

Fictive Utterance and Imagining II

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(This is an un-edited pre-print. Please only cite the final version of this paper, published in *The Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume 85 (2011): 163-80.*)

ABSTRACT:

The currently standard approach to fiction is to define it in terms of imagination. I have argued elsewhere (Friend 2008) that no conception of imagining is sufficient to distinguish a response appropriate to fiction as opposed to non-fiction. In her contribution Kathleen Stock seeks to refute this objection by providing a more sophisticated account of the kind of propositional imagining prescribed by so-called ‘fictive utterances’. I argue that although Stock’s proposal improves on other theories, it too fails to provide an adequate criterion of fictionality. I conclude by sketching an alternative account according to which fiction is a genre.

The currently standard approach to fiction is to define it in terms of imagination. It is my view, for which I have argued elsewhere (Friend 2008), that no conception of imagining is sufficient to distinguish a response appropriate to fiction as opposed to non-fiction. In her contribution to this symposium Kathleen Stock seeks to refute this objection by providing a more sophisticated account of the kind of propositional imagining prescribed by so-called ‘fictive utterances’. I argue that although Stock’s proposal improves on other theories, it too fails to provide an adequate criterion of fictionality.

In §1 I summarise my reasons for rejecting other theories of fiction that rely on imagination and fictive utterance. In §2 I outline Stock’s proposal and in the following two sections I develop objections to it. In the final section I sketch an alternative account of the nature of fiction.

1. Imagination and Fictive Utterance

Stock follows a number of thinkers—notably Currie (1990), Lamarque and Olsen (1994) and Davies (2001, 2007)—who claim that we should understand the nature of fiction by focusing on fictive utterance as opposed to works of fiction, and that fictive utterance is necessarily characterised by the author’s intention to prescribe imagining. It is worth asking why we should care about fictive utterance in this sense: after all, arguments over the distinction between fiction and non-fiction are typically arguments over how to classify works, not individual statements therein. So it is helpful to remind ourselves how the debate over fiction and imagination becomes a debate over fictive utterance.¹

¹ The arguments in this section are given in more detail in Friend 2008.

The idea that fictionality can be understood in terms of prescriptions to imagine originates with Kendall Walton, but Walton is not interested in our ordinary conception of fiction. His concern is representational art more generally, including both texts and pictures. Walton focuses on the classification of works. On his view, any work that prescribes imagining counts as fiction. 'Fiction' therefore includes, for example, works of literary criticism, insofar as they engage us in the pretence that there are fictional characters; as well as all pictures, including journalistic photos and courtroom drawings, insofar as they invite us to imagine seeing what they depict. Let us call this wider category *walt-fiction*.

Many and probably most works ordinarily classified as non-fiction invite imagining and thereby qualify as walt-fiction. For instance, any text may prompt visual or other imagery. And non-fiction narratives aim to get us to imagine 'the world of the story': that is, to form a mental representation of the situation described in more detail than the text provides, by making inferences to keep track of individuals and settings, the chronology of events, and so on (see e.g. Gerrig 1993). In fact a work could invite us to believe its entire content and still count as walt-fiction, so long as it invites imagining as well.² Walt-fiction is therefore a broader category than our ordinary notion of fiction.

Suppose that we want to capture something closer to the ordinary distinction between fiction and non-fiction. Given the standard assumption in the debate that non-fiction invites *belief*, the lesson of walt-fiction is that works ordinarily classified as non-fiction may also invite imaginings compatible with believing their contents. Thus a prescription to imagine is, at best, a necessary but insufficient condition for fictionality. Currie, Lamarque and Olsen, and Davies propose further criteria designed to narrow the domain of fiction.³ I follow Stock in focusing on Currie's account.⁴

Currie claims that in addition to prescribing imagining, a fictive utterance can be no more than accidentally true. The guiding intuition is that belief, *rather than* imagining, is appropriate for non-accidentally true content. In short, the kind of imagining prescribed by fiction must be imagining *without* belief. Call this attitude *mere-make-believe*.

