in each category is determined by a cluster of non-essential criteria. Finally I examine how classification as fiction or non-fiction influences appreciation.

II. *Standard Theories of Fiction.* The currently standard account of fiction takes it to be defined at least in part by an invited response of imagining or make-believe. Typically, theorists who defend this line claim that fiction is marked by a distinctive speech act, called *fictive utterance*, which is characterized by a Gricean intention on the part of the author that readers imagine or make-believe a particular content, in virtue of recognizing that very intention.[6] This is by contrast with non-fiction, where (according to this view) authors make assertions that invite belief.

Theorists who adopt this approach are inspired by Kendall Walton (1990), but Walton himself does not advocate anything like a speech act theory of fiction. This is partly because he (controversially) denies that fiction must be intentionally produced. But more importantly, it is because Walton is not concerned with fiction in the ordinary sense; rather, he is concerned with a significantly wider category of representational art, which he takes to be unified by the essential role of imagining (see Friend 2008). A different motivation of the fictive utterance approach is widespread agreement that fiction cannot be distinguished from

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[4] A genre is thus akin to a *category of art* in Kendall Walton's (1970) sense, or what Dom Lopes (2010) calls an *appreciative kind*. Other theories of genre emphasise classification criteria more than appreciation (e.g. Currie 2004; see also Chandler 1997).

[5] The term 'super-genre' seems to originate with Rabkin (1976).

[6] Such views are put forward by Currie 1990; Lamarque and Olsen 1994; Davies 1996, 2001, ms; and Stock 2011, ms.

non-fiction by appeal to syntactic or semantic properties.[7] The linguistic structures of works of fiction and non-fiction may be indistinguishable. And just as works of fiction may refer to real individuals and events and contain true statements, works of non-fiction may contain non-referring expressions and make false claims.

I agree that fiction cannot be defined syntactically or semantically. But though there is an intuitive connection between fiction and imagining on the one hand, and non-fiction and belief on the other, there is no conception of 'imagining' or 'make-believe' that distinguishes a response specific to fiction as opposed to non-fiction. Because I have made this case elsewhere (Friend 2008, 2011), I shall be brief.

The class of works that invite make-believe or imagining is substantially broader than our ordinary notion of fiction. Anyone who reads Ernest Shackleton's *South* (1920), an account of his failed expedition to Antarctica, without imagining the terrible odyssey that unfolded after his ship was crushed by ice has simply not engaged properly with the story. Vividly told non-fiction narratives invite us to imagine what it was like for people to live in different times and places, to undergo wonderful or horrible experiences, and so on. In fact the invitation is often explicit. Here is a passage from Simon Schama's *A History of Britain:*

> Take a look at [Disraeli's] Buckinghamshire country house, Hughenden Manor, with its stupendous over-decoration (unerringly like Osborne House); imagine its terraces full of peacocks, and the sense of Disraeli the sorcerer — or 'magician', as his friends and enemies liked to say — becomes more plausible. (Schama 2003, p. 259)

The invitation to imagine, whether explicit or not, is common to narrative works of non-fiction. Indeed I suspect that the association between fiction and imagination arises partly because fictions are normally narrative in structure, and narratives typically invite imagining.

Given the breadth of the category of works that invite make-believe or imagining, advocates of fictive utterance must find a way to exclude the Shackleton and Schama narratives and their ilk from counting as fiction. The obvious point to be made about such narratives is that although they invite imagining, the imagining in question is compatible with believing the story in its entirety; the authors are not making anything up. So the usual move is to introduce a further condition requiring that the *content* we are to imagine be, in some sense, a product of the author's imagination, or at least not included with the specific aim of truth-telling. I shall discuss just two examples of this move here. Gregory Currie claims that 'a work is fiction iff (*a*) it is the product of a fictive intent and (*b*) if the work is true, then it is at most accidentally true' (1990, p. 46). The first condition reflects the necessity of fictive utterance, and the second is designed to rule out cases where an author invites audiences to make-believe a true story. David Davies (1996, 2001) disagrees with Currie, arguing that a non-accidentally true narrative could still be fiction. On his view fictionality requires that (1) the author intends that readers make believe the narrated events, and (2) it is not the case that 'correspondence with the manner in which events actually transpired was taken, by the utterer, to be a constraint that the ordering of events in [the text] must satisfy' (1996, p. 52). A work is fiction if its primary aim is something other than this *fidelity constraint*, for example if aesthetic considerations determine the narrative structure (2001, p. 266).[8]

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[7] Such definitions have been more popular outside philosophy. For the syntactic approach, see Hamburger (1993) and Banfield (1982). For the semantic approach, see Wellek and Warren (1956) and Riffaterre (1990).

[8] Davies (ms) has since revised his view in light of various objections (including some mentioned below). See discussion below and n. 9.

Neither of these accounts is satisfactory. First, many works of fiction contain non-accidentally true statements. Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* opens with this sentence: 'There are some fields near Manchester, well known to the inhabitants as "Green Heys Fields," through which runs a public footpath to a little village about two miles distant' (1987, p. 1). This statement is not only true, it was intended to be true and any informed reader of Gaskell will believe it. It meets all the standard requirements on sincere assertion. Denying that it is an assertion because it occurs within a work of fiction would just be begging the question. At the same time, many works of fiction take the truth to constitute a constraint on the ordering of events. The point of the seven novels in Gore Vidal's 'Narratives of Empire' series (1967-2000) is to introduce readers to American history according to Vidal's interpretation. Although the members of two fictional families show up in every novel — though barely at all in *Lincoln* (1984) — they are there primarily to provide perspectives on the real events that drive the plots forward.

