

# Metalinguistic Acts in Fiction

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**Abstract:** This chapter identifies and explains several primary functions of the fictional use of metalinguistic devices and considers some difficult cases. In particular, this chapter argues that when real persons are quoted in a storyworld they are ‘storified’ as near-real fictions. In cases of the misquotation of real persons, near-real fictions and near-real quotations must adequately exploit resemblances between the real and the fictional. This concludes with a discussion of the similarities between fictional and nonfictional uses of metalinguistic acts, and how they bear on our understanding of imagination and make-believe.

**Keywords:** quotation, reporting, metarepresentation, storytelling, narration, fiction, imagination, make-believe

## 1. Introduction

Metalinguistic acts are the use of language to report something.<sup>1</sup> Speech occurs in an initial context,  $c_1$ . It is reported on in some other context,  $c_2$ . This is done for a number of reasons: to translate speech, to describe or imitate the speech of others, to provide evidence for a separate assertion, to establish authority, to chronicle events, etc. When used to chronicle events, speech reporting is not the only option. Rather than talk about an event in  $c_1$ , a speaker tells a listener about some language that was used in  $c_1$ . When this happens, the speaker tells the listener something about  $c_1$  using a speech report. We don’t know a priori what that *something* is.<sup>2</sup> For some reason, the speaker has decided to use a metalinguistic act in order to tell that something. Why does this matter? Suppose what happened in  $c_1$  is that Jon killed a reindeer. In recalling this event, Lisa could say, “Jon killed a reindeer and was overjoyed at his good luck,” or she could say, “Jon killed a reindeer and hollered, ‘this is my lucky day!’” Lisa is telling the story of Jon’s luck and doing it with a description of his feelings, in the first case, or with a quotation of his speech, in the second. The quotation of his speech is doing the work of describing his feelings for the listener. It does not have to be this way. Lisa could be quoting Jon for different reasons (perhaps she is gathering evidence of how he cheats the other hunters). She might love the sound of his voice and enjoys acting it out. She might be learning Jon’s language and uses constant quotation as a chance to practice.

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<sup>2</sup> See Heal (2001); Clark & Gerrig (1999). Heal describes indirect reports as indexical predicative expressions, arguing for a variety of event types, including speech events, that could be picked out with an indirect report.

A key to understanding metalinguistic practices in fiction is understanding the goals of metalinguistic practices outside of fiction. It is imperative that we understand that quotation and reporting are used for many storytelling and conversational functions beyond just saying what was said. A paradigm use of quotation is in newspaper reports. Chronicling that a speaker said something matters if the person being quoted is illustrious — for example, if she is a public figure or a person of influence. But other goals are just as interesting, and function as means of telling the story itself. In reporting on the aftermath of a mudslide, a reporter might quote a local resident describing his distress and fear. The reporter could convey the same content by describing the distress and fear of the local residents without a quotation since that is the only function that the quotation is performing in the newspaper story. The inclusion of the quoted speech by speakers that we otherwise do not care about is meant to develop something like authenticity or human concern. Newspaper stories are themselves modeled on the way in which human speakers communicate with one another, what human speakers are interested in, and how we fill our speech with stories about contexts not present, which require imaginative representation.<sup>3</sup> We also use quotations, either of ourselves or others, as central storytelling props. Authors use quoted speech to set a mood, mark a transition, or elicit emotion. As social creatures we are attuned to the speech of others as interpretive devices for understanding the story we are telling or being told. I conjecture that the use of quotation simply to convey *what is said* is an atypical use of quotation, despite the extraordinary attention it has received in the philosophical literature.

Fictional works are premised on prescriptions to make-believe at least some of their content (Currie 1990; Stock 2011). While traditional works of fiction<sup>4</sup> prescribe internal standards of coherence and consistency, they invite constrained imagination in the fictional world. Fictional quotation is subject to some of the same problems of fictional assertions, truth in fiction, and proper names in fiction,<sup>5</sup> but also to particular problems having to do with quotation across contexts, and quotation used for rhetorical or artistic ends. In telling a fictional story, assertions, descriptions, quotations, and other linguistic and literary devices are not used merely to chronicle<sup>6</sup> a fictional world, but they are each used to tell a story which itself creates the fictional world. The devices used in fictional storytelling have as their goal the creation of the fictional world which makes possible the telling of some particular story. I argue that fictional quotation within a storyworld largely functions in the same way as nonfictional quotation: characters interpret quotations as performing their standard functions, and readers assume this as well — as long as we recognize that it is characters and not readers who are the audience for most

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<sup>3</sup> See Dessalles (2007: 25–27) for a view on storytelling and narration as unique aspects of human communication and as occupying a broad swath of our communicative lives.

