

Normative Fiction-Making and the World of the Fiction*

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Abstract

In recent work, Walton has abandoned his very influential account of the fictionality of p in a fictional work in terms of prescriptions to imagine emanating from it. He offers examples allegedly showing that a prescription to imagine p in a given work of fiction is not sufficient for the fictionality of p in that work. In this paper, both in support and further elaboration of a constitutive-norms speech-act variation on Walton's account that I have defended previously, I critically discuss his objections. In addition to answering his concerns and developing the account further, I provide additional abductive support for its explanatory virtues vis-à-vis institutional accounts like Walton's, and Gricean speech-act proposals.

Keywords: fictionality; truth in fiction; fictional worlds; speech acts; norms.

1. Introduction: Contrasting Views about Fiction-Making

Walton's work on fiction and the imagination has been deservedly influential on philosophical and empirical work. Walton didn't advance his account as conceptual analysis (Friend 2008, 152-4; Woodward 2014, 825). On his view, fictions are artefacts with a socially ascribed function from which specific prescriptions to imagine result, whether or not this fits

folk pretheoretical notions; this determines the fictional content of the work, what is fictional according to it: “a proposition is fictional in (the world of) a particular work, *W*, ... just in case full appreciation of *W* requires imagining it”, Walton (2015, 17).

In spite of Walton’s scepticism about philosophical analyses, writers influenced by him take their work in that spirit. Currie (1990) argues that fictions result from a *sui generis* speech act, fiction-making,¹ satisfactorily addressing in my view Walton’s (1990, 85-9) concerns regarding non-verbal fictions, or works treated as fictions that were not produced as such. Following Currie, I have also suggested in previous work that we should take fiction-making to be a specific sort of invitation to imagine, addressed to a specific kind of audience (García-Carpintero 2007, 2013, 2016, 2019a). Like Currie, I thus reject that literary acts of fiction-making are just (as Green 2017a, 54 aptly puts it) “acts of speech” – say, acts of pretending to do something, bereft of the representational aims of speech acts, as Searle (1974/5) has it – as opposed to speech acts proper, with specific force and contents.²

I’ll briefly revisit these contrasting views about fiction-making. From the earlier stages of speech act theory, there has been a divide between descriptive, psychological theories (favored by Grice, Strawson, Schiffer and their followers) and prescriptive or normative theories (preferred by Austin, Alston, Searle and their followers). The former take psychological attitudes to be constitutive of speech acts. On a Gricean view, it is constitutive of an assertion that *p* that the speaker intends the hearer to believe *p*, or to believe that the speaker believes *p*, on the basis of the recognition of that intention. Fiction-making is analogously characterized by the intention to lead the audience to imagine its content by the recognition of that intention. Stock (2017) offers a compelling version of the view, addressing objections raised over the years, by Friend (2008, 2012) and others, which Currie (2014), an earlier proponent, also takes up with hesitant conclusions.

Griceans know that we evaluate assertions, criticizing them for instance when they are false, and that we similarly criticize fictions when they lack interest: when they fail to thrill, entertain, challenge or move us, when they cause imaginative resistance, and so on (Stock 2017, 135). Griceans however take the norms thereby deployed to be *regulative* – derivable from non-illocutionary norms, perhaps moral or prudential ones. Austinian normative accounts take instead some of those norms to be *constitutive* of the relevant speech acts, on the model of games whose natures are thought to be normatively specifiable.

Unlike Currie's and Stock's, the account I have defended (García-Carpintero, 2013, 2016, 2019a) is Austinian: it incases Waltonian prescriptions in a normative speech act account. Fictions result from proposals by actual fiction-makers for their audiences to imagine. They thereby constitutively involve prescriptions for the audience to imagine the propositions that constitute the fictional world, conditional as most prescriptions are on different features: the interests of the intended audience, their belonging to the intended class, their considering such propositions. The propositions whose imagining is prescribed in the relevant sense are specifically those such that the fiction-maker becomes by her action beholden to a norm requiring their imagining to be a worthwhile project for the relevant audience.³

More specifically, I took as my model Williamson's (1996) "simple" formulation for the norms of assertion, deploying a constitutive norm that uniquely characterizes the act by its normative essence. For that act – the one we perform by default when uttering declarative sentences – Williamson advocates a *knowledge* rule, a norm requiring for correctness that the speaker knows the asserted proposition. An assertion with content *p* is the act whose product is subject to this rule: it is correct only if the speaker knows *p*. Other constatives have weaker requirements, bare truth or justification for *guessing* or *conjecturing*, etc. Norms like this are *sui generis*: they do not have their sources in moral or prudential rules, but fit in specifically illocutionary codes. They are defeasible and *pro tanto*: they can be overridden by stronger

norms. It is possible to violate them, thereby rendering the acts not non-existent (Austinian *misfires*), but wrong (Austinian *abuses*). There are many situations in which *p* is asserted but the speaker doesn't know *p*, because *p* is false, or proper justification is lacking. The assertion is then wrong, relative to a norm constitutive of such speech act.

In order to apply this to *fiction-making*, my proposal is modeled on a normative account of directives derived from Alston's (2000). Roughly, directives are subject to the norm that they are correct only if their audiences are thereby provided with *a reason* to see to it that their content obtains.⁴ The reason might be based on different sources, which further specify the nature of the directive: the authority of the speaker in the case of commands, the good will or presumed interests of the audience in the case of requests, suggestions, or proposals. Again, the norms are *sui generis*, defeasible and *pro tanto*, and it is possible for them to be broken – as when a speaker invites the audience to do something that has no chance of satisfying their relevant desires. On this basis, my proposal was that a fiction with content *p* results from an act that is correct only if it gives relevant audiences (audiences of the intended kind, with the disposition to engage with such works) a reason to imagine *p*.⁵ The reasons in question have to do with whatever makes engaging with good fictions worthwhile: to experience the emotions generated by well-drafted, suspenseful thrillers, say, or to put oneself in the shoes of other people in other circumstances, getting thereby knowledge about them.