Furthermore, there are works of non-fiction that meet the sufficiency conditions offered by Davies and Currie. Begin with Davies's fidelity constraint. Many works of New Journalism, or creative non-fiction more generally, use true stories for other purposes, such as entertainment. Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965) provides a good example, since Capote was clear that his purpose was to show that journalism could deploy literary forms (Plimpton 1966). To this end the narrative was originally published as a non-fiction feature series by the *New Yorker*. Yes, Capote engaged in certain falsifications, for which he is rightly condemned. But these no more turn the book into fiction than the more recent fabrications by Jayson Blair turn his series of *New York Times* articles into fairy tales. Fictive utterance theorists sometimes retort that works of New Journalism are borderline or controversial, so that we should not rest our case on them.[9] This is a mistake in my view, but leaving that aside for the moment, Davies's fidelity constraint would also be foreign to past practices of writing non-fiction. According to the ancient Roman conception of history that had a defining influence on European historiography in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, the point of history was to provide moral and especially political instruction through examples (Nadel 1964). The choice of examples and the way they were treated constituted aesthetic and didactic decisions, not motivated primarily by fidelity to the facts.

As a result of their different concerns, Roman historians and their early modern successors also provide a counterexample to Currie's definition. Despite frequently insisting that history must be restricted to the truth, Roman historians took this requirement to be compatible with the standard convention of making up speeches and battle descriptions. Tacitus's *Annals* and *Histories* are replete with vivid battles and strikingly eloquent speeches, the contents of which readers are not supposed to believe. In addition Tacitus tells us what historical figures were thinking, including their dreams, as in this passage from the *Annals* (i.65): 'A ghastly dream appalled the general [Caecina]. He seemed to see Quintilius Varus, covered with blood, rising out of the swamps, and to hear him, as it were, calling to him, but he did not, as he imagined, obey the call; he even repelled his hand, as he stretched it over him' (Tacitus 2003, p. 37). It was only in the late sixteenth century that historians began to eschew the representations of inner thoughts, invented speeches or battles and the depiction of legendary heroes and fabulous events that had no basis in evidence (Shapiro 2000, p. 41). We *could* say that historical writing prior to the seventeenth or eighteenth century counts as fiction rather than non-fiction. But surely it is more plausible to say that the conventions for writing non-fiction history have changed over time.

[9] Stock makes this claim (2011, p. 156), as does Davies (ms); they think the same of Vidal's novel *Lincoln*. I criticise this view in §5.

Admittedly I have not considered every possible fictive utterance theory. However, the wide variety of counterexamples should cast doubt on the prospects for such accounts. Even when supplemented by additional conditions, they cannot adequately explain the distinction between works of fiction and works of non-fiction.

How does the fictive utterance theorist reply? The standard move is to claim that the criteria of fictionality apply in the first instance, not to whole works, but instead to their parts. On all versions of this view, a given utterance in a work — typically identified as a sentence of the text — is a fictive utterance so long as the author intended its content to be imagined. Currie applies his sufficiency condition to individual utterances as well: if they are both intended to be imagined and are at most accidentally true then they count as ***fictional statements***. From this perspective Tacitus's ***Histories*** and ***Annals***, like Gaskell's ***Mary Barton***, would contain a mix of fictional and non-fictional statements. Davies (ms) has recently suggested that his criteria apply to ***fictional narratives***, which also may form only part of a work. A fictional narrative is a portion of a work that is comprised of fictive utterances and is constructed with a story-telling objective other than fidelity in mind. So Tacitus's ***Histories*** and ***Annals*** contain a number of fictional narratives interspersed among those parts of the texts that are subject to the fidelity constraint.[10] Although the assumption is that the fictionality of the work depends on the fictionality of its parts 'in some perhaps irremediably vague way' (Currie 1990, p. 49), what really matters for theorizing is fictionality as a feature of the parts themselves.[11]

An approach that sheds no real light on how we move from the parts to the whole is inadequate, however. For though it can matter to us which parts of a work we should or should not believe, or whether they were motivated by a fidelity constraint, work-level classifications play a role in appreciation that is simply left out on this approach. For example, when critics objected to the device of a fictionalized narrator in Edmund Morris's ***Dutch: a Memoir of Ronald Reagan*** (1994), it was already clear which parts of the book were made up and which were not; the debate arose because the ***work*** was published as non-fiction.

As I see it, the reason fictive utterance theories have so much trouble accounting for the distinction between works of fiction and non-fiction is that they are ***reductionist:*** they seek to reduce fictionality to properties possessed by the parts of a work or a single dimension of the work. I shall argue that the right way to distinguish between fiction and non-fiction focuses attention, not on how the parts of a work add up to the whole, but instead how the whole work is embedded in a larger context, and specifically in certain practices of reading, writing, criticizing, and so on. Thus I propose a non-reductionist, ***contextualist*** account of the distinction between fiction and non-fiction.

At the same time, my proposal that fiction and non-fiction be construed as genres does justice to the intuitive links between fiction on the one hand, and imagining, story-

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[10] Stock (ms) similarly claims that her account of fictionality, according to which a fictive utterance is intended to invite imagining in a particular sense (described in Stock 2011), applies in the first instance to ***fictions***, which are not identical to ***fictional works*** and may form proper parts of works categorised as either fiction or non-fiction. To distinguish works she appeals to a ***dominant*** intention concerning ***most*** of the utterances in the text. This new account avoids some of the criticisms in Friend (2011) but I do not believe it to be satisfactory. However I do not have the space to consider the account here.

[11] Davies (ms) proposes that the fidelity constraint operates at the work level as well: if the inclusion of fictional narratives is motivated by an overall purpose of truth-telling, then the work will still count as non-fiction; otherwise it will count as fiction. I think this proposal is subject to counterexamples, but do not have space to develop these here. In addition, as Stock (ms) points out, it does not explain the relationship between fictive parts and the whole work.

telling and making things up on the other — the links that motivate the fictive utterance theory. I claim, however, that rather than constituting necessary and sufficient conditions, these links indicate *standard features* of the genre of fiction; as such, they count towards classification, but only in combination with other criteria. To understand this claim we must put it in the context of an account of genre.