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise stated, I am only addressing fictions such as stories, novels, and films that have a narrative structure, and adhere to traditional norms of storytelling. That is, I am excluding postmodern works, poems, and other representational arts.

<sup>5</sup> See discussions in Currie (1990); Friend (2000); Lewis (1983); Sainsbury (2010); Searle (1975).

<sup>6</sup> Walton (1990) distinguishes between reporting and storytelling narration. He uses this distinction to discuss verbal representations in which a character in a fiction speaks or writes in order to report or express an attitude, *or* in order to tell a story. To avoid confusion, I use the term ‘chronicle’ instead of ‘report’ to make the same point that Walton made. In this paper I use the term ‘reports’ to pick out metalinguistic acts and devices.

metalinguistic speech in fiction.<sup>7</sup> My primary task is to discuss the use of quotation and similar reporting devices in fictional contexts, including how they are used to structure narration and storytelling, and how they are used to import common ground (Stalnaker 2002). I draw attention to some of the features of quotation in fiction that set it apart from quotation outside of fiction. Speculatively, I conclude with a discussion of how nonfictional quotation has a storytelling structure and the implications for understanding the role of imagination in both.

## 2. Functions of metalinguistic acts

What makes metalinguistic acts in fiction interesting? Speakers in the real world quote across contexts. Fictional speakers quote across contexts within a single fictional world, but sometimes they also appear to quote across worlds. This can happen between fictions, and between a fictional world and the real one. Interpreting fictional metalinguistic acts sometimes requires make-believing that quoted speakers are nearly like real-world counterparts. It also requires positing multiple conversational contexts and narrative goals simultaneously. Audiences perform these interpretations with literary and rhetorical goals in mind, in addition to goals of veridicality.<sup>8</sup> Let's look at some of these cases.

Here is the most ordinary use of a quotational device in a fictional work:

(1) "Tut, tut, tut," said Gerardo.

A natural reading of (1) is that the author is not quoting Gerardo. The author is using quotation marks to depict dialogue in a written form. While this involves the use of quotation marks, it is not obviously an instance of quotation itself. I will assume that the narrator is quoting Gerardo rather than depicting dialogue, and that the author is quoting the narrator by writing the book.<sup>9</sup> It's worth asking, even with this most basic example, why dialogue is depicted at all. What are the functions of depicting speech (or quoting characters) and why is it that stories are, in part, told through the speech of characters? Here is a non-exhaustive list of seven overlapping functions that a metalinguistic act performs in a fictional work:

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<sup>7</sup> This is a problem for Gricean theories of fiction. Much of any given fictional text does not take the reader as the immediate audience of the dialogue. See Gerrig (1993) and Walton (1990). This requires further clarification: we are meant to interpret characters as the audience for their dialogue with one another; the depiction of the dialogue by the narrator has the reader as the intended audience. Other forms of metalinguistic devices in fiction (as in example (2)) takes other characters as their primary audience when the character is using the metalinguistic device, and the reader is the audience when the narrator is taken to be the speaker. Gerrig (1993) characterizes this as a *side-participant stance*. This division is what creates problems for a Gricean model.

<sup>8</sup> There is a growing body of literature on learning from fiction which is relevant here but beyond the scope of this paper, although I do discuss related points at the end of this paper (see Gendler (2000); García-Carpintero (2016) for helpful discussions). In addition to learning from fiction, audiences are often responsive to fictions in ways that would not be predictable on the basis of suspending disbelief. Gerrig (1993) provides an extended analysis of a fear of the ocean after watching *Jaws*. He concludes that this is, in part, due to an association with what we already know to be true (i.e., we already know that sharks sometimes attack), but the fiction *Jaws* changes our attitude toward this fact. See also Bauer & Beck (this volume) for an interesting discussion of exporting knowledge from fiction.

<sup>9</sup> Or portraying the narrator, or acting out the narrator role. I have no preferred view on this. See Alward (2009: 321).

- (i) It reveals the inner life of characters who are not the narrator. In traditional works of fiction, narrative point-of-view is limited, even for omniscient narrators.<sup>10</sup> Quotation or dialogue can be the most straightforward way of presenting multiple characters' inner lives, thoughts, or perspectives.
- (ii) It reveals the contrast between the inner life of a first-person narrator and his outer life (e.g., to depict deception or self-deception). Depicting deception through the use of speech can be a more narratively interesting alternative to a mere description of deception.
- (iii) It makes explicit interaction between characters. As is the case with (i) and (ii) this is not narratively necessary, since character interaction can be described without dialogue or quotation, but it is often a more interesting narrative option.
- (iv) It allows for secondary narration on the part of the characters. Below, I describe characters who quote prior speech events as *secondary narrators*.
- (v) It performs a structural role in the story by changing narrative pace, mood, or perspective.
- (vi) It allows the author or narrator to accomplish other rhetorical, narrative, or assertoric goals, such as expressing nonfictional truth. These are accomplished, in part, through the importing of common ground presuppositions.
- (vii) It makes a story compelling as a fiction because we care about the thoughts and perspectives of other persons, and these perspectives serve as imaginative and interpretive aids.