A reason I offered for that view was that normative accounts fare better relative to the intentionalism/conventionalism debate about the interpretation of fictions. There are compelling criticisms of Gricean accounts of core speech acts such as assertion based on cases of speakers performing them, even when lacking Gricean communicative intentions (say, officers in information booths). Analogously, I discussed examples showing that a fiction might have a specific interpretation, even if the author has not intended it to be imagined in its detailed specificity (García-Carpintero 2013, 2019a). Another reason I have

offered (García-Carpintero 2016, 2019a, 2019b) is that the normative account provides a better understanding of the relation between fiction and truth, answering criticisms by Friend (2008, 2012) and providing a better alternative to her Waltonian institutionalist, anti-essentialist *genre* account.⁶

In recent work, Walton (2015) has abandoned the account of fictionality quoted above; he offers several examples allegedly showing that, while a prescription to imagine *p* in a given work is necessary for the fictionality of *p* in that work, it is not sufficient. I cannot accept this. For the relevant prescriptions are in my view constitutive, definitional of fictionality (cf. Ohmann 1971, 15). Here I will critically discuss Walton's objections to his own proposal. I will set its virtues in relief in contrast with Walton's, Alward's (2009, 2010a, 2010b) and Friend's institutional view, and with Currie and Stock's (2017) orthodox Gricean account.

The methodology to address these matters is broadly abductive. With Stock, I'll assume that studying the specific propositional imaginings that fictions call for, or make appropriate – which she calls 'F-imaginings' (2017, 4-9) – is a good strategy to get a better understanding of the imagination itself. She convincingly argues that, when it comes to providing an account of the imagination, intuitions are particularly problematic because systematic agreement is missing; and hence that it is a better strategy to investigate the imagination by studying its theoretical role in well-taken explanatory pursuits (*OI*, 7; Kind (2013) makes a similar point). We are after an account of fictions and the imaginings they trigger with good explanatory pay-offs, unburdened by any irrevocable imperative to accept ordinary usage and folk intuitions. I add that this is what I take conceptual analysis to be, in the spirit of Carnapian *explications* or *rational reconstructions*. From a Carnapian perspective, intuitions about cases play indeed a distinguished evidential role vis-à-vis data from fiction studies, critics or cognitive psychologists; but they may nonetheless be overridden.

In the remaining sections I will first show (§2) how the normative view of fiction-making cashes out the intuitively and theoretically significant metaphor of the *fictional world*. In §3 I'll argue that it thereby provides us with an intuitively well supported distinction between *propositional imaginings required by a fiction*, and *those constituting the fictional world*. Then I'll explain in §4 how this helps us to deal with Walton's cases.

2. Fictional Worlds

To address Walton's (2015) objections, I'll argue that a normative speech act account of fictionality allows us to untangle what I'll claim is an ambiguity in what Stock calls 'F-imagining', which I'll articulate in the next section. The key for it, and with it for my account of Walton's cases in §4, lies in the role I give to the metaphor of *the world of the fiction*, which Walton (2015, 17) employs when, in summarizing his view in a quotation given above, he says that "a proposition is fictional in (the world of) a particular work, *W*, ... just in case full appreciation of *W* requires imagining it". This metaphor is put to several serious theoretical uses. Psychologists use it to explain "transportation" or "immersion" in a narrative – the experience of "suspending disbelief" so as to become concerned with fictional scenarios as if they were part of the actual world, no matter how wild.⁷ I'll show in this section how the proprietary notions of a normative view help us to cash out this metaphor.

Stock (2017, 20) stipulates *F-imagining* to be "whatever kind of imagining is appropriate, at a minimum, as a response to fictional content". This is, I take it, a technical notion well-motivated by all accounts of fiction-making we are considering, which in one way or another understand fictions as representational devices constitutively inviting imaginative responses.

The nature of F-imaginings is to be further specified by the theoretical role they play in the specific theoretical proposals positing them.

I also agree with Stock that F-imaginings have propositional contents (2017, 20-7). I think we should adopt a minimalist attitude towards propositions, such as the view originating with Stalnaker that they are just properties of *circumstances of evaluation* (cf. Richard 2013). What are such circumstances? They are complete and consistent possible worlds for Stalnaker, for Lewisians *centered* possible worlds. For reasons presented below, I need to take them to be more fine-grained, in the tradition of Situation Semantics updated in the “truthmaker semantics” of Yablo (2014) and Fine (2017). Stock might concur with this, for she prefers to take F-imaginings to be about “scenarios” rather than complete and consistent fictional worlds (2017, 27), on account, I think, of worries related to my own. I will nonetheless keep mostly speaking about the *fictional world*, because this is more standard than *fictional scenario* and I need to emphasize the intuitive character of this notion. I fully agree with her in addition that not only can such a “world” not be identified with a complete and consistent possible world, but it cannot be reductively analyzed either in such terms.⁸

Formal semantics offers tools to better understand the notion of a fictional world. Truthmaker semantics develops the Austinian idea that truth (the standard of correctness for assertoric speech acts) concerns not the full actual world, but more fine-grained situations made of objects, events and properties that the representational acts are about (Kratzer 2017). Berto (2017a) invokes work in that tradition to articulate in a sufficiently precise sense the idea of a fictional world that F-imaginings are in a similar sense about.⁹