III. *Criteria of Classification.* Genres are essentially what Kendall Walton (1970) calls 'categories of art'. Categories of art are ways of classifying artworks — by medium, art form, genre, style, or what have you — that guide appreciation; but I take the idea to apply to representations in general, and not just to works of art. Membership in most categories is not determined by necessary and sufficient conditions, but rather by a cluster of non-essential criteria that include not only features internal to the work (in a sense to be explained), but also facts about the work's origins, in particular the category in which the artist intended the work to be appreciated, or in which the artist's contemporaries would have placed it.[12] I claim that fiction and non-fiction are genres in this sense. Classification as fiction or non-fiction, like classification in other genres or categories of art, influences the way we experience, understand and evaluate a work by specifying a contrast class against which the work's properties stand out as being *standard*, *contra-standard* or *variable*. What other theorists propose as defining properties of fictionality — such as containing utterances whose contents we are to imagine — I see as *standard features* of works in the fiction genre.

What does it mean to claim that a feature internal to a work is 'standard', 'contra-standard' or 'variable' for the genre or category in which the work belongs? The distinctions come from Walton's (1970) account of *perception in a category*, but they can also be applied to texts. A feature of a work is *standard* if possession of that feature places or tends to place the work in a particular category: flatness is standard for painting; an obvious-but-innocent suspect is standard for whodunits. A feature is *contra-standard* if possession of that feature excludes or tends to exclude the work from a category. Heavy drumbeats are contra-standard for minuets; stream-of-consciousness narration is contra-standard for science textbooks. *Variable* features are those that can differ between works in a category without bearing on classification. Colour and composition are variable for painting; the degree of detail in describing characters is variable for the novel. When we experience a work in a particular category, we are sensitive to these different kinds of properties. So, Walton points out, we do not take the bust of a Roman emperor to 'resemble and represent a perpetually motionless man, of uniform (marble) color, who is severed at the chest', nor do we take black and white drawings to depict a colourless world, or Cubist paintings to depict squarish people (1970, p. 345). This is because of our familiarity with what is standard for the categories.

A complication should be noted. Because Walton introduces the distinction among standard, contra-standard and variable features of an artwork in the context of a discussion of perceptually distinguishable categories of art, and because he is arguing against those who claim that the 'aesthetic properties' of an artwork — properties like *elegance* and *garishness*, *tension* and *balance* — depend solely on the work's observable 'non-aesthetic properties' — such as the configuration of particular lines and colours in a painting, or the sequence of particular sounds in a symphony — he restricts the features that count as internal to a work to those that can be seen or heard, that are immediately manifest to a person with normal eyesight or hearing. However, there is no reason for us to be restricted in this way.

I propose to count as internal features of a text not only features that are manifest in the text itself — such as the use of linguistic or formal devices, stylistic choices and structural

[12] Walton adds to these criteria a consideration of which category makes perception of the work most pleasing (1970, p. 357). I leave this criterion aside here for the sake of simplicity.

properties (e.g. the inclusion of 'once upon a time', footnotes, first- or third-person narration, etc.) — but also some that cannot be identified in the absence of information available outside the work: whether certain names refer, whether an author asserts a particular claim or has made up a particular detail, and so on. The properties to which fictive utterance theorists try to reduce fictionality, such as the invitation to imagine a particular content, belong in this second group. I claim that these properties, which pertain only to the parts of a work or a single dimension of a work, are actually internal features of fictional texts that play the same role that Walton attributes to the standard features of perceptual artworks. As such, they contribute to classification without determining it.

The features that count as standard for a genre are those we expect works in that genre to have; this is why possession of those features tends to place the work in the category. If we take a text to be fiction, for example, we will expect it to engage us imaginatively through narrative; to deploy certain literary devices; to include invented elements, such as descriptions of what has never happened and names that fail to refer; to make claims that are not assertions by the author; and so on. If we take a work to be non-fiction, on the other hand, we will expect an effort to be faithful to the facts; references to real people, places and events; assertions that convey the author's views; and so forth. Why do we take works to be fiction or non-fiction in the first place? This might be because they are located in the relevant sections of the bookshop or library, or are written by a familiar author. Or it might be because we recognize features of the work that we have seen in other works in the category, for example starting with 'Once upon a time' or containing lots of footnotes.[13]

Once we take a work as fiction or non-fiction, we will expect the standard features to be present, and when they are we will normally take them for granted. This has implications for our evaluative practices. We do not normally criticize authors of fiction for making things up; instead, we criticize them if the story they weave is not sufficiently interesting. Conversely, appraisals of factual correctness are normally appropriate for non-fiction, whereas it would make little sense to criticize a work of non-fiction for failing at verisimilitude — that is, for being too 'unrealistic' (with non-fiction we accept that truth may be 'stranger than fiction'). When standard features are lacking, on the other hand, this is likely to make a significant difference. Someone who picks up Vladimir Nabokov's ***Pale Fire*** (1962) in the fiction section of the bookshop will expect a narrative, but will instead find a 999-line poem extensively annotated by a fictional commentator (one who turns out to be deeply unreliable). The structure, standard for a sub-genre of non-fiction but contra-standard for fiction, certainly makes a difference to our understanding and evaluation of the work, whether positive or negative: at the time of publication reviews were decidedly mixed.

A work like Nabokov's illustrates the fact that standard features are just that: standard or typical, and not necessarily definitive. No one would claim that ***Pale Fire*** is not a work of fiction because it lacks a feature (narrative structure) standard for that category. The work is interesting in part precisely ***because*** it lacks that feature, possessing instead a structure that is contra-standard for the fiction genre. The same is true of those properties discussed by fictive utterance theorists. It is currently standard for a work of fiction (and contra-standard for a work of non-fiction) to contain many statements that are not intended to be believed. It is also currently standard for a work of fiction (and contra-standard for a work of non-fiction) to be constructed with objectives other than truth-telling in mind, or to contain parts constructed with such objectives in mind.