Functions (i), (ii), and (iii) are interesting in themselves and deserve an independent analysis, but I do not undertake that analysis here. Instead, I discuss functions (iv) and (v) in sections 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3, and (vi) in some detail in section 3. I return to function (vii) in section 4.

## 2.1 Secondary narration

In (2), a character quotes a conversation that we are to make-believe occurred prior to the quoting event.

(2) “I said to her: ‘Honour’s always been honour, and honesty honesty, in Manson Mingott’s house, and will be till I’m carried out of it feet first,’” the old woman had stammered into her daughter’s ear, in the thick voice of the partly paralysed. “And when she said: ‘But my name, Auntie—my name’s Regina Dallas,’ I said: ‘It was Beaufort when he covered you with jewels, and it’s got to stay Beaufort now that he’s covered you with shame.’ ”

The narrator of Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence* depicts Mrs. Mingott recounting her dressing-down of Mrs. Regina (Dallas) Beaufort. The quotations are a prop for the reader to imagine this event, which was not previously depicted in the text. This is the first way in which fictional quotation differs from nonfictional quotation: the quoted context and the quoting context are simultaneously present in the text. In traditional fictions, we are to make-believe that

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<sup>10</sup> The point here is that omniscience implies in principle knowledge of everything, but is not committed to a point-of-view of everything. The latter can still be limited for a variety of aesthetic or experiential reasons.

the fictional world exists as a totality, and that the narrator is telling us a story about that fictional world. We are not prompted to pretend that the fictional world is coming into existence through the telling of the story (even though, in some sense, it is). In this example, the narrator depicts Mrs. Mingott's speech, and Mrs. Mingott depicts the earlier conversation. It is through Mrs. Mingott's account that the reader comes to make-believe that a prior conversation took place. Even though quotation in fiction is usually addressed to other characters, and not to the reader, in this case it serves the function of telling other characters what was said in a prior speech context (its ordinary function), and it serves the function of telling the reader about something that happened in the fictional world that is not otherwise depicted by the narrator. This means that the character who is quoting a prior speech context is performing *secondary narration*; or, what we might also call *embedded narration*. I prefer the former label to allow for tiered narration, or parallel narration.

As secondary-narrators, characters have the same pitfall as primary-narrators: they can be unreliable. When Mrs. Mingott recounts what transpired previously, the reader is intended to realize that she tells the story with bravado, where she is even more strident than usual, and Mrs. Beaufort even more meek. The reader is prompted to imagine that the earlier encounter is not as it is described by the secondary-narrator. The reader instead has to create layers of context for interpreting her speech: we imagine an earlier speech context between the two characters, and dissociate the real speech context from the secondary-narrator's distortion. The presumptive problem is that it is difficult to identify what to attribute to a speaker given how many voices there are in a text — an author, implied author, narrator, characters, etc. I don't think this is a real problem for readers, *ceteris paribus*. Speakers outside of fictional settings use mixed and indirect quotation readily, and we are able to distribute perspectives to the various speakers being represented.<sup>11</sup>

At this point in the story, the reader presupposes that Mrs. Mingott blusters and distorts. Any quotation by her that would otherwise chronicle a prior speech context is discounted on the basis of these presuppositions about her reliability. Mrs. Mingott distorts the narration, and that distortion serves to tell us more about her character than it does about the prior speech context (which is not particularly important for the story). In this particular case, the primary rhetorical or artistic function of (2) is to reveal an aspect of Mrs. Mingott's character, not to chronicle a prior speech event. The interpretation of nonfictional speech reports are similarly adjusted based on the perceived reliability of the reporter, and what is at stake in accepting the reporter's account.

## 2.2 Narrative perspective

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<sup>11</sup> See Gerrig (1993). He puts this point this way, with which I agree: "...I feel confident we could find speakers participating in exactly this same range of functions in everyday conversation, both in earnest and in pretense... Speakers regularly mingle other voices with their own when they use direct quotation in conversation... Hearers must, therefore, be accustomed to apportioning responsibility to different originators within the same conversational turn" (112–113). The *ceteris paribus* point is this: various media and speech modalities allow for different kinds of marking between 'voices'. Speakers can use body positioning, gestures, and imitative voices to mark distinct speakers, whereas authors do not have these tools. Whether something is possible in a text depends in part on an author's ability to mimic natural speech. Gerrig (1993) develops the concept of a *side-participant stance*. This is listeners' ability to interpret speech that is not directed at them, whether in fictional or nonfictional contexts. He sees this as central to interpreting fiction.