Berto’s account assumes some “explicit input”, as in supposition-based reasoning, and provides a theoretical account of an acceptable *logic of the imagination* that leads us beyond that explicit input while we “stick with what the explicit input is *about*” (Berto 2017a, §3), offering inferential patterns that he takes to be valid. This assumes a version of the standard

distinction between *direct*, or *primary* fictional truths, and *indirect* or *implied* ones, as in Lewis's (1978) or Walton's (1990) work.¹⁰ In Lewis's view we get the primary content on the assumption that the fictional narrator tells the fiction "as known fact", and we derive implied truths from either a "Reality Principle" or a "Mutual Belief Principle".¹¹ This assumes something controversial that I nonetheless grant; to wit, that verbal fictions have fictional narrators, explicit or implicit.¹² As Alward (2009, 321) nicely puts it, actual storytellers of verbal fictions "portray" them, the way actors play characters: "fictional storytelling is best viewed as a species of theatrical performance in which storytellers portray the narrators of the stories they tell". Thus, in creating *Don Quixote*, Cervantes "plays" the first-person narrator – whom we may or may not identify with Cervantes (cf. Wilson 2011, 114-5) – who first presents himself as passing information gleaned from archives in La Mancha, and then his translation of an Arabic historical narrative by a Cide Hamete Benengeli.¹³

Now, Walton was skeptical that, when it comes to F-imaginings, there are any such principles that are sufficiently general to be codified (1990, 139). Stock (2017, 64, 180) shows that fiction-making intentions can trump even the most solid inference principles used to derive fictional content. Thus, she would accept the default validity of Berto's (2017a, §4) *adjunction* rule, for it corresponds to her principle that "fiction is normally conjunctive" (2017, 27): when both *p* and *q* are fictional in a given fiction, they "co-occur with respect to the same scenario" (*ibid.*). However, she shows that even this rule has exceptions, in cases of fictions presenting a plurality of worlds (2017, 169-74); this will be illustrated below.

Nonetheless, this is not a reason to be skeptical about the distinction between *direct* and *indirect* fictional content, and the notion of *fictional world* that comes with it; only to conclude that all such inference principles, including the more purely logical ones that Berto studies, are defeasible. The distinction is intuitively plausible, and it can be theoretically grounded. The explicit contents of a given fiction are, roughly, those features of the fictional

world fixed by what the author primarily, immediately pretends to do, or has other actors pretending to do. This includes non-illocutionary pretend actions and illocutionary acts. In putting forward a declarative sentence, the author immediately “plays” the fictional narrator asserting what is said by it; similar for questions, and so on. Implicatures by the actual fiction-maker that may add to the character of the thereby presented fictional world, like the outputs of inferences based on the aforementioned principles, are not immediate.¹⁴

A notion of *the fictional world* also plays an important role in “semantic” alternatives to “pragmatic” accounts of fictional utterances like mine. I didn’t mention them in the previous section because, to the extent that they constitute a real alternative, I have serious doubts about them. Thus, Predelli (1997), Recanati (2000, 213-226), Reimer (2005) and Voltolini (2006) have advanced semantic contextualist views of fictional discourse. In a narrative in the historical present, the context in which ‘The battle unfolded now.’ is uttered requires us to evaluate the assertion not with respect to the time when the utterance is made, but rather with respect to another, contextually provided time. On these views, the context of fictional utterances similarly leads us to evaluate their truth not at the actual world, but a counterfactual or imaginary one, the world of the fiction.¹⁵ These proposals are committed to fictional referents for fictional terms, or make instead claims that I think we shouldn’t accept,¹⁶ so I go along with Walton’s (1990, 41-2) that “truth in fiction” is not really a form of truth.¹⁷

Summing up: there is an intuitive metaphorical notion of *the world that a fiction is about*, which is deployed for significant theoretical purposes in accounting for fiction. It captures the measure of objectivity that fictional content has, in particular when it comes to nonexplicit content, allowing for error and ignorance in fiction consumers, and even on the side of fiction-makers themselves. It is also useful to explain fictional immersion, and it has received elucidation in formal semantics.

On my view, this helpful metaphor is to be cashed out in terms of the prescriptions to imagine assumed in the normative speech act account. Fictions result from the specific norms to which fiction makers commit themselves, appraising the particular proposals to imagine they issue in creating them. The *fictional world* realizes the *plot of the story*, consisting of the contents on whose imagining by the intended audience a proper appraisal of the fiction-maker's proposal is to be grounded. In other words, it is the scenario whose imaginative representation the fiction-maker commits to be worth her while for the audience. The fictional world is thus on my view determined by the prescribed fictional truths.¹⁸

Fictional worlds are indeterminate, as shown by Beardsley-like silly questions such as how many children Lady Macbeth had – which, following Lorand (2001, 428), I distinguish from Walton-like silly questions, considered in the next section. It is not that they include indeterminate objects, which – putting aside weird postmodernist fictions – they don't (Berto 2017a, §5); it is just that the grounding facts leave the issue undecided (cf. Taylor 2018). It is not fictional in the world of *Macbeth* that Lady Macbeth has exactly one child, and it isn't fictional either that she has at least two; *Macbeth* leaves the question undecided.

Williams & Woodward (forthcoming) point out an ambiguity that normative accounts of fictionality like Walton's or mine haven't broached so far. For this indeterminacy can be taken (as they put it) in either a "permissivist", or rather a "prohibitionist" way. On the latter reading, one *ought not* imagine it one way, and one *ought not* imagine it the other. On the former, one is allowed both. Given that the prescriptions that determine the fictional world are those required for competent appreciation of the work, i.e., for proper appraisal of the speech act from which it results, the prohibitionist line is the best take on the indeterminacy that Beardsley silly-questions exhibit, I submit: whatever one does is for such purposes irrelevant, and therefore fails to characterize the fictional scenario. When it comes to imaginatively

construe it, the reader ought not imagine that Lady Macbeth has exactly one child, and ought not imagine that she has at least two (granted that it is to be imagined that she has some).¹⁹

I disagree with Williams' & Woodward's view that prohibitionism is adequate for cases of "deliberate ambiguity" creating interpretative plurality. *A Turn of the Screw* is a well-known example; whether Deckard is a replicant in the world of *Blade Runner* is another good case. The best account here is permissivist. I take this to follow from the view that the work determines *two worlds*, only partially overlapping, and that full appreciation requires imagining at least one, and, if one also imagines the other, to avoid conjoining them.²⁰ This is also Stock's view (2017, 105, 170).