The difficulty is that we cannot distinguish works of fiction and non-fiction by an invitation to engage in mere-make-believe: both contain a mix of made-up and non-accidentally true content. The passage of commentary from Thackeray discussed by Stock is a case in point, but there are countless other fictions that include non-accidentally true claims. More importantly for assessing the sufficiency claim, many works of non-fiction include invented content. These are not limited to controversial cases such as Edmund Morris's *Dutch*, the official biography of Ronald Reagan in which the author inserts himself as a fictionalised narrator; or John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, in which the author alters chronology to be on hand when a murder takes place. The point holds for totally uncontroversial cases, like Classical Greek and Roman histories: for instance Tacitus, following standard conventions, made up speeches and battle descriptions. Although it is open to the philosopher to insist that Tacitus was writing fictions, that is just a mistake.⁵ To take the *Annals* and *Histories* to be anything but non-fiction is to revise our ordinary categorisations beyond recognition.

The motivation to focus on fictive and non-fictive *utterances* should now be clear. According to Currie (1990), those parts of a work for which mere-make-believe is appropriate

² Walton (1990) makes this explicit in his discussion of New Journalism (p. 80).

³ As Stock points out, they are also motivated by various counter-examples introduced in Currie 1990.

⁴ See Friend 2008 for discussion of other theories of fictive utterance.

⁵ Currie and Davies have suggested this option in conversation.

count as fictive; those parts for which belief is appropriate (whether or not they also invite imagining) count as non-fictive. That actual works contain a mix of fictive and non-fictive utterances should not worry us, he says: ‘As long as we are clear about what water molecules are, it hardly matters for purposes of definition that most things we call “water” actually contain much else’ (p. 49). Stock makes a similar claim in asking us to attend to ‘the fictive utterance in its own right, leaving the question of what makes a fictional work to be answered otherwise’ (p. xx).

This reasoning is, however, seriously flawed. It assumes that *fictive utterance* is an explanandum in its own right, whose analysis illuminates an ‘essence of fiction’ independent of the role of utterances within fictional works, much as the essence of water is found in the molecule and not in the rest of what comes out of the tap. But scientists do not care about what else is in the tap because they are interested in the natural kind H₂O. We have no good reason to think that fiction is in the same sense a natural kind. This is obvious when we consider that what constitutes ‘fictive utterance’ alters depending on one’s theory: on Currie’s theory, a fictive utterance is one whose content was invented by the author without the intention that it be believed, so that it is at most accidentally true; on Davies’s theory, a fictive utterance might be non-accidentally true so long as it was included in the work for a purpose other than truth-telling. As we shall see, Stock’s criterion is different again. There is no phenomenon of fictive utterance antecedent to the theories that stipulate its definition, such that we might discover its true essence.

We should therefore view the postulation of fictive utterance as a methodological tool used by philosophers to clarify phenomena that we care about. I think there are two such phenomena we should expect an account of fiction to explain. One is the distinction between fiction and non-fiction works. Another is the appropriate response or responses to works in either category. The theories so far discussed face difficulties accounting for either.

Despite their assumption that fictive utterances are of independent interest, theorists of fictive utterance typically assume that the classification of works depends on the status of the utterances within them (Currie 1990, p. 49). Yet they do not provide any formula for determining the fictionality of a work from the number or type of fictive utterances it contains, and it is hard to see how any such formula could be satisfactory. In the debates over how to classify *Dutch* and *Midnight*, for example, no one is in any doubt as to which parts of each work are made up and which parts reliable.⁶ Having this information is obviously insufficient to settle the controversy by itself. Furthermore, as Stock points out, Currie must deny that any utterance that invites belief can be fictive. Thus on his and related theories, accepted works of fiction could contain more non-fictive utterances than fictive ones, as with largely accurate historical fictions. Works that we treat as unambiguously fiction (or non-fiction) turn out to be a patchwork of fictive and non-fictive utterances. Call this the *first patchwork problem*, or PP1.

Stock is more concerned with what I will call the *second patchwork problem*, or PP2, which arises when we try to understand the kind of engagement appropriate to fiction. According to Stock, the theories discussed so far assume that many works of fiction prescribe a schizophrenic patchwork of attitudes: a mix of imagining, construed as mere-make-believe, and belief. The result is that where authors intend readers to believe parts of their stories, or where these stories contain non-accidentally true content, readers must switch between attitudes, contrary to the phenomenology of engaging with fictional works. So, she argues, we should prefer a theory that allows us to treat such cases as inviting a uniform response throughout.

⁶ I therefore disagree with Stock’s claim that the difficulty in classifying controversial works is epistemic.