Using direct quotation in a story usually functions to say what a character said. In the example of the previous section, this can turn the character into a secondary narrator if she is chronicling some previously unknown event in the storyworld. Direct quotation — used, for example, in the depiction of ordinary dialogue — can present or imitate the perspective<sup>12</sup> of a speaker who is not the narrator. In an ordinary case, it is obvious whose perspective is being taken because the speaker uses first-person pronouns, and some conventions of quotation are typically marked.<sup>13</sup>

Another way of shifting narrative perspective is less perspicuous: *free indirect discourse* (FID). FID occurs when a narrator uses language from a character's perspective as a means of presenting or imitating that character's perspective. For example, if Lisa is the narrator of a story and in the telling of the story presents a scene from Jon's point of view, or with Jon's epistemic or perceptual limitations, or as modulated by Jon's mood, then this is an ordinary example of FID. The language of the narration seems as if it has shifted to Jon's perspective, but it is freely integrated within the language of Lisa's narration.

Some uses of quotation in fiction use perspective shifting that is unlike the obvious case of direct quotation, and unlike the use of FID. I am calling these uses *free direct discourse* (FDD). Here are two examples from Jane Austen's *Emma*:

(3) But no sooner was the distress known to Mr. Elton, than it was removed. His gallantry was always on the alert. “Might he be trusted with the commission, what infinite pleasure should he have in executing it! he could ride to London at any time. It was impossible to say how much he should be gratified by being employed on such an errand.”  
“He was too good!—she could not endure the thought!—she would not give him such a troublesome office for the world”—brought on the desired repetition of entreaties and assurances,—and a very few minutes settled the business. (Austen, *Emma*, emphasis added)

(4) “Why will not you write one yourself, Mr. Elton?” said she; “that is the only security for its freshness; and nothing could be easier to you.”  
“Oh, no! he had never written, hardly ever, any thing of the kind in his life. The stupidest fellow! He was afraid not even Miss Woodhouse”—he stopt a moment—“or Miss Smith could inspire him.” (Austen, *Emma*, emphasis added)

(3) and (4) look as if they abide by the conventions of direct quotation, and the passages in the surrounding text in fact abide by these conventions. Yet, in both of these excerpts, direct and indirect reporting conventions are mixed. The pronouns take an indirect form, when they should

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<sup>12</sup> I am grateful to Andreas Stokke for pointing out the problems with assuming that direct quotation merely presents a perspective. I am not sure that I have resolved these problems satisfactorily, but adjustments to my argument have been made throughout.

<sup>13</sup> There are many examples of how this can be done. The clearest cases in English writing use quotation marks and an indication of who is speaking: ‘Lisa said’. But there are many other options, including italics, offset lines, and no punctuation at all — where the dialogue and the identity of the speaker is inferred from context. Quotation of characters’ thought can also be marked in some of these ways. These variations don’t change the analysis here, although usage patterns within a text inform the correct interpretation. See Banfield (1973); Stokke (this volume); Cumming (this volume); Abrusán (this volume) for helpful discussions of perspective shift and narrative point-of-view.

be in the first- and second-person as direct quotes. What might be occurring here is free integration of indirect discourse with the primary narration deploying direct quotation. We can call this FDD.

One might think that this is FID that has had quotation marks added. The reason that (3) and (4) look like instances of FID is because of the perspective shift that takes place, unexpectedly, in the dialogue (the surrounding text uses standard conventions for quotation, the marking of thoughts, and FID throughout). This may be the correct interpretation. In fact, there are historical reasons for thinking this is the case, and that practices of quotation in literary works are not historically stable (Johnson 2017).<sup>14</sup> FID is a means of presenting or imitating a character's point-of-view within the language of narration. The far more straightforward way doing that with speech is to use direct quotation. In passages (3) and (4), neither of these things is happening. Direct quotation is being used to present the narrator's point-of-view. The point-of-view shifts from the characters to the narrator; or, possibly, there is a merge between the point-of-view of two characters and the narrator in these passages. The reader expects direct discourse to be presented from the perspective of the speaker, and this direct discourse is presented from the perspective of the narrator. That is what makes it so interesting.

The reasons for using metalinguistic devices in these unusual ways involve literary rather than linguistic interpretations. I speculate that the storytelling reason for this shift in narrative perspective within direct discourse is a matter of heightening narrative pace. At this point in the story, Emma has been building the connection between Mr. Elton and Harriet in her matchmaking role. The reader gets sense that there is a bit of tedium to this much pomp in the matchmaking process, and wants to get on with the story, to increase narrative pace, by accelerating the depiction of dialogue and reducing it to its 'desired repetition of entreaties and assurances'. The merge of the speakers and the narrator allows for this acceleration of narrative pace.