This line of thought is apt to provoke an objection. Claiming that a feature is standard for a category implies that a work could lack that feature and still belong in the category,

[13] The way in which the presence of some features associated with a genre lead us to expect other features is emphasised by Currie (2004) in his account of genres.

even if this is by definition a rare occurrence. But this does not seem right for at least some features. Could we conceive of a work of fiction that did not invite us to imagine made-up content? Even if the inclusion of invented elements cannot be a sufficient condition for fictionality, it may seem to be necessary. Although there is no reason in principle to deny that a standard feature can be a necessary condition, I hesitate to say that it is *inconceivable* that a work of fiction could be entirely true, given the right context. Davies's account of fiction allows for entirely true fictions, so long as the narrative structure was determined by goals other than truth-telling; thus he would categorise *In Cold Blood* as fiction even if Capote made nothing up (ms). Similarly, some theorists think that narrative structure or the use of literary devices implies fictionality. So if we imagine a practice where the concept of non-fiction is sufficiently restrictive, the use of free indirect discourse by itself might classify a work as fiction, despite its having no impact on the veracity of the story. Or there may just be circumstances in which presenting a true story as merely to be imagined and not believed counts as producing fiction. Compare the situation with painting. Flatness is a standard but not necessary condition for painting, given the existence of collagist paintings and the like. One might be inclined to think, though, that at least the use of paint is necessary for something to count as a painting. But digital paintings are now an accepted genre, and there are other works that use materials such as fabric to achieve painterly effects; these are often called 'paintings without paint'.[14] If there can be paintings without paint, presumably there can be fictions without invention. That said, there can be no doubt that the inclusion of made-up content is a particularly significant standard feature of fiction.[15]

Thus when we read a work of fiction we do not usually blink when we find authors making things up; we expect the inventions to contribute to the imaginative and entertainment value of the work and don't necessarily worry about accuracy. And when we read a work of non-fiction that turns out to contain elements that have been invented, or does not aim primarily to tell the truth, we are surprised and wonder about what we can believe. These responses would not make sense if the lack of a standard feature or the possession of a contra-standard feature simply excluded a work from the relevant category. Vidal's 'Narratives of Empire' series is noteworthy precisely because the novels possess features contra-standard for fiction. Capote's *In Cold Blood* is noteworthy precisely because it possesses features contra-standard for non-fiction.

Actually, that is not quite right. Capote's narrative *was* noteworthy as contra-standard non-fiction when it was published in the early 1960s. For journalists to use narrative techniques associated with literary fiction was then a ground-breaking development. But since that time, the extent to which works of non-fiction deploy literary devices has become variable, as university courses on New Journalism and Creative Non-fiction attest. That influential works with contra-standard features can change our expectations of a genre should be familiar from other cases. When Agatha Christie made the narrator the culprit in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), she defied readers' expectations of detective stories, in which the narrator, as the detective's sidekick, was presumed to be outside the realm of possible suspects.[16] The device, which led to accusations of cheating and betrayal, changed the conventions of the genre in ways that opened up new possibilities (ones Christie herself

[14] For just one example, consider the exhibit 'Painting without Paint', described at http://artsmacked.com/2012/01/18/painting-without-paint-5/.

[15] In Friend (2008, 2011) I surmise that this is because the existence of the genre of fiction is at least partly explained by the purpose of allowing authors to use their creative imaginations to make things up. But this is compatible with a particular work's failing to adhere to this purpose.

[16] See Barnard (1980) and Bayard (2000).

exploited later). The same kind of change occurred with the advent of New Journalism for the genre of non-fiction.

In these cases, change occurs because of the influence of works or sub-genres with contra-standard features. But breaking the rules of a genre is neither necessary nor sufficient for the evolution of standard features. First, there is no guarantee that the use of contra-standard features will 'catch on' and change the expectations associated with a category. Laurence Stern's *Tristram Shandy* (published between 1759 and 1767), wildly digressive and unstructured as it was, did not significantly alter the development of fiction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which retained and solidified the emphasis on coherent narrative. Though *Tristram Shandy* was popular for its bawdy comedy, it was not until the twentieth century that various kinds of experimental fiction seriously challenged the centrality of narrative coherence — not coincidentally at the same time that modernism was developing across the arts, rejecting traditional assumptions and especially realism. Second, genre conventions may change even without the provocation of contra-standard works. The movement of historians away from invented speeches and the like in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries appears to have been motivated largely by the developing legal conception of 'fact' and its association with evidence in law, leading to a new role for documentation in history and an increasing rejection of any 'fact' for which documentation could not be provided (Shapiro 2000, Ch. 2).

I have by no means exhausted the subject of how the standard features of fiction and non-fiction have changed over time.[17] But it is clear that they do change. And this is why Tacitus and other historians of the past can be writing non-fiction — works that sit squarely within the genre of non-fiction, works that are in no way controversial or borderline — whilst nonetheless breaking some of the most important rules we associate with the genre. Fictive utterance theorists have substantial difficulty coping with such works because they mistake features that are merely standard in our current practice, for necessary and sufficient conditions that define fictionality for all time.

We can safely say that a work that lacks any standard features of a category, whether manifest or non-manifest, will be excluded from that category. Furthermore, a work that has many standard features of a category (and few contra-standard features) is likely to belong in that category, and a work that has few standard features of a category (and many contra-standard features) is unlikely to belong.[18] But if standard features by themselves cannot determine correct classification, what else is relevant? We must take into account historical and contextual factors. It should be obvious by now that we may not recognize which features of a work are standard (or not) without knowing something about the history of the work. But this is not merely an epistemic requirement. Walton (1970) argues that knowledge of the origins of an artwork — in particular, knowledge of either the author's classificatory intention or the categories established in the author's community — is essential to correct classification. The same is true of fiction and non-fiction.

Why do Tacitus's *Annals* and *Histories* qualify as non-fiction? Not just because Tacitus writes about a lot of real historical figures, and not because he makes things up. Rather, it is because he intended to write non-fiction history within an established practice

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[17] That genres evolve over time is widely recognised by genre theorists, even if they do not put the point in terms of standard features. See, e.g. Chandler 1997 and Swales 1990.