2. Stock's Proposal

Stock traces both patchwork problems to the assumption that prescriptions to imagine are necessary but insufficient for fictionality; it is the inclusion of an additional, putatively sufficient condition that creates the mix of utterance types and thus attitudes. Her provocative suggestion is that we take the prescription to imagine as both necessary and sufficient for fictionality, so that imagining is the appropriate attitude for all fictive utterances. Given that at least some statements in works of fiction invite belief, the relevant kind of imagining cannot be mere-make-believe. So Stock aims to identify a kind of imagining plausibly prescribed by statements within works of fiction as opposed to non-fiction, but which is nonetheless compatible with believing at least some of those statements.

Stock suggests that the relevant kind of imagining, which is propositional, be understood in terms of the following three claims:

[CONS] Necessarily, a thinker T who imagines that p , thinks of p as being the case.

[CONNECT1] Necessarily, a thinker T who imagines that p , is disposed to connect her thought that p is the case with other propositional thoughts about what is the case.

[CONNECT2] Necessarily, where a thinker T imagines that p at time t , either T does not believe that p or T is disposed to connect her thought that p is the case to some further proposition(s) about what is the case, whose content is not replicated by any belief of hers at t . (p. xx)

Stock puts forward these conditions as a general, if non-exhaustive, account of propositional imagining; but this is not the place to adjudicate among different theories of imagination.⁷ I therefore take Stock's three conditions to describe a particular kind of imagining, one designed to distinguish between fiction and non-fiction. Call this *Stock-imagining*.

The point behind the first condition is that Stock-imagining, like belief, involves thinking of a state of affairs as obtaining; this is by contrast to desiring that the state obtain, questioning whether the state obtains, and so on. To Stock-imagine that p , a thinker must entertain the thought that p is the case. So to imagine that, say, Hamlet takes vengeance on Claudius, I must entertain the thought that Hamlet takes vengeance on Claudius as occurring or as having occurred.

The second condition indicates that to Stock-imagine that p requires at least the disposition to bring together one's thought that p with other thoughts. For example, we import background beliefs in making inferences about the world of a story, as when we understand why a character grieves after a friend's death or how blood on a handkerchief provides a clue in solving a mystery, without having to be told explicitly. But arguably [CONNECT1] is a condition on thinking any thought at all, whether believed, imagined, or otherwise, for reasons Stock discusses. To entertain the thought that p requires understanding the content of p , and this necessarily involves a disposition to connect p with other thoughts.

⁷ More detailed alternative accounts may be found in e.g. Stich and Nichols 2003 and Currie and Ravenscroft 2002.

The first two conditions are likely to be uncontroversial on any account of propositional imagining and do not distinguish it from belief. That is the job of the final condition. [CONNECT2] is supposed to be a conceptual truth about Stock-imagining as opposed to belief. Whilst a reader might connect a belief with something she does not believe in reading a story containing both, the nature of belief does not require her to do so. By contrast, it is necessary that if she Stock-imagines that p , either she does not believe it, or else she is disposed to connect it to some q that she does not believe. Because the disposition need not be actualised, the phenomenological experience of thinking that p in response to a passage in a work of fiction need not differ depending on whether p is to be believed. The reader can both Stock-imagine and believe that p , insofar as she is disposed to connect p with two distinct sets of thoughts: a set that includes only beliefs, and a set that includes at least one q that is not believed.

In summary, Stock-imagining that p requires entertaining the thought of p as being the case, which involves a disposition to connect p to other thoughts; and either (i) not believing that p or (ii) being disposed to connect p to at least one thought q that one does not believe. Where there is a prescription to Stock-imagine that p , we have a fictive utterance. So a fictive utterance need not be one for which belief is inappropriate, if the relevant utterance meets (ii) rather than (i).

Now, it is unclear from Stock's discussion whether, to meet (i) or (ii), one must actively *dis*believe p or q , or whether it is sufficient that p or q simply not be included in one's set of beliefs.⁸ Even if the requirement is for active disbelief, Stock-imagining puts relatively few constraints on what counts as propositional imagining.⁹ All that is required is that one entertains a thought without belief, or that one entertains a thought that is connected to another thought that one doesn't believe. So it seems to cover not only the kind of potentially rich imagining in which we engage in response to fiction, but also counterfactual reasoning and supposition, since these involve entertaining thoughts we do not believe.¹⁰ I return to the implications of this below.