3. Ancillary vs. Constitutive Prescriptions to Imagine

The normative view allows us to make the problematic ambiguity that I have announced in Stock's 'F-imagining', "whatever kind of imagining is appropriate, at a minimum, as a response to fictional content" (2017, 20). For there are imaginative acts required to understand a fiction – hence appropriate responses to it, and thus *prima facie* F-imaginings by Stock's stipulation – that are merely *ancillary* or subordinate to the determination of the world that the text invites proper appreciators to imagine, *without constituting it*. Walton's objections to his previous account, I'll argue in the next section, also neglect this distinction between two different prescriptions emanating from fictions. I'll distinguish (*merely*) *a(ncillary)-imaginings*, from the *c(onstitutive)-imaginings* that make the fictional world. In this section I will illustrate the distinction with sufficiently uncontroversial examples, and I'll explain how it fits with the normative account.

Mindless stories provide my first example: “once upon a time, when there were no people and things did not have names, there was this little dragon, Urkul ...”. On my account of proper names, different homonyms are just different words (García-Carpintero 2017). The reader is hence to imagine that there is a dragon picked out by a specific ‘Urkul’-naming-practice.²¹ However, that there is such a practice is clearly not intended to be part of the (main) content of the fiction.²² I thus count it as a mere a-imagining.²³

Alternatively, following Alward (2010b, 357) and Walton (2015, 31-3) we could take a “plurality of fictions” view about these cases, placing the fictional narrator and the assumed naming practice in a scanty embedding fictional world in which the fiction presenting the richer fictional world is told. The worlds of the two fictions are non-overlapping, unlike the *Quixote* world – which both the first-person narrator and his sources (Cide Hamete Benengeli, the La Mancha archives) share with Don Quixote, with whom they causally interact. If we adopt this pluralist alternative, the normative account still helps to explain the relative order of importance of the imaginings: the thin world is the one less relevant for the appraisal of the representational act by its constitutive norms.

Authorial intrusions such as Brönte’s in *Jane Eyre* (“A new chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play; and when I draw up the curtain this time, reader, you must fancy you see a room ...”) provided a second example. Intuitively, they are not meant to constitute the fictional world; the asides are serious assertions by the fiction-maker, commenting on the story and its characters (cf. Wilson 2011, fn. 16, 118-119). However, readers must entertain (i.e., F-imagine) them in appropriately responding to the fiction.

A third illustration are Walton’s silly questions, why does Othello speak in such a fine verse, or why do Vietnamese peasants in American films speak English. In contrast with the line defended above on Beardsley’s silly questions, I don’t think that prohibitionism applies here. Engaging with the fiction requires F-imagining that Othello speaks in fine verse, and the

peasants English, but these are just a-imaginings. We ought not imagine these as features of the (core) world of the fiction. However, I think we *ought* to imagine that Othello *doesn't speak in verse*, and the Vietnamese peasants *don't speak English*; these are c-imaginings, determined by Reality assumptions. Then again, we might think the issue to be indeterminate (Wilson 2011, 122-5), and these to be cases of multiple stories. If so, as argued above we would not anyway be adopting prohibitionism, but permissivism.

Unreliable narrators, like Nabokov's Kinbote in *Pale Fire*, offer a final example. He tells us that a Zemblan assassin intending to kill Zembla's deposed king (i.e., Kinbote himself) accidentally killed the poet Shade. But we are not supposed to take this to be true in the world of the fiction, a c-Imagining part of the plot of the story we are presented to imagine. We are to infer that the killer is the insane Jack Grey who, wanting to kill the judge who put him away, mistook Shade for him (cf. Wood 1998, 198). To understand the sentences comprising the fiction we must grasp what Kinbote asserts, hence F-imagine it; but these are not c-imaginings relevant for its proprietary appraisal. Other contents are c-imaginings instead, which we only arrive at through inferences deriving them in part from such a-imagining.²⁴

As granted, these a-imaginings can be treated as constituting additional thin stories. This is not my view, for in clear examples of fictions with a plurality of interpretations like *Blade Runner* imagining one of the worlds suffices for appreciation. But if we adopt it, the thin "plots" must still be ranked as lower in relevance for that purpose than, and subordinate to, those constituting the (core) fictional world. They would thus also count as ancillary.

The distinction between a-imaginings and c-imaginings is thus intuitively well-motivated. It also fits naturally the normative framework, for it is of the same kind as others required by it. I have embraced Williamson's hypothesis that constitutive rules are simple. However, as he makes clear, this doesn't exclude that other norms should also be taken into consideration in a

full account of the relevant representational acts. It is just that constitutive rules play the crucial role of individuating their nature, or distinctive essence.

Among such additional rules there are the general norms that Williamson (2000, 256-7) invokes in order to distinguish *primary* and *secondary* propriety.²⁵ A speech act is primarily correct just in case it obeys its constitutive norm, and secondarily correct just in case it is reasonable for the agent to think that it does.²⁶ Then there are “sincerity” norms, concerning psychological states expressed when indicating liability to a constitutive norm. These are more specific to particular speech acts, but nonetheless, on the constitutive norms approach (reversing the priorities on psychological views) they are derivative. Finally, there are “conceptual” or “preparatory” norms: those requiring general conditions for being liable to obligations and norms in the first place, or grasping the resources used to indicate liability to constitutive norms, such as a natural language, or Gricean cooperative principles.

The distinction between a-imaginings and c-imaginings belongs in the third group. A subject that makes a promise is prescribed to use a language that her audience can understand. She is also required to fulfil the promise, on the standard account of the relevant constitutive rule.²⁷ But, assuming that the constitutive norms account is on the right track, both obligations don't have the same status: the latter is constitutive of what promising is, the former merely ancillary to promising. The distinction I have made, assuming a constitutive norm account of fiction-making, is of the same kind.