### 2.3 Narrative divergence

There are other ways in which direct discourse can be altered to present perspective shifts within a narrative. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is framed as a story told from tapes recorded by the handmaid and found many years after the collapse of Gilead. The story, as narrated by the handmaid, sometimes uses quotation marks to depict dialogue and sometimes omits them. This alternation does not correspond to alternations between direct and indirect quotations. A plausible interpretation of this is to mark shifts in the reliability of the narrator —

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<sup>14</sup> I am grateful to Andreas Stokke and Emar Maier for pressing me further on this issue and enjoining me to consider Johnson's (2017) argument about the shifting conventions for quotation in English. Johnson also analyzes this form of metalinguistic representation in Jane Austen's works, and his evidence is compelling. I still think that there is an interesting phenomenon to be found in these passages, and one that deserves separate categories of analysis, such as FID and FDD. This is because Austen does not consistently present FID within quotation marks as we would expect if the correct analysis of (3) and (4) is that they are merely FID with a historically particular use of quotation marks. She uses this convention, ordinary direct and indirect reports, and ordinary free indirect discourse throughout. She deviates from that in some cases, and, in these cases, she moves very quickly through multiple characters' perspectives in FID. The structural goal that these examples illustrate is that she uses this for the purpose of accelerating narrative pace. This is not incompatible with this being an historically particular convention of punctuation.

some dialogue is marked as having really occurred, and other dialogue is marked as merely remembered or as contained in the mind of the narrator. The reader begins by taking the handmaid's narration as an accurate depiction of the storyworld; the break in punctuation conventions prompts the reader to remember that this is a story being told within a story, and that the narrators can diverge. Just as direct discourse can be presented from the perspective of the narrator (in examples (3) and (4) above), it can also be the case that the narrator is unreliable. In that case, we expect that the dialogue that is presented is also unreliable. In the next two passages, the narrator presents some dialogue as direct quotation of speech, some as private thought, and some as what I will call *unreliable dialogue*. Unreliable dialogue is presented from the shifting perspectives of the characters.

- (5) a. "Yes," I say, "Praise be," I add as an afterthought. *Mayday* used to be a distress signal, a long time ago, in one of those wars we studied in high school...
- b. Do you know what it came from? said Luke. *Mayday*?
- c. No, I said. It's a strange word to use for that, isn't it?
- d. Newspapers and coffee, in Sunday mornings, before she was born...
- e. It's French, he said. From *m'aidez*.
- f. Help me.
- (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*)

Line (5a) is direct discourse in the narrative present, marked by conventional quotation marks. This is consistent with other depictions of direct discourse throughout the text. Lines (5b), (5c), and (5e) are memories of direct discourse from the narrative past, marked by 'he said' and similar phrases, but missing conventional quotation marks. Line (5d) is a memory of the context of those utterances. Line (5f) is a private thought in the narrative present, absent markings, and understood from context. In one short passage, the author distinguishes three different types of metalinguistic representations.

- (6) a. Who was the woman who stayed in that room? I said. Before me?
- b. If I'd asked it differently, if I'd said, Was there a woman who stayed in that room before me? I might not have got anywhere.
- c. Which one? she said...
- d. So there has been more than one...
- e. The lively one. I was guessing. The one with freckles.
- f. You know her? Rita asked, more suspicious than ever. Rita accepted this. She knows there must be a grapevine, an underground of sorts.
- g. She didn't work out, she said.
- h. In what way? I asked, trying to sound as neutral as possible.
- i. But Rita clamped her lips together. I am like a child here, there are some things I must not be told.
- j. What you don't know won't hurt you, was all she would say. (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*)

In passage (6) the author introduces a fourth type of metalinguistic representation. This combines direct and indirect discourse from the narrative past and FID. Lines (6a), (6c), (6e), (6g), and (6h) are all memories of direct discourse from the narrative past, marked by 'she said' and similar phrases. Line (6b), (6d), and (6i) are memories of private thoughts of the narrator. Line

(6f) begins as remembered direct discourse in the narrative past and then uses FID to imitate Rita's perspective. Finally, (6j) represents an *indirect* report of Rita's speech from the narrator's point-of-view. Again, the author uses four different metalinguistic devices in a single short passage.

What is the literary function of the combination of all of these metalinguistic devices? It is used to convey the narrator's unreliability, and that this is an unreliable depiction of dialogue. The story of *The Handmaid's Tale* embeds the handmaid's narration within the larger story frame which takes place much later. The reader begins by taking the handmaid's narration as an accurate depiction of the storyworld; the variation in metalinguistic devices prompts the reader to remember that this is a story being told within a story, and that the narrators can diverge.