Stock's proposal has certain virtues. The analysis of imagining in terms of how we connect up various thoughts makes explicit the widely accepted idea that imagining in response to fiction essentially involves integrating thoughts, including beliefs, to imagine the world of the story. At the same time the proposal avoids the conclusion that a work composed entirely of statements we are meant to believe, and which in no way required connection to anything we do not believe, could count as fiction. Such a text might prescribe imagining in other senses, but it would not prescribe Stock-imagining. This suggests that a work cannot count as fiction unless it contains at least one element that we are not supposed to believe, a point Stock makes explicit in her discussion of *Robinson Crusoe*. She therefore circumscribes the domain of fiction more narrowly than Walton. So the theory captures something else central to our intuitions about ordinary fiction.

It is far from clear, however, that Stock solves the two patchwork problems. With respect to PP2, the idea is that works of fiction invite us to Stock-imagine their contents, whether or not they also ask us to believe certain elements of those contents. A uniformly imaginative response is thereby compatible with believing certain elements of a story, as opposed to the apparently

⁸ I owe this point to Paloma Atencia-Linares.

⁹ Given this, Currie could claim that Stock agrees that the prescription to imagine (in some sense) is no more than a necessary condition for fictionality, whilst offering an alternative sufficient condition, namely [CONNECT2]. I take Stock at her word that she is proposing a new account of propositional imagining that is both necessary and sufficient for fictionality.

¹⁰ Some theorists distinguish these other activities from imagining. See Meskin and Weinberg 2006.

‘schizophrenic’ switching of attitudes required by a theory like Currie’s. But PP2 may not reveal a genuine difference between these accounts. First, even if we Stock-imagine the contents of all utterances in a work, we believe only some of them; so we seem to be switching in and out of belief.¹¹ If Stock replies that this switch makes no difference phenomenologically, the same reply seems open to Currie. His argument may suggest that fictive and non-fictive utterances invite completely different attitudes, but it is compatible with his account that both fictive and non-fictive utterances within a work of fiction prescribe imagining (in some sense) whilst only the non-fictive utterances should also be believed. Second, Stock-imagining that *p* without belief is phenomenologically indistinguishable from Stock-imagining that *p* with belief only if the dispositions to connect *p* to different sets of thoughts remain unactualised. Though there is evidence that while reading, we make only local, minimal connections between the content we are currently processing and the rest of a text (McKoon and Ratcliff 1992), once we pause to reflect we are likely to connect *p* to a wider set of thoughts, thereby actualising one or the other disposition.

What of PP1, the challenge of explaining how work classification depends on the status of the utterances in the text? Stock seems to solve this problem at a stroke. If a work contains at least one utterance we are not supposed to believe, then that utterance is fictive. If most or all of the other utterances in the work must be connected to that element, then they are also fictive. We will never end up with a work of fiction in which most of the utterances are non-fictive, so long as there is at least one sufficiently connected component of the work that we are not to believe.

3. Stock-imagining and Non-fiction

This sounds like a good result until we remember that a theory of fiction also tells us something about non-fiction. If it is the case that a work containing at least one connected component we are not supposed to believe is *ipso facto* constituted entirely, or nearly entirely, by fictive utterances, then presumably it is a work of fiction. But many paradigm works of non-fiction contain at least one such component. Consider an academic history of World War Two in which the author argues that had Hitler been killed in the assassination attempt of 1944, his generals would have negotiated peace. Particularly if this counterfactual possibility is central to the argument of the book, understanding the text will require readers to connect most or all of the rest of what they read—which, let us assume, consists entirely of claims to be believed—to at least one thought they do not believe, namely that Hitler was assassinated in 1944. It will therefore turn out that most or all utterances within the text are fictive utterances, insofar as they prescribe Stock-imagining, and that the text is fiction.

This kind of case is by no means hypothetical. Rare is the work of non-fiction history that is nothing but a chronicle of happenings. Most paradigmatic works of history entertain counterfactual possibilities in making arguments about why events unfolded the way they did (and not just works of ‘counterfactual history’, though that too is a perfectly respectable genre of non-fiction).¹² Stock’s criteria appear insufficient to exclude such works from the domain of fiction.

Presumably Stock does not want to count most works of non-fiction history as composed largely of fictive utterances, even if those works require us to connect the factual to the

¹¹ Thanks to Paloma Atencia-Linares for this observation.