Summing up, in the previous section I pointed out that fictional worlds play important roles in theoretical pursuits such as the semantics of fictions – aiming to capture the “objectivity” of fictional contents, in particular implicit ones – and psychological accounts of fiction understanding; and I cashed out the metaphor assuming a constitutive norms account. In this section I have shown how to distinguish in our framework imaginings constituting the (core) fictional world, from imaginings merely auxiliary to it.

4. Dealing with Walton's Objections

I'll now use the distinction to address Walton's (2015) examples allegedly showing that a prescription to imagine p in a given work is not sufficient for the fictionality of p in that work. In contrast, Waltonian and Gricean accounts overlook the distinction.

A first example concerns the exploitation of the sequential nature of our engagements with fictions for "garden path" effects: what seems a feature of the fictional world at a point is eventually revealed not to be so – as when the closing of *Alice in Wonderland* reveals everything from early on to have been a dream. Intuitively, such cases should be accounted for in that – as Woodward (2014, 832) puts it – "the prescriptions generated by a work can change as the story develops, even though what is fictional is what we are prescribed to imagine after we have taken into account all relevant aspects of the work as a whole". In my terms, imaginings that are prescribed at one stage only to be finally discarded are a-imaginings, not c-imaginings determining the world of the fiction.

On the plausible assumption that, instead of constituting independent imaginative projects presenting their own isolated fictional worlds, serial fictions should be understood as adding features to the character of a unified world, they raise similar issues. Thus, it is already a feature of the world of the first *Star Wars* film, *Episode IV: A New Hope* that Luke is Vader's son, even though this is only revealed in *The Empire Strikes Back*, and it would come as a surprise to competent viewers of the first film. Walters (2017, 20) offers a compelling formulation of a version of the "prescriptions to imagine" account of fictionality capable of accounting for these cases, which my own account can adopt.

Walters' account for such fictions is similar to Stock's own proposal for garden path effects (2017, 64-6). Given that serial fictions might branch, and that there doesn't need to be a final one supplying a "maximal" fiction, Walters defines fictional truths as those prescribed to be imagined after a given stage, so that the prescription is never revoked at a later stage. Except that, questionably as I will argue, Stock claims that these are fictions presenting a plurality of worlds/plots: they involve at least two different fictional worlds, the one with the misleading features revised at later stages, and the "official" final one.

Other alleged counterexamples to his previous account that Walton proposes concern fictions within fictions. He offers an example of a painting by Vermeer, in which a painting of Cupid is depicted; the dream that constitutes most of *Alice* is another. Appreciators of the Vermeer painting are to imagine that there is a naked, winged boy. But this is intuitively not part of the world of the painting; it is only part of it that there is in it a painting with such a content. The same applies to Alice going down the rabbit-hole.

As Walton (2015, 26-7) notes, a proposal like the one I am making also works well here: viewers must imagine that there is a winged, naked boy on their way to imagining what the work prescribes, but this is merely an a-imagining that doesn't determine what is fictional in the work. Walton objects that the distinction is question-begging; and it might well be in his account. But, as shown, it is perfectly well justified in the framework of a normative speech act account (cp. Woodward (2014, 831)). Incurring an obligation (advancing a c-imagining, in our case; making an assertion, or other specific speech act) may demand incurring others (inviting an a-imagining; assuming that one's audience has the conceptual resources needed for understanding one; speaking loud enough for them to hear). Given the specific speech act I take fiction-making to be, it is well motivated to distinguish the fictional-world-constituting invitations to imagine from others, merely ancillary to it.

The same treatment can be given for metaphors, which Walton (2015, 25-6) discusses with a nice example from Katherine Mansfield. On my reading, Clarice Lispector's *The Passion According to G. H.* provides another good illustration. Readers will hardly forget the central epiphanic experience in the novel, when G. H. puts in her mouth the cockroach she has crushed. On my interpretation, this is just an allegoric metaphor for the character's handling of a more prosaic event alluded to in ways parallel to the cockroach episode – an abortion that leaves the character infertile. The novel requires readers to imagine the cockroach episode, but this doesn't obtain in the world of the fiction; it is just an a-imagining, a means to ascertain what is fictional according to the novel. The example also shows that, even if an F-imagining is only a means to ascertain fictional truth rather than constitutive of it, it can nonetheless contribute to the appraisal of the overall aesthetic value of the work. Of course, the case of Othello's verse makes the same point.²⁸

I have granted that we could treat these cases as fictions presenting a plurality of worlds, i.e., fictions with several correct interpretations, noting that, even if we do so, we need to make a distinction parallel to mine. Stock (2017, 169-74) treats only some of them this way: fictions within fictions, garden path fictions, fictions with unreliable narrators. As a challenge to her views, I will argue now that this is not a stable position.

Stock rejects views that rely on applications of Lewis's and Walton's *Reality Principle* – or, I take it, Friend's (2017, 29) *Reality Assumption* that “everything that is (really) true is also fictionally the case, unless excluded by the work” – unconstrained by the intentions of the author. She argues that these views have unintuitive consequences, producing fictional truths “which clash with features of the competent reader's experience and practice” (2017, 52). She illustrates this with silly questions, like why Tintin doesn't get old or Wodehouse's Wooster doesn't have cirrhosis: if these views were correct, readers should worry about such issues, but they do not (2017, 54). They populate fictional worlds with irrelevant facts (2017,

55), see also Alward (2010b, 350). Readers should be surprised when exposed to material contradicting well-known facts, but they are not (2017, 56). On her account, the alleged fictional truths are blocked because they are not intended by the author (2017, 58). This offers a principled explanation, better than claiming that the facts are relatively unimportant parts of the fictional world, without indicating the grounds for such ranking (2017, 62).