[18] The role of standard and contra-standard features in genre classifications differentiates this kind of account from something like an institutional theory of art, according to which art status is conferred by relevant members of the 'artworld' with no internal constraints on the kinds of things that qualify. Thanks to Michael Morris for pressing me to differentiate my account from an institutional theory.

recognized by his audience, an audience fully aware of the conventions for historical writing of the period. (Notice that it is Tacitus's intention to write non-fiction history, and ***not*** his intention to invite belief or make-believe, that is important here.) Where practices are not yet fully developed, the author's classificatory intention plays a more significant role. Why does ***In Cold Blood*** count as non-fiction journalism? Not just because Capote purports to tell the truth, and not because he uses novelistic techniques; but also not because he operated within established conventions. Rather, it was Capote's intention to create a new form of artistic journalistic writing that mattered. This is not to say that authorial intentions are decisive by themselves. If the ***New Yorker*** had refused to publish Capote's work it might never have changed the course of journalistic writing. Frey intended ***A Million Little Pieces*** to be non-fiction, but once his deception was revealed it was re-classified by the publisher. And consider the case of ***Dutch*** once again. The fact that Edmund Morris was the only official biographer of Reagan; that he was already a Pulitzer Prize-winning presidential biographer (of Theodore Roosevelt); that he intended ***Dutch*** to be a work of non-fiction; and that it was published as non-fiction biography, all lend support to the claim that the book should be classified as non-fiction. But these features were not definitive at the time of publication because there was no established practice of using fictionalized narrators as a device in non-fiction biography, and the device did not catch on.

To highlight the significance of these historical and intentional considerations in classifying fiction and non-fiction, we need only change the context for a particular work. Had Tacitus's ***Annals*** and ***Histories*** been written in the mid-twentieth century, they might have been classified as fiction.[19] Had Gore Vidal written something like the 'Narratives of Empire' series in sixteenth-century England, on the other hand, they might well have counted as non-fiction. And had Morris not intended ***Dutch*** to be non-fiction, it could have been classified as (very boring!) fiction. This is so even if we hold constant the authors' intentions about what we are supposed to imagine. Where works display features associated with both fiction and non-fiction, contextual information about categorisation takes on an even larger role.

I conclude that we do not classify works as fiction or non-fiction based on necessary and sufficient conditions, such as an invitation to imagine. Instead, as with other genres and categories of art, classification turns on a cluster of non-essential criteria: in particular, the possession of standard features (including those identified by fictive utterance theorists), the intention of the author that the work be read in a particular category and the conventions associated with contemporary categorisation practices. If this is right, do we have an account of fiction and non-fiction as genres that is superior to standard theories of fiction?

Not yet. I have shown that classification as fiction and non-fiction operates along the same lines as classification in other genres or categories of art, rather than in the ways suggested by fictive utterance theorists. But this is not enough by itself to establish that fiction and non-fiction ***are*** genres and thus to provide a robust alternative theory. A genre as I have defined it is a way of classifying representations that guides appreciation, so that knowledge of the classification plays a role in a work's correct interpretation and evaluation. Even if I am right about how we categorize works as fiction and non-fiction, these categories may not play any role in our understanding or evaluation of particular works. In that case the categories as I have defined them would be of little interest. I address this challenge in the next section.

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[19] Of course it is more likely that Tacitus would have written them differently, following different conventions. Thanks to Paloma Atencia-Linares for this observation.

IV. *Effects of Classification.* Consider the sceptic: someone who thinks fiction and non-fiction are categories without any interesting role in appreciation. The sceptic argues that the categories of fiction and non-fiction are simply too broad to do any real explanatory work. The very fact that different sub-genres of fiction and non-fiction can undermine the expectations associated with the broader categories, causing the categories to change over time, seems to suggest that the more general expectations are ultimately irrelevant. And the considerations I have adduced seem to show only that the more specific genres matter: that Tacitus is writing *Classical Roman history*, that Capote is developing *New Journalism*, that Vidal is composing *historical novels*. Compare an argument by Dominic Lopes concerning 'digital art'. Although the category of artworks produced digitally is a genuine kind, Lopes contends that it is not an 'appreciative kind' — that is, a classification that is relevant to appreciation — because we do not 'normally appreciate a work in the kind by comparison with arbitrarily any other works in that kind' (2009, p. 17). We do not typically appreciate digital music, for example, by comparison with digital photographs. Just so, the sceptic claims, with respect to fiction and non-fiction: we do not normally appreciate fairy tales by comparison with political thrillers, or economics textbooks by comparison with Roman histories, even if they belong in the same categories of fiction or non-fiction respectively. Paintings may be classified by the weights of their frames, but the category of 'heavy paintings', even if it is a genuine category, is not an appreciative kind because it has no bearing on the way we interpret and evaluate the paintings. Similarly, the sceptic argues that works may be fiction or non-fiction, but this simply doesn't matter to how we appreciate them.[20]

The sceptical objection trades on a mistaken assumption, however: that because a narrower appreciative kind exists, a broader category is automatically irrelevant. Lopes's argument does not have that implication. To the contrary, Lopes claims that digital music is a sub-category of the art form of music, certainly a very wide class of works but nonetheless significant. For example, it matters to our appreciation of atonal music that it is music, something not necessarily obvious to first-time listeners. The invention of atonal music thwarted certain expectations associated with the general category, at least for those listeners accustomed to Classical European music, and thereby altered the possibilities of the kind (compare the effect of John Cage's *4'33"*, or the development of rap). It is the very fact that atonal music is counted as a sub-category of *music* that makes it interesting, in virtue of its contra-standard features. Similarly, I would claim, it is the fact that Morris intended to write *non-fiction* that makes *Dutch* noteworthy, in virtue of its contra-standard features.

To test this claim it is not enough simply to reflect on our ordinary engagement with fiction and non-fiction, and this for two reasons. First, in normal circumstances, we know much more about a work than the general classification: more specific genre information, facts about the author, and so forth. In such circumstances it may be impossible to distinguish the role played by the fiction/non-fiction distinction from the role played by other factors. Second, the effects of classifying a work as fiction or non-fiction may not be introspectively available, insofar as categorisation may trigger subconscious or sub-personal cognitive processes. I'll address these concerns in turn.