¹² For examples of the genre, see the essays in Cowley 2001.

counterfactual. Perhaps we can revise [CONNECT2] to rule out these cases. Insofar as we are dealing with imaginings prescribed by a text, we could restrict the relevant kind of connection to the contents of utterances contained in the work, rather than including thoughts more generally. With the non-fiction history of World War Two, we might say that there are no *utterances* within the work that meet either part of the condition. Suppose that in addition to entirely factual claims, the work contains the statement, ‘If Hitler had been assassinated in 1944, the German army would have negotiated an end to the war with the Allies’. Although understanding the conditional requires thinking of the counterfactual possibilities represented by the antecedent and consequent, we are invited to believe the full conditional itself.

The revised condition does not entirely solve the problem, however. First, it is ad hoc given the goal of providing a general, if partial, account of the nature of propositional imagining. Second, it does not address the many works of non-fiction that contain explicit statements whose contents we are not supposed to believe. These include mundane examples of irony, hyperbole, questions, jokes and so on, as well as quotations of sources who are not taken as reliable. They include all the speeches and battle descriptions in Tacitus and other Classical historians. And they include other cases where engaging imaginatively serves a larger purpose.

To take just one example, a recent opinion piece in the *New York Times* provides a timeline of how events ‘might unfold’ given the referendum in Sudan on independence for the South (still upcoming at the time of writing). Here is an excerpt:

JAN. 18 The South declares that 91 percent of voters have chosen secession. The North denounces the vote, saying it was illegal, tainted by violence and fraud, and invalid because the turnout fell below the 60 percent threshold required.

JAN. 20 The South issues a unilateral declaration of independence.

JAN. 25 Tribal militias from the North sweep through South Sudan villages, killing and raping inhabitants and driving them south. The governor of a border state in the North, Ahmad Haroun, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court for war crimes and organizing the janjaweed militia in Darfur, denies that he is now doing the same thing in the South.¹³

Readers are invited to think of these events as occurring and to connect them with what they know about the situation in Sudan, but they are not supposed to believe that any of the events described have taken place. They are not even supposed to believe that any of the events *will* take place; the author explicitly says that ‘events won’t unfold like that’. His purpose is to get us to imagine a worst-case scenario in an effort to motivate changes to US policy. The article is comprised mostly of utterances we are not supposed to believe, but it is a clear case of non-fiction. Therefore even on a revised version of Stock’s conditions they turn out to be insufficient for fictionality.

4. Understanding a Story

¹³ N. Kristof, ‘Chronicle of a Genocide Foretold’, *New York Times*, 29 September 2010.

In defending the sufficiency of her criteria, an alternative is for Stock to focus on the kind of necessity involved in [CONNECT2]. The claim might be that although readers must connect the various statements in a work of non-fiction to a thought they do not believe *in order to understand the work*, this is different to its being necessitated by the very nature of their attitude toward those statements. Stock might say readers can believe the rest of the book without *necessarily* connecting those beliefs to anything they don't believe, on some interpretation of the relevant kind of necessity.

This cannot be right, however, since the same could be said for the Thackeray passage or any other passage in a work of fiction that invites belief. If these do not *necessarily* require connection to the rest of the work, they cannot count as fictive utterances and we face the patchwork problems again. The point of [CONNECT2] is precisely to bring such passages within the realm of fictive utterance by recognising their necessary connection to other elements of the fiction that we do not believe. So the relevant sense of necessity must derive from something like a requirement on understanding the fiction as a whole. And in fact this seems to be what Stock has in mind when she writes:

[O]n the assumption that the reader of a fictional work is supposed to be disposed to conjoin together all or most of the utterances contained therein, even a work significantly constituted of utterances intended to be believed, may also prescribe imagining overall, as long as it contains some utterances which are *not* intended to be believed. (p.xx)

The unintended consequence is that the same will hold for many works of non-fiction.