However, as far as I can tell the cases that she does want to treat as involving a plurality of interpretations don't differ in these respects from these. If it is not part of "the" *Othello* world intended by its author that the character speaks in verse, or of the *Jeeves and Wooster* world that Wooster has cirrhosis, or of either of these that Barcelona was called 'Barcino' in Roman times, by the same token it is not part either of the world of *Pale Fire* that Shade was killed by a Zemblan assassin. For we can assume that it was not intended by Nabokov that it should be, and competent readers don't take it to be so. Alternatively, assume that, given that Nabokov must have intended his readers to at least entertain that thought, we must take it that there is a (thin) alternative interpretation presenting a world in which it is true. Why shouldn't it be then the case that, in a similarly thin sense, Hergé did intend us to entertain a Tintin-world in which he does get old, but this doesn't show (he has a Dorian-Gray-like picture at home, say), or an alternative one in which he doesn't – physical laws are suspended, so that he can be in so many different places in a short interval of time?

I have argued in earlier work that we don't come to imagine what is true in a fiction along Gricean lines, by recognizing author's specific intention for us to do; rather, both author and audience rely on well-established fiction-interpreting practices (García-Carpintero, 2016, 2019a, 2019b). But if we insist that we are somehow intended by authors to entertain the truths constituting the fictional world, we should also grant that we are similarly intended to entertain those here classified as merely ancillary. It is thus unclear how, on the basis of the materials available to Griceans, Stock can make the distinctions we need. Making them in

some cases (unreliable narrators, garden path fictions) is unstably at odds with the reasons she offers to reject doing so in others (silly questions).

As part of my global abductive argument, I advance this criticism as a challenge to Stock. As a reviewer notices, she makes a distinction that might be relevant. She says that, just as understanding an assertion doesn't require believing the content, "for fictional cognition, all the reader needs to do is understand what she is intended to F-imagine, not F-imagine it, though most of the time she will immediately F-imagine it as well" (Stock 2017, 36). For this to work, Stock should explain the difference between *entertaining a proposition in understanding*, and *(propositional) F-imagining*. The reviewer suggests that she could help herself to ideas not far from those I have invoked: "you only really engage with a fiction, or become immersed in it, when you imagine its contents". Perhaps in those cases that she treats as involving a plurality of interpretations, readers are intended to engage with the thinner fictions she posits along these lines, by becoming immersed in them.

This suggestion should be elaborated, addressing concerns in the vicinity of those bedeviling Gricean accounts: how could we justify ascribing such discriminating intentions to fiction-makers and their audience? Can Stock distinguish a sense in which Nabokov intended us to imagine that Shade was killed by a Zemblan assassin, while Hergé didn't intend us to imagine potential explanations for Tintin's age like those entertained above? We could put back to her the rhetorical question she poses to others, "on what grounds might one insist that no propositional imagining occurs here?" (2017, 125) And we can support the implicated answer the way she does: there are general considerations that explain why reflective readers might well entertain the propositions, as appropriate responses to the fictions.

As explained at the end of the previous section, on the account developed here what distinguishes c-imaginings from a-imaginings are normative facts about the evaluation of fictions by their proprietary norms. This is what on the view intuitions about *the world of the*

fiction track. It is such facts that ground the impression that a-imaginings do not constitute fictional worlds – or the pluralistic alternative that they constitute thin, subordinate worlds. Stock and Walton hold undiscerning views about F-imaginings: for Stock they are imaginings intended by fiction-makers, for Walton imaginings prescribed by fictions given their institutional function. Without further elaboration, these views neglect required distinctions.

There may remain concerns about how illuminating the proposal is. I'll address them in closing, by contrasting it in this respect with Alward's (2010b, 357), which also crucially appeals to fictional worlds: "the narrator in a fictional story is ... the reader's informant regarding the fictional world described or generated by the text". Such a narrator is an explicit or implicit construct like Lewis's (1978) fictional teller: an "informant" who "reveals" (*ibid.*, 358) the fictional world. We don't need to go here into the specifics of Alward's view.²⁹

Now, Alward acknowledges a commitment to cash out the world metaphor: "Although I am committed to the utility of the "fictional worlds" idiom, I do not take it to have ontological import" (*ibid.*, 358). This is what he says to discharge it: "The fictional world embodied by a text is just the collection of fictional truths embodied by it" (*ibid.*, 357). But the fictional truths were on his account *just those that the narrator "reveals" in "informing" us about the fictional world!* This is too tight a circle for it to be illuminating: fictional worlds consist of fictional truths ... which are the contents of the fictional narrator's assertions revealing them. How does this help us to address the previous worries? How does it help, say, to decide whether it is part of the world of *Pale Fire* that a Zemblan assassin killed the poet Shade, as Kinbote tells us, or the insane Jack Grey instead, or both somehow?

I haven't provided a reductive account either. I have assumed that we already have a sense of the contours of fictional worlds, which informs different theoretical undertakings in cognitive psychology and formal semantics. However, by grounding fictional worlds on constitutive norms for fiction-making, I have given an account establishing wider connections

with other familiar notions. On my proposal, truth in fiction is grounded on norms deployed for the evaluation of fictions as such. It is true what we must entertain the thought that a Zemblan assassin killed the poet Shade to properly appreciate *Pale Fire*, but the “must” here is like the one in stating preparatory conditions for speech acts. In the sense expressing constitutive norms, we *must* instead imagine that the killer was Jack Grey.

Of course, one might reject constitutive norms accounts and primitive normativity, but that is another concern. A reviewer says, “compare Lewis’s analysis, which does not seem prey to the same kind of circularity or primitivity – as he analyzes truth in fiction in terms that don’t assume it ... does it not retain this advantage over the author’s?” To be sure, it does. Lewis’ modal realism about possible worlds holds a similar advantage over the Stalnakerian account of the modal realm I endorse, which helps itself to primitive modality. But to many of us, in both cases this partial advantage doesn’t add to a global one (García-Carpintero 2007; Alward 2010b, 349-51; Stock 2017, 49-61). Lucid as always, Lewis (1978, 280) himself comes close to admit it, anticipating Walton’s concern about embedded fictions.