### 3. Cross-quoting

The final set of metalinguistic devices that I will discuss are all examples of what I call *cross-quoting*. These are cases when real persons and real utterance contexts are quoted in fictions. This happens in a number of ways. For example, (i) a character quotes a real person, (ii) a real person becomes a character who speaks within a fiction, and (iii) a narrator or character quotes another fiction. These metalinguistic devices serve similar literary ends, which I discuss at the end of this section. Let's begin by looking at examples for (i) and (ii) in (3.1); a puzzling instance of (iii) will be discussed in (3.4).

#### 3.1 Varieties

In (7), a fictional character quotes a real person.

(7) Mary said, "JFK said, 'Ask not what your country can do for you'."

Readers are to make-believe that a fictional entity, Mary, quotes the real utterance of the real person, John F. Kennedy. To be clear, different philosophical issues arise in cases similar to this one. One is the problem of using empty names, or saying true things about fictional entities (e.g., Frodo, Gregor Samsa). Another is the problem of real entities appearing in fictional contexts (e.g., London, Abraham Lincoln).<sup>15</sup> In this case, however, the reader is invited to imagine that JFK said, "Ask not what your country can do for you," and this is easy to imagine because he did say it, but we are to imagine that he said it in the storyworld of the fiction. This is complicated by the fact that artistically, and narratively, imagining that JFK said, "Ask not what your country can do for you," resonates *because of* what we believe about the real JFK, and the fact that this was something that he said. There was a prior speech context in the real world, and it looks like it is being quoted. This structures and informs our interpretation; the common ground for understanding (7) is our shared set of beliefs and attitudes about JFK and this speech.

Examples (8) and (9) show that the quotation of real persons in fictions can be more complicated:

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<sup>15</sup> See Friend (2011); Maier (2017); Thomasson (1999) for helpful discussions of empty names and Friend (2000); Recanati (this volume) on real entities in fictional contexts.

- (8) a. Goethe shrugged and said with some pride, “Perhaps our books are immortal, in a certain sense. Perhaps.” He paused and then added softly, with great emphasis, “But we aren’t.”  
 b. “Quite the contrary,” Hemingway protested bitterly. “Our books will probably soon stop being read. All that will remain of your *Faust* will be that idiotic opera of Gounod. And maybe that line about the eternal feminine pulling us somewhere or other ...”  
 c. “*Das Ewig Weibliche zieht uns hinan*,” recited Goethe.

(9) Bettina von Arnim: “That fat sausage went crazy and bit me!”

In (8) and (9) real people are characters in a storyworld, and the narrator depicts conversation between these characters. With the exception of (8c), these are not quotations from real people, as was the case in (7). In (8c), the character Goethe quotes himself.<sup>16</sup> (9) is an utterance of the character Bettina von Arnim who is based on a real person named Bettina von Arnim. In this passage, she is describing her disagreeable interaction with Goethe’s wife.

The default model for understanding quotation is that speech occurs in an initial context,  $c_1$ , and it is reported on in some other context,  $c_2$ . The assumption is that these contexts are continuous:  $c_1$  occurred before  $c_2$  in the same world. (7), (8), and (9) all violate this assumption and do not fit into the default model. So how should we understand the cross-quotation of real persons in these cases?

### 3.2 Trans-world quotation

The first option is what we can call *trans-world quotation*. Within a fictional world, Mary quotes something that John F. Kennedy said in the real world. The way in which this is *trans-world* may not be obvious. We could say that the expression type *Ask not what your country can do for you* is an expression type within Mary’s world and within JFK’s world. But the act of quotation (in any world) is not merely of an expression type, but it states that some entity also tokened the expression type in question; that is, it asserts that  $p$  was uttered *by someone*. So, under this interpretation the quotation of Kennedy is trans-world even if the expression being quoted is common to both worlds. While it is plausible that this quotation is of an expression common to both worlds, and that it implies that Kennedy said this, it is implausible that the fictional character, Mary, is talking about something from outside the storyworld. Even if a fictional character were to talk about another fictional world (for example, tell the plot of a movie within a novel) this is still all happening within a single storyworld. The *trans-world* interpretation of (7) is unintuitive and I will set it aside.

### 3.3 Single-world quotation and a modified Reality Assumption

The second option is to reject the idea that Mary’s fictional world is other than JFK’s real world: the real world is ‘storified’ within Mary’s world. We assume a principle of minimal departure.<sup>17</sup> Everything in the real world is assumed to be the case in the fictional world unless otherwise stipulated. It follows from this that everything that has been said in the real world can

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<sup>16</sup> Or quotes Goethe.

<sup>17</sup> See Ryan (1980); Gerrig (1993); Walton (1990); Friend (2017). For an extended and illuminating discussion of the Reality Principle, see Franzen (this volume).

be quoted in the fictional world as well. This is *single-world quotation*. A fictional entity can quote a speaker from historical reality because the original speech context, the expression type, and the quoting act in fictional discourse all exist in the same world. This option comes from a view that has been presented and defended in a number of places. Here is one statement of it:

*Reality Assumption*: “everything that is true or obtains in the real world is storified—that is, we are invited to imagine it as part of the storyworld—unless it is excluded by the work” (Friend, 2017: 31).