The real question is whether it is open to readers, when faced with a work that mixes the factual and the invented, to isolate the invented content so completely that there is no disposition to connect it with the rest of the work. Stock suggests that this is possible in her discussion of cases like *Dutch* and *Midnight*, but this is a mistake. Whilst it may not be essential to the very concept of belief that we connect our beliefs to something we do not believe, making this connection is in fact necessitated by the goal of understanding a work that contains at least one significant component we do not believe. This is obvious for a work whose central premise is that history would have unfolded differently had certain events occurred, where understanding the *argument* of the book involves connecting up the facts to the counterfactual supposition. But it is also true for any *narrative* containing an invented element that plays a sufficiently important role. Narrative comprehension assumes a basic capacity to make inferences connecting the main elements of a story, such as causal inferences among events (this murder led to that vengeful act) and inferences about relationships (including spatial, temporal, emotional, etc.), as a result of which readers form a mental representation of the world of a story. There is ample evidence that readers make these inferences and form these story representations—sometimes called ‘mental models’ or ‘situation models’—for both fiction and non-fiction narratives (Gerrig 1993).

So although Stock's proposal avoids the Scylla of a paradigmatic work of fiction constituted almost entirely of non-fictive utterances, it runs aground on the Charybdis of a paradigmatic work of non-fiction constituted entirely or almost entirely of fictive utterances. In other words, non-fiction prescribes Stock-imagining in much the same way that it prescribes other forms of imagining, which ought to lead us to conclude once again that prescriptions to imagine cannot distinguish between fiction and non-fiction—whether at the work level or at the utterance level.

Now, defenders of fictive utterance could deny this conclusion by denying that the works I have been considering are, in fact, works of non-fiction. After all, philosophers are not required to classify works the way bookstores and libraries do; if they have a theory that explains important phenomena, they can reject such ordinary practices. I have already identified two such phenomena: the classification of works as fiction and non-fiction and the appropriate response or responses to works so classified. The present reply simply rejects the first as an explanandum, opting instead for a stipulative classification of works. For Stock this would presumably be to categorise any work that contains at least one utterance we are not supposed to believe as fiction; non-fictions would be comprised entirely of utterances to be believed. Then the appropriate response to all fictions would be Stock-imagining, and the appropriate response to all non-fictions would be belief. But relying on stipulation does not provide genuine explanation. Moreover, the stipulative approach is not what Stock herself has in mind, since she quite rightly takes it as an objection to a theory that it counts mixed or controversial cases as clearly fiction or non-fiction (p. xx). Surely it is worse if a theory moves uncontroversial cases into a different category altogether.

Given these problems, I recommend that we dispense with the attempt to define fiction in terms of either imagination or fictive utterance. I sketch an alternative account in the final section.

5. Fiction as a Genre

In attempting to distinguish between fiction and non-fiction, we should consider, not how the parts of a work add up to the whole, but instead how the whole work is embedded in a larger context: in particular, the practices of reading, writing, publishing, and so on. I therefore construe fiction and non-fiction as different *genres* into which works may be categorised. In what follows I offer some brief remarks in favour of this approach and then consider how it captures the intuitions that drive the association between fiction and imagination.

Genre classifications are characterised by certain features. First, whilst membership in some genres is determined by necessary and sufficient conditions (e.g. the Petrarchan sonnet), the vast majority are determined by a cluster of non-essential conditions (e.g. the short story). Second, genres are often overlapping, making it difficult to locate sharp distinctions. For instance, Austen's novels exemplify traits of both romance and realism. Related to the second point is the fact that genres are nested: the Jamesian realist novel is one kind of nineteenth-century realist novel, which is one kind of novel, and so forth. Third, classification affects our expectations of standard features in reading a work, explaining why, say, works of magical realism can be so disconcerting. Finally, classification helps determine appropriate norms for evaluating a work. Thus we criticise historical fictions for inaccuracies in chronology in a way that we would not criticise fantasies.¹⁴

Intuitively, the categories of fiction and non-fiction share these features. When we know that a work is fiction we expect to find aspects that are made up; when we know that it is non-fiction we expect an effort to be faithful to the facts. We praise Shakespeare for the artistically justified distortions in his history plays; we would be critical of such blatant falsehoods in a history of England. These points do not reflect necessary and sufficient conditions, but rather expectations about what is standard for works in a given category and assumptions about how to

¹⁴ Arguments for some of these claims are in Dutton 1965, Walton 1970, Currie 2004 and Davies 2006.

evaluate those works. Psychological studies of text comprehension suggest more subtle distinctions in our responses to works in different categories, for instance with respect to whether or not we believe what we read. It turns out that for some kinds of information, we are at least as likely, if not more likely, to believe what we read in fiction than in non-fiction, probably because the 'fiction' label weakens our tendency to scrutinise information (Prentice and Gerrig 1999; Green and Brock 2000). The effects of genre classification are not as simple as a straight dichotomy between belief/non-fiction and imagining/fiction.