To wrap up. In some cases (mindless fictions), truth in fiction/the fictional world is fixed by what the fictional narrator tells us as known fact, but the telling itself is not part of the fictional world. In some other cases (embedded fictions, unreliable narrators), only the telling or other intentional acts constitute the fictional world, not their contents. In still other cases, both what the narrator tells us as known fact and the telling constitute the fictional world, in spite of the fact that, if we were told such things in actuality, we would utterly refuse to accept them. Matravers (1997, 79) nicely illustrates this with supernatural tales like *The Master and Margarita*. Or we candidly accept implied contents that we wouldn’t even contemplate if the fiction was really told as known fact, as I (García-Carpintero 2007) illustrated with Cortázar’s “Continuity of Parks”. I have shown that these facts, left unexplained by Lewis’ account as much as by others I have discussed, are accounted for on the assumption that they are

grounded on the normativity of fiction-making: on the fictional world being fixed by the contents to which fiction-makers commit themselves for the proper appraisal of their acts.³⁰ This offers abductive support for my normative speech-act variation on Walton's account of fictionality. It allows replies to Walton's objections to his views, and provides explanatory benefits over Alward's and Friend's institutional proposals, and Stock's Gricean account.

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Notes

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¹ It is *sui generis* in that it is a *specific* speech act, with its own individuating definition, along with others such as promises, guesses, conjectures, and so on. But it belongs in one of the highest genera for such acts in a proper taxonomy, that of *directives* (cp. Alward 2010a, 390; 2010b, 356). 'Speech' is to be broadly understood; "speech" acts can be made with pictures: the account of fiction summarized below is meant to apply to films.

² Ohmann (1971), Grant (2001), Sutrop (2002), and Stock (2017) also support the speech-act view; Gale (1971), Searle (1974/5), Alward (2009, 2010a) and Friend (2012) object to it. In García-Carpintero (2019b) I discuss Green's less clear-cut view. He doesn't posit a specific speech act of fiction-making, but he explains fictions in terms of the speech act of supposing.

³ I oscillate between deontic and axiological vocabulary throughout. For our purposes, it doesn't matter which one takes precedence, if any.

⁴ That the audience fulfils an order doesn't make it correct (it might have been utterly wrong in the first place), and that it remains forever unfulfilled doesn't make it incorrect.

⁵ Alward (2010a) provides a nice metaphor for what on my account are fiction-making speech acts from which fictions result: the deployment of "word-sculptures". (Better "representation-sculptures", not to exclude films, pictures, and, indeed, sculptures.) He

provides an institutionalist account of fictionality that, like Walton's, is consistent with my normative speech-act account – the normative speech-act-kinds themselves are on my view the relevant institutions. Like Walton, however, Alward opposes his account to speech-act views. This is because he assumes that “what is characteristic of illocutionary action is the intention to produce an effect in an audience by means of the latter's recognition of this intention” (*op. cit.*, 395). The objections he makes on this assumption echo Walton's (1990, 85-9). They only apply to Gricean views like Currie's or Stock's; normative accounts like mine reject that assumption. The only intended effect in the audience is in my view their recognition that by her act the agent becomes beholden to a norm; this typically depends on the institutional features that Alward, Friend and Walton rightly emphasize.

⁶ Cf. García-Carpintero (2013, 2016) and Stock (2017, 163-7). The constrained role that the intentions of fiction-makers play in a normative account (García-Carpintero, 2019a) deals well with one of Currie's (2014, 359) reasons for pessimism about prospects for speech-act accounts of the fictionality of works. The account supports a more holistic approach than Currie's on what fictional utterances are, which is also helpful.

⁷ Cf. Friend (2017, 31; forthcoming, ch. 4).

⁸ I take Lorand's (2001) and Sainsbury's (2014) skepticism to be addressed to views like Lewis' (1978) that attempt to reductively analyze the world metaphor in possible-worlds ideology. I will also talk of *the plot of the story*. I am unconcerned with the circularity which Lewis (1978, 265) sees in it, grounded on his aiming for a possible-worlds-based reduction of fictional content (Sainsbury 2014, 283). Below (fn. 21) I'll address another, Kripke-based argument that Lewis invokes to reject a *plot-of-the-story* account of fictional content.

⁹ The proposal is made precise by resorting to traditional possible worlds semantics; Berto (2017b) develops it in a way that deals with what I, like him and Stock (2017, 141-4), take to

be perfectly possible inconsistent F-imaginings. In any case, *illuminating a view by giving a precise ideal model for it* doesn't amount to *providing a reduction*.

¹⁰ Indeed, as Lorand (2001, 427) suggests, “the main function of the ‘world’ metaphor in theories of fiction is to supply a framework for justifying the tendency to go beyond the given text and include in the story more than that which is explicitly stated”.

¹¹ This is the core of what Matravers (1997, 79) calls “the report model”: “in reading a novel, a reader makes-believe he is being given a report of actual events. In other words, he makes-believe the content of the novel is being reported to him as known fact by a narrator”.

¹² My reasons are essentially Wilson's (2011, 116-7), addressing Kania's (2005) skepticism. Kania (*ibid.*, 52) says that a fictional world “is just stipulated ... by the artist through the work”, but he doesn't tell us how this stipulating goes. In fact, the best account for how verbal fiction-makers convey the explicit features of the fictional world (to my mind, Walton's (1990)) has them simulating the assertions that would be made in the relevant context by means of the declaratives they put forward – these are crucial “props” in verbal games of make-believe. These assertions have assertors, explicit as in *Don Quixote* or implicit instead. Zucchi (2017, 96-9) provides a related reason, based on the behavior of indexicals in discourse constituting fictions, in contrast with discourse reporting on it. Wilson (2011, 112) doubts that the view generalizes to all verbal cases, mentioning works consisting mostly of dialogue like Compton Burnett's *The Present and the Past*. But its very first lines show such dialogues to be explicitly *reported* by an implicit teller: “‘Oh, dear, oh, dear!’ said Henry Clare. His sister glanced in his direction ...”. Novels consisting only of interrogatives or imperatives would provide content through presuppositions, also acts in the “assertive family” (Green 2017b). Regarding films, Wilson (2011, 126-139) himself or Cumming, Greenberg & Kelly (2017) offer adequate justification. The distinction below between a-imaginings and c-

imaginings ward off the difficulties that fictions positing *prima facie* mindless worlds create for Lewis's "idealism" (Byrne 1993); see the discussion of 'Urkul' in §3.