To isolate at least some noticeable effects of the fiction/non-fiction distinction, we can borrow a method employed by Walton in a thought experiment illustrating the effects of classification on the perception of an artwork (1970, p. 347). Walton asks us to imagine a

[20] A more extreme version of the objection is discussed by Currie, who imagines an objector arguing that 'what really matters for explaining the effect of the work is the specific way it is', not any genre to which it belongs (2004, 56). My reply below applies equally to this objection.

society which lacks painting but does have works called *guernicas*, which are like Picasso's *Guernica* but in bas-relief. So the colour palette (black/grey/white) and the shapes used are more or less the same as in the Picasso, but the works differ in the ways that they protrude from the wall, whether with smooth bulges, or jagged angles, and so on. This society would classify Picasso's work as a *guernica* rather than as a painting, so that for them its composition and colouring would be standard whereas its flatness would be variable or even contra-standard. As Walton says,

> This would make for a profound difference between our aesthetic reaction to 'Guernica' and theirs. It seems violent, dynamic, vital, disturbing to us. But I imagine it would strike them as cold, stark, lifeless, or serene and restful, or perhaps bland, dull, boring — but in any case *not* violent, dynamic, and vital. (Walton 1970, p. 347)

The reason for this difference is simple. As a painting *Guernica*'s flatness counts as standard, but as a *guernica* that is the most salient feature of the work, the one that distinguishes it from other works of the same kind.

Walton says that when we perceive the work as violent and dynamic, or as cold and serene, we perceive *Gestalt* or *emergent* qualities (1970, p. 340). So someone familiar with both paintings and *guernicas* who switched between these different ways of seeing Picasso's work should experience a gestalt effect akin to seeing Wittgenstein's picture now as a duck, now as a rabbit (p. 348). A real-world example of the same shift in perception, this time involving nested categories, is provided by Lopes, who points out that 'viewed simply as an example of twentieth-century abstract painting, Piet Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* comes across as spare, rigid and controlled. However, it's joyous, full of movement, and exuberant when compared to other paintings by Mondrian' (Lopes 2009, p. 17). What has happened here is that we have switched the relevant *contrast class:* the set of works with which the work in question is compared, a set with different standard, contra-standard and variable features. As a result of the switch, we focus on different features of the work, taking some aspects as more *salient* and foregrounding these whilst leaving others in the background.

A similar effect can be observed when we read certain texts now as fiction, now as non-fiction. To illustrate, consider this passage from Simon Winchester's *The Surgeon of Crowthorne* (1998). The passage is a description of a deserter from the Irish brigade of Union forces in the American Civil War, in 1864. Try reading it as fiction and as non-fiction:

> He was a dirty and unkempt man in his early twenties, his dark uniform torn to rags by his frantic, desperate run through the brambles. He was exhausted and frightened. He was like an animal — a far cry from the young lad who had arrived, cocksure and full of Dublin mischief, on the West Side of Manhattan three years earlier. He had seen so much fighting, so much dying — and yet now the cause for which he had fought was no longer truly his cause, not since Emancipation, certainly. His side was winning, anyway — they wouldn't need him anymore, they wouldn't miss him if he ran away. (Winchester 1998, pp. 54-55)

If we read the Winchester passage as fiction, we may not even remark on the 'inside view' of the character's thoughts, and in particular the appearance of free indirect discourse, the mix of third-person narration and first-person perspective ('yet *now* the cause for which *he had fought*') characterizing the last two sentences. We will not ask how the author knows what the deserter is thinking. This kind of inside view of what people are thinking is standard for fiction. And although we will recognize the historical backdrop, indicated by references to

real places (Dublin, Manhattan's West Side) and a real event (the Emancipation), we cannot straightforwardly assume the deserter ever existed. Placing invented characters within historical settings is a matter of course; the extent to which the invented elements are interwoven with real things is variable for fiction. Contrast our expectations when we read the passage as non-fiction. Now we will assume that the deserter was a real person, as real as the places and events we recognize. Reference is standard, and failure of reference contra-standard, for non-fiction. Moreover we will assume that Winchester intends his claims to be true, so that he can be criticized to the extent that he departs from the historical facts or lacks evidence. Given this, we will wonder how Winchester could know what the deserter was thinking. The use of free indirect discourse, entirely standard for fiction, will now stand out in the non-fiction context: is it an inspired literary device that makes a factual narrative more interesting, or an inappropriate overreach on the part of the author?

These differences in expectations should be evident to anyone reflecting on their experiences of the passage, but as previously noted the effects of classification may not be so intuitive, triggering cognitive processes of which we are not immediately aware. Psychological studies which have specifically addressed the effects of the 'fiction' and 'non-fiction' labels — where different subjects read the same story labelled in one way or the other — yield some interesting results. For example, one might assume that when we take a work to be fiction we are less likely to believe what we read. But whilst this is true of those aspects of the story that concern particular characters or events, it does not seem to be true of those aspects of a story that concern the real world more generally (Prentice and Gerrig 1999; Green and Brock 2000). So we may be ***more*** likely to believe what a fiction author says about a historical setting than what a non-fiction author says. One reason for this persuasive effect is that the 'fiction' label weakens our tendency to scrutinize what we read; another is that readers simply assume that authors of fiction would not gratuitously invent background information (cf. Prentice and Gerrig 1999). This difference has an effect on how we judge the works we read in both categories. Our attitude of scrutiny means that we are much less forgiving about mistakes or falsifications in non-fiction. But because we expect authors of fiction to be accurate about general real-world facts, we are also critical of mistakes or of falsifications that have no artistic justification. For instance, if ***The Surgeon of Crowthorne*** is fiction, we won't mind if the deserter character was invented. But we might mind if it turned out there were no Irishmen at all serving in the Union Army. Those who defend falsifications because a work is 'only fiction' have not paid sufficient attention to the expectations of readers.