Deploying the *Reality Assumption*, there are two ways that *single-world quotation* can be understood:

*sw1*: the device of quotation is a prop that invites the reader to imagine a fictional character quoting a real person.

*sw2* the device of quotation is a prop that invites the reader to imagine a fictional character quoting a fictionalized version of a real person.

According to *sw1*, a fictional person quotes a real person; in *sw2*, a fictional person quotes another fictional person. Let’s look at this in more detail. *sw1* fits within a view of fictional discourse that claims that the attitude enjoined by fictional discourse about a real entity is directed toward that entity and not toward a make-believe version of it (Friend 2000). Fictional discourse that mentions real entities refer to those entities and not to make-believe versions of them. Fictional Mary’s metalinguistic act in (7) is about real JFK’s real utterance.

According to *sw2*, a fictional person quotes a *near-real* person. In example (7), JFK is a fictional person, but one who is near-real. The *Reality Assumption* stipulates that the real world is storified in the fictional world, and that includes JFK. This allows us to assume everything that we know about the real JFK when interpreting the prior speech context referred to by Mary. But, if it is the case that the real world is storified, and JFK is fictionalized, then Mary quotes the fictional utterance of a fictional person, but one who has all of the features as the real JFK (except for existence), hence *near-real*. This is a departure from the *Reality Assumption* and requires that it be modified:

*Near-Reality Assumption*: everything that is true or obtains in the real world is storified — that is, we are invited to imagine it as part of the storyworld — unless it is excluded by the work. Real entities storified into the storyworld are fictionalized to the extent that they perform a causal, agentive, or storytelling role in the work.

*sw2* in conjunction with the *Near-Reality Assumption* has the virtue of containing all of the speakers in the same speech context, who can quote one another, and be in conversation with one another.<sup>18</sup> In principle, *sw2* allows JFK and Mary *to talk to one another*, something not allowed

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<sup>18</sup> What is missing here is a defense of what counts as the *near-real*. There must be some set of properties that overlap between a real entity and fictional entity in order for that fictional entity to be called ‘near-real’ rather than ‘pure fiction’. For example, if the character Goethe in my examples were not a writer, but an ice-hockey enthusiast and broadband salesman from Ottawa, we would not regard the character as a

by interpretation *sw1*. This entails that a near-real fiction has at least the qualities of the real counterpart, but may have additional qualities as well (e.g., ability to time travel or to talk in the afterlife). For these reasons, interpretation *sw2* is the better account of how fictional entities quote real people.

*sw2* is particularly helpful in understanding (8) and (9). In imagining a conversation between Goethe and Hemingway, the understanding is aided by prior knowledge of real persons. We presuppose that the near-real Goethe said at least everything that the real Goethe said. The near-real Goethe is both fictionalized and an extension of the real person. This is not accidental, but essential to the interest the reader takes in his role in the story. It motivates the readers' interest in the dialogue and it allows for the import of common ground presuppositions about the real persons who have been fictionalized. We impute to the characters the real properties of Goethe and Hemingway in (8), and von Arnim in (9). We take these imputations and then we allow them to have agency in the fictional world: Hemingway and Goethe have a conversation in the afterlife, which is otherwise impossible. Von Arnim and Goethe's wife have a fight, which is both possible and actually happened. Moreover, all of these characters talk to one another in the storyworld and to other, wholly invented characters (which we might call *pure fictions* in contrast with *near-real fictions*).

One final point in defense of *sw2*: In example (8) Goethe has an entirely fictional conversation with Hemingway. In that conversation, it's reasonable to say that the real Goethe is not quoted in (8a), but is quoted in (8c). *sw2* stipulates that this is one and the same entity — a fictionalized version of a real person. Otherwise, we are left with the view that the real Goethe is quoted in (8c) and the character Goethe speaks in (8a). This leads to a failure of interpretive unity in the work.

### 3.4 Misquoting

The final case of cross-quoting that I will discuss is that of quotation across fictional works, but a case that appears to involve misquotation. This is to get us toward an answer to the question: What are the unique problems posed by misquotation in fictional settings?

Tolstoy famously opens *Anna Karenina* with the line:

(10) All happy families resemble one another, every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

Nabokov opens *Ada* with the line:

(11) "All happy families are more or less dissimilar; all unhappy ones more or less alike," says a great Russian writer in the beginning of a famous novel.