¹³ Cf. Ohmann (1971, 18) and Gale (1971, 337). I thus agree with Searle (1974-5) that verbal fiction-making is illocutionary pretense. Alward, however, argues on this basis against the speech-act view, on the questionable assumption that "theories of fictional discourse can be used without revision as accounts of theatrical discourse" (2009, 321): given that the *sui generis* speech act view is not a good account of the latter, it follows that it fails for the former too. But the assumption question-beggingly overlooks a distinction related to the one I'll be making, between ancillary and constitutive imaginings. In performing illocutionary acts, actors (including storytellers of verbal fictions) play two roles, an *actor-role*, and a *storytelling-role*. I agree with Searle and Alward that the former is just pretense, but this doesn't apply to the latter. In the first role, an actor playing Don José has him saying that Carmen loves him, while in the second the storyteller conveys though his acting that Don José wrongly believes so in his infatuation. In "playing" an unreliable narrator like Kinbote, the storyteller (Nabokov) in the actor-role portrays a fictional narrator (Kinbote) asserting *p* while, in his second role, he invites his audience to imagine something else (see §3).

¹⁴ Cf. García-Carpintero (2019b). I count manifest implicatures that the fictional teller is portrayed as making as contributing to immediate content, but this raises issues I cannot address here. Unreliable narrators don't require any special qualification, see fn. 24.

¹⁵ Predelli and Reimer formulate their views in a possible worlds semantics; this can be understood once more not as a reductive proposal, but done merely for the sake of offering a precise model. Voltolini takes the notion as primitive in his earlier work, but he provides a cognitive elaboration in a more recent presentation (Voltolini 2016). Woods (2018) also takes a primitivist view, see García-Carpintero (2018).

¹⁶ Reimer (2005) disclaims the ontological consequences of the view by ascribing to fictional utterances truth-conditions but not propositional contents. My deflationary take on propositions leaves me no room for that distinction.

¹⁷ Everett (2013, 48) suggests that the difference between these “semantic” accounts and “pragmatic” ones is not big. I have been scare-quoting ‘semantic’ and ‘pragmatic’ because the indication that a declarative is used for fiction-making and not for asserting is by my lights as “semantic” as the indication that it is used for guessing or supposing.

¹⁸ “In inviting the reader to constitute speech acts to go with its sentences, the literary work is asking him to participate in the imaginative construction of a world – or at least as much of one as is necessary to give the speech acts an adequate setting”, Ohmann (1971, 17). Cf. also Camp (2017, 77-8).

¹⁹ In a possible-worlds analysis of fictional worlds, this corresponds to Lewis’ (1978, 277) “method of intersection” for dealing with inconsistent fictions. This is my official view but, as it transpires below, I am not sanguine about it. I am open to the “plurality of interpretations” line below, hence the permissivist view and the “method of union” that goes with it.

²⁰ This corresponds to Lewis’ (1978, 277) “method of union”.

²¹ This account of names answers Lewis’ (1978, 265) Kripkean objection to explaining fictional truth relative to the *plot* of the story. The Holmes stories prescribe imagining that he is called with the *specific homonym* for which Conan Doyle invites us to imagine a reference-fixing naming practice (in this case, one also part of the fictional world). The fact that in the actual world someone called by another homonym (“improbably, incredibly”) carried out all Holmes’s exploits doesn’t thus make it one of those “where the plot of the stories is enacted”.

²² Cf. Predelli 2017, 135 ff on “peripheral” dubbings for a similar take on this, and Wilson’s (2011, 125, 115 fn.10) distinction for these and related cases of “heterodiegetic”

narrators between what is fictional “in the work” and what is fictional “in the story”, which I take to be parallel to mine between *ancillary* and *constitutive* F-imaginings.

²³ The distinction disposes of Byrne’s (1993) objection of “idealism” to accounts, like mine, granting Alward’s (2009) view that all fictions have fictional narrators: the ‘Urkul’ world itself doesn’t have naming practices or rational agents (dinosaurs aside).

²⁴ They are thus not fictional-world-constituting fictional truths, and hence they are not explicit fictional truths either (fn. 14); they are only *prima facie* explicit fictional truths.

²⁵ The terminology is DeRose’s (2002, 180).

²⁶ Lackey (2007) questions the distinction. I take it that what is controversial is only the use of it to respond to alleged counterexamples to the knowledge rule for assertion (say, cases of untrue assertions for which the speaker has very strong justification).

²⁷ This is not my own view. In parallel with the case of directives, I take it that one must promise that *p* only if one gets thereby a reason to see to it that *p*: that one fulfils a promise doesn’t make it correct, if it was inadequate in the first place, and it may have been correct even if it remains unfulfilled. But for present purposes we can stick to the traditional view.

²⁸ Woodward (2016) provides compelling responses to some other specifically visual cases that Walton invokes, which I take to be fully compatible with the line I am pushing.

²⁹ I critically discuss it elsewhere (García-Carpintero forthcoming).

³⁰ Earlier (fn. 12) I supported Wilson’s (2011, 111) “minimal” take on fictional narrators in his polemic with Kania. But when it comes to Kania’s (2007) polemic with Alward, I am on his side. I fully agree with him (*ibid.*, 406) that only actual fiction makers truly “reveal” the fictional world to us; “playing” fictional narrators is just one of the resources they use for it.