Another interesting effect shows up when readers are asked to retell narratives labelled as either fiction or non-fiction. Subjects who think they are reading fiction retell the stories at much greater length, with significantly more detail as well as more of the language from the original texts (Hendersen and Clark 2007). Hendersen and Clark call this the 'fiction superiority effect', and suggest that it might be due to the different roles readers expect details to play in fiction and non-fiction: we assume that the details included by the author of non-fiction are there because they are true, rather than to serve some other purpose, so we do not give them the same kind of attention. Again this difference has implications for our evaluative practices. We expect authors of fiction to be at least as concerned with style and structure as they are with the content being conveyed; a work of fiction should be a good read, and to the extent that the style makes it dull (or too difficult without being thereby more interesting) we criticize it. By contrast, though we appreciate good writing in non-fiction, we are typically aiming to increase our knowledge of a particular subject matter and expect authors to have a similar focus. So if ***The Surgeon of Crowthorne*** is non-fiction, the fact that it is written in an engaging style may count as a virtue only insofar as it does not detract significantly from the capacity to impart information.

As it happens, there is no controversy over the correct classification of *The Surgeon of Crowthorne*, which is published as non-fiction. Someone who knew nothing about it might be misled by the novelistic style, but this by itself does not make it fiction. In fact it is the thoroughly researched story of the beginnings of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Winchester weaves that story together with the history of his title character, William Chester Minor, who contributed hundreds of the early definitions and examples included in the *OED* whilst imprisoned in the Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum near Crowthorne, England. (Minor had been a surgeon in the Union Army and served during the Civil War.) The book was widely praised when it was published for its highly entertaining and readable style, a style noteworthy in a work of non-fiction. It was also praised for the extensive research, but with some critics expressing reservations about the inclusion of details that make the story better but for which evidence is not provided. These evaluations clearly turn on the assumption that *The Surgeon of Crowthorne* is non-fiction.

I therefore claim that the classification of a work as fiction or non-fiction can make a genuine difference to appreciation. Labelling a work in one way or the other has an effect on how we read it, primarily by directing our attention to different aspects of the work. Plausibly this is because when we read a work as fiction or as non-fiction, we treat different features as standard, contra-standard and variable. As a consequence, we evaluate works we take to be fiction and non-fiction differently. But notice that we do this not just along a single dimension, but in ways that reflect the complexity of our expectations. It is not as if we *only* care about accuracy in reading non-fiction, or *only* about inventiveness or artistry in reading fiction.

In fact once we reject the notion that works in each category (or their parts) invite a particular response such as imagining or belief by definition, we can explore other aspects of our responses. I have already mentioned the few psychological studies that address the influence of the 'fiction' and 'non-fiction' labels on what readers believe or what they recall. But given the complexity of our classification practices, we should expect a variety of other effects, including effects on our experience of reading and on how we evaluate particular works, that have yet to be investigated in any rigorous way. For example, when we considered the Winchester passage, we saw that changing the classification produced a shift in our reading experience by altering which features of the passage counted as standard, contra-standard or variable. But how, exactly, was this effect produced? For the parallel *guernica* case Walton adverts to the familiar and well-studied idea of a gestalt shift: placing Picasso's *Guernica* in different categories foregrounds some features whilst putting others in the background, depending on where attention is focused. But gestalt shifts and visual foregrounding are both aspects of perceptual experience, with no literal application to reading. So, for example, there is evidence that various contextual factors, such as knowledge of the artist or title, affect what parts of a painting viewers look at, and for how long. Psychologists studying these effects manipulate the variables and then measure the eye-movements of subjects confronted by various pictures.[21] Such studies will not illuminate the role of classification in reading. Where Walton talks about perception in a category, we need an account of *reading in a category*, and in particular reading *as fiction* or *as non-fiction*.

Though I do not have time to develop it in any detail here, my own suggestion would be that reading in a category involves adopting what psychologists working on text comprehension call a *reading strategy* or *encoding strategy*. A reading strategy is a way of compensating for limitations in cognitive capacity, paradigmatically working memory capacity, by prioritizing attention on certain features of a text.[22] Because our working

[21] See, for example, Hristova and Grinberg 2011, and citations.

[22] For discussion, see e.g. Daneman and Hannon 2007 and the papers in McNamara 2007.

memory — roughly, the temporary storage system that processes incoming information — is not infinite, we are able to keep only so much information available at any one time for performing cognitive tasks, such as making the inferences that yield comprehension. Thus it would be impossible for normal individuals to focus equally on everything as they read: on every word, on every event, on every detail of setting or character. Instead we pay attention to some things more than to others. In doing so we sub-consciously adopt reading strategies — for example, focusing on what matters to the protagonist, or on events that are causally implicated in the main plot — that lead us to treat certain kinds of information as especially relevant to understanding what comes next in the text, as well as for integrating what we are currently reading with what we already know. What gets prioritized is what gets encoded in memory, and psychologists measure not only what we encode but also how we encode it: the kinds of mental representations that store the information.

We can apply this idea to the studies concerning fiction and non-fiction. The experiment by Hendersen and Clark suggests that when a work is classified as fiction, we pay more attention to language and details than when it is classified as non-fiction, developing a better representation of the text itself (the 'textbase representation'); this result is supported by a different study that contrasted a 'literary story' with a 'news story' (Zwaan 1994). The experiments concerning persuasion suggest effects on how we integrate different kinds of information with our background knowledge when reading fiction and non-fiction, which has implications for how we represent the situation described by the text (the 'situation model'). Although there are relatively few studies that look at the effects on reading strategy of the fiction/non-fiction distinction specifically, there are many studies that look at related variables, such as whether the purpose of reading is entertainment or study (e.g. van den Broek et al. 2001) and whether the text is narrative or expository (e.g. Wolfe and Woodwyck 2010). By investigating the interactions between classification and other variables that trigger different reading strategies, we will get a clearer picture of the effects of categorizing works as fiction or non-fiction. There are likely a range of effects on memory, comprehension and evaluation of works that have yet to be explored.

V. *Conclusion*. I conclude that we have good reason to construe fiction and non-fiction as genres: categories whose membership is determined by a cluster of non-essential criteria, and which play a role — or rather, a variety of roles — in the appreciation of particular works. In closing I would like to highlight a further contrast between my account and the fictive utterance approach.