It is thus not surprising that classification as fiction or non-fiction depends on a variety of factors, which tend to determine not only the broader category but also more particular genres nested therein. For instance, certain textual devices such as free indirect discourse or the use of the phrase 'once upon a time' are associated with fiction; the latter is, of course, associated with fairy tales. The inclusion of footnotes citing source documents is associated with academic history and related kinds of non-fiction. But these conventional associations can be broken, as with historical fictions that include footnotes to genuine sources. Conventions for particular genres may also flout assumptions about broader categories, as with magical realism and realism, or New Journalism and the non-fiction feature. The fact that we tend to appreciate works that break the 'rules' associated with a genre in interesting ways fits well with this approach.

Contextual features will also be relevant to categorisation.¹⁵ These include authorial intention and contemporary publication and reception practices. The fact that Tacitus intended to be writing history within an established practice recognised by his audience is surely a large part of the reason we classify the *Annals* as non-fiction history. Similarly, once we understand the practices and conventions surrounding the early novel we can dispense with the notion that Defoe might have intended *Robinson Crusoe* to be taken as a genuine diary, whether in full (as suggested by Currie) or in part (as suggested by Stock). The assumption is usually based on Defoe's statement in the Preface that the diary is 'a just history of fact' with no 'appearance of fiction in it'; but this kind of preface was a standard convention in the eighteenth-century novel, when 'protestations of the truth of stories are sometimes made with what amounts to a disarming wink' (Nelson 1973, 111). Far from providing evidence of a deceitful intention to fool his audience, Defoe's preface reveals an intention to write a work of fiction within a developing practice.

The complexities of genre classification also explain controversial cases like *Dutch*. 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 fictionalised narrators as a device in non-fiction biography. *Dutch* is controversial because of this conflict in the various factors that determine classification within a genre, not because of confusion about whether to imagine or to believe (parts of) the work.

So far I have said nothing about an author's intention to prescribe imagining or invite belief. We might take these intentions to be further expectations associated with fiction and non-fiction, but I am sceptical that they provide guidance on classification in the broader categories. Tacitus made up certain elements of his histories in line with the conventions of the time, but the invitation to engage in mere-make-believe prescribed by those aspects of his works does not turn them into fiction. Tacitus's intention to produce histories is much more important to

¹⁵ Walton 1970 is the classic argument for this claim, though it is restricted to perceptual artworks.

classification than his intention to get us to take certain cognitive attitudes toward parts of his work.

Does this mean that fiction has nothing to do with imagination? I believe there are two important links between fiction and imagining. First, works of fiction are typically narrative in structure, and narratives prescribe imagining in a variety of senses, including the production of imagery and the construction of rich story representations. This observation does not suffice to distinguish fiction from non-fiction since, as previously argued, narrative non-fiction invites the same kinds of imagining. But I suspect it is the narrative aspect of fiction that is often responsible for the strong intuitive connection between fiction and imagination.

The second link occurs at a more abstract level. I suggest that the existence of fiction *as a genre* is at least partly explained by the purpose of allowing authors to use their creative imaginations to make things up. Anthony Savile (1998) has argued persuasively that a developed practice of literature requires traffic in invented characters and situations. This may be so even if authors working within more specific genres are faithful to many facts. By contrast, the category of non-fiction is justified by other purposes, even if specific genre conventions permit or require authors to invent aspects of their works. Given the larger purposes of fiction and non-fiction as genres, it is to be expected that works of fiction should contain at least some invented content. Stock's requirement that a work of fiction contain at least one element we are not supposed to believe is thereby explained as a consequence of the overall theory.

I have by no means offered a full explanation or defence of construing fiction and non-fiction as genres. But even a brief sketch indicates that this approach has a greater potential to elucidate our engagement with works in both categories than the attempt to define fiction by appeal to fictive utterance and imagining. The genre approach allows for complex classification practices and equally complex cognitive and epistemic responses to particular works. No attempt to locate an essence of fictionality in terms of our imagining the content of particular utterances, or in the uniform imaginative response to whole works suggested by Stock, has the same explanatory power.¹⁶

¹⁶ Thanks to Paloma Atencia-Linares for helpful comments on a previous draft.

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