Consider works that contain a mix of standard features for fiction and non-fiction, such as the cases I have brought forward as counterexamples to the arguments of fictive utterance theorists. As previously mentioned, they sometimes treat such works, for instance Capote's *In Cold Blood* or Vidal's *Lincoln*, as borderline or subject to dispute (though they do not say the same of Classical history). But these conclusions are motivated by a mistaken conception of how we classify works as fiction and non-fiction. Though fictive utterance theorists are correct to recognize the importance of authorial intention, it is the intention that a work belong in a particular category, along with contemporary practices regarding categorisation, that helps to determine classification — not the intention that certain parts of a work be believed or imagined. Once we take these contextual facts about categorisation into account, we will not count works as borderline solely on the basis of their internal features. There is simply no question that *In Cold Blood* is non-fiction, and no question that *Lincoln* is fiction. They contained contra-standard features for their genres when they were written, but this is part of what makes them interesting. Notice, though, that we can be so definite about these classifications only in retrospect. Where authors aim to push the boundaries of a category, it is always possible for them to go too far, leading to rejection of the intended

categorisation. As I said before, it is not just Capote's intention to create a literary journalism that identifies *In Cold Blood* as non-fiction, but also the *New Yorker*'s acceptance of that categorisation and the fact that his technique caught on. In short, far fewer works of this kind will count as 'borderline' on the genre account.

Of course this is not to imply that the classification of every work will be perfectly clear, even in retrospect. To the contrary, it can happen that consideration of internal features combined with the relevant contextual factors fail to yield a definite verdict, leading us to conclude that the works are not definitely fiction or non-fiction. This is likely when there is a conflict among criteria, as when an author's intention sits uneasily with contemporary expectations (think of *Dutch*). But it can also occur where an author's intention or contemporary practices allow for works that do not fit clearly in either category. Authors who explicitly intend to present a work that will be hard to distinguish as either fiction or non-fiction are relatively rare. Apparently the author Mark Sundeen fits this bill; he counts as a success the fact that two of his books were published as non-fiction in the US and as fiction in Europe (Montana Arts Council 2011).[23] And there are many cases where works are produced in sub-genres that mix features of fiction and non-fiction, but without a classificatory intention or established conventions to help clarify the broader category. This may be the case with Shakespeare's so-called 'history plays', for example, which belong in the late Elizabethan genre of 'historicall poesie' (see Campbell 1947, p. 98ff; Shapiro 2000, p. 199). The plays were based closely on historical works, for instance Holinshed's *Chronicles*, and functioned to popularize English history; but Shakespeare altered many facts and aimed to entertain his audience. At the time he was writing, however, these latter aspects of the plays were only beginning to count as contra-standard for non-fiction.

The important point is that insofar as such works are difficult to classify, this is not because, or not only because, they contain a mix of fictive utterances and assertions. It is rather because, *in addition* to containing internal features standard to both fiction and non-fiction, the author's classificatory intention and contemporary practices of categorisation fail to place the works definitively in the genre of fiction or the genre of non-fiction. What should we say about these cases? We could say simply that their classification is indeterminate. But the genre approach opens up a more interesting possibility, of saying that they are works of *both* fiction and non-fiction: the whole works, and not merely their parts. We are familiar with other works that fit into more than one contrasting genre: Jane Austen's novels, for example, qualify as both romance and realism, and given when she was writing (before realism in the novel became an established genre) we will not get further clarification from her classificatory intentions or contemporary practices. Perhaps the same is true of Shakespeare's history plays.

One might object that that the concepts of 'fiction' and 'non-fiction' imply categories that are mutually exclusive and exhaustive.[24] If interpreting them as genres has the consequence that a work could be both fiction and non-fiction, this looks like a problem for the interpretation. But it is not at all obvious that fiction and non-fiction must be understood that way. 'Non-fiction' means more than 'not fiction'; my computer and the Milky Way are neither of them fiction, but this does not make them non-fiction. Perhaps, though, the intuition is that once we limit ourselves to representations or texts, we should say that only one of the categories constitutes a genre, with the other as its complement.[25] For example,

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[23] Another kind of case is one in which an author intends a work to be read as fiction by one audience and as non-fiction by another. Thanks to Arthur Schipper for suggesting this possibility.

[24] This objection has been raised on different occasions by Michael Martin and Berys Gaut.

[25] This was Michael Martin's suggestion.

were I to produce a poem that uses the rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet but had sixteen lines, one might deny that it is a sonnet without thereby claiming that it belongs in some other poetic genre. Similarly, the thought goes, if I say that a text is non-fiction I might simply be saying that it is not fiction, or vice versa. The difficulty, though, is that it is unclear which of fiction and non-fiction should be the genre and which the complement. This is because we have positive characterisations of both categories, given by standard features that cannot be interpreted merely as negations of the features of the other category. I suggest that we should not be misled by the prefix. Just as there is no bar to the same person's being both conformist and non-conformist in different respects, there is no bar to the same work's being both fiction and non-fiction for different reasons.

Regardless of whether we are willing to count works like Shakespeare's history plays as both fiction and non-fiction, or merely as indeterminate with respect to classification, I suggest that the way we read them is, and should be, different from the way we read works that are clearly in one category or the other. Again, the precise effects on reading of classifying works as fiction or non-fiction, or possibly as both (or neither), is an area ripe for investigation. This is a more fruitful line of inquiry than simply defining the effects of classification a priori, as fictive utterance theorists do. Instead, once we recognize that fiction and non-fiction are genres, we should expect to discover a variety of roles played by these classifications in our experience, understanding and evaluation of particular works. So not only does the account of fiction and non-fiction as genres do a better job explaining what we already know about works in the two categories, it promises more interesting results as we learn more.[26]

[26] I am exceedingly grateful to Paloma Atencia-Linares for invaluable and incisive comments on several drafts of this paper. I would also like to thank Heythrop College for a Research Assistance Grant. The paper has benefited from the feedback of audiences who heard earlier incarnations or portions of the talk over the years, at the Joint Session of the Aristotelian Society and Mind Association in July 2011, in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Bristol in June 2010, the LOGOS Workshop on Fiction at the University of Barcelona in December 2009, the Philosophy Department at Durham University in May 2009, the Conference on Literature and Philosophy at the University of Sussex in June 2008 and the Department of Philosophy at Heythrop College in January 2008.

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