A first pass at (11) is that Nabokov is pragmatically implicating that what is presupposed in *Ada* is the opposite of whatever was presupposed by Tolstoy in *Anna Karenina*. He could have done this in a variety of ways. The opening line of *Ada* could have been "All happy families are more

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near-real Goethe. Perhaps a model of isomorphic mapping between real persons and similar fictions, such as that developed by Bauer & Beck (this volume), would be helpful in building such a theory.

or less dissimilar; all unhappy ones are more or less alike” with no pretense of quoting Tolstoy. But instead he uses the device of quoting Tolstoy.<sup>19</sup> Is this correct? Is Nabokov quoting Tolstoy?

The first option is to say that, yes, he is attempting to quote Tolstoy but it is the kind of misquote that is just a mistake. It is underwhelming to simply assume he made a mistake. He is obviously using this form of the quotation deliberately.

The second option is to say that, no, he is not quoting Tolstoy. This response is similarly underwhelming; it would not be possible for the reader to adequately interpret (11) without understanding the reference to (10). This point is easier to see if we consider a more obvious not-quoting of Tolstoy. Imagine if the opening line of *Ada* was not (11), but instead was:

(12) “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife,” says a great Russian writer in the beginning of a famous novel.

Since the reference to a ‘a great Russian writer’ is a reference to Tolstoy, we can clearly say that (12) does not quote Tolstoy. (12) is importantly different in structure and content from (11). If nothing else, (11) *refers to* Tolstoy’s line, even if it does not quote it. But, this also falls short as an explanation. The opening line of *Ada* could have been:

(13) A great Russian writer at the beginning of a famous novel said something false about happy and unhappy families.

This is a *reference to* (10), but contains no quotation of it. So, (11) does more than only refer to (10), as (13) does. To be clear, (11) refers to (10) *by quoting it*.

The third option is to say that Nabokov is quoting a fictionalized Tolstoy who said something similar to what the real Tolstoy said. This would be plausible if (11) were the opening of an alternative interpretation of *Anna Karenina*, one where Tolstoy’s non-fictional assertions are storified in a fictionalized Tolstoy, and then inverted; but it is not. But why shouldn’t we think that in *Ada* Nabokov can stipulate that *p* is true, just by writing it into the story? It is generally assumed that the author determines the truth and falsity of claims about the storyworld that they construct. Shouldn’t it be the case that Nabokov can construct a storyworld in which Tolstoy wrote the passage quoted in (11)? Another way of asking this is: Is it true in *Ada* that the first line of *Anna Karenina* is that which is quoted in (11)? Zucchi (this volume) considers a similar puzzle from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Huck quotes Hamlet’s monologue as:

(14) “To be or not to be; that is the bare bodkin.”

Zucchi says that it is not the case that, according to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, (14) is the first line of Hamlet’s monologue. Instead, we should say that, according to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck gets the first line of Hamlet’s speech wrong. The reason that this is a natural conclusion is because we take Huck to be an unreliable narrator of many things, including his own beliefs, values, events, and other matters. We don’t assume that, in this storyworld, Hamlet’s monologue has changed. What are the differences in the *Ada* case? The

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<sup>19</sup> The pretense is exacerbated with an incorrect citation. Nabokov is well known for embedding puzzles and literary allusions in his work. His point in this case may be a criticism of translations. I am not engaging in literary analysis here, so I will not try to sort out why he did this. My only interest in this section is in understanding the unique problems posed by misquotation in fictional settings.

primary difference seems to be that the reader does not have a speaker, like Huck, to whom to attribute this quotation from *Anna Karenina*, even though we want to say that this unreliable narrator simply gets the quotation wrong.

Perhaps it's best then to say that Nabokov is not ignoring conventions of quotation, but is exploiting them for rhetorical reasons. By way of comparison, the standards for successful indirect reporting are typically a preservation of propositional or pragmatic content from the reporter's speech perspective (Wieland 2013; 2015). Successful indirect reporting requires some manner of exploitation of the conventions of direct reporting in order to execute this preservation of content. Clearly, the quotation in (11) does not preserve the content of (10), although it does preserve the structure (re-formulated, and with negations inserted as, perhaps, facetious unquotes) (Shan 2010; Maier 2015):

(10) a. All happy families resemble one another, every unhappy family is unhappy in a unique way.

(11) a. "All happy families [do not] resemble one another, every unhappy family is unhappy in a [non]unique way," says a great Russian writer in the beginning of a famous novel.

(11) is a prop to invite the reader to recall (10). It is a prop that takes the form of a direct quotation, but is being used as a storytelling device, and does not even attempt to adhere to a standard semantics of quotation. It does, however, resemble the original utterance in *Anna Karenina*. Wilson (2000) talks about an 'exploitation of resemblances' in metarepresentational acts. What (11) does is exploit resemblances enough to give the reader a reason to believe that Tolstoy's work is being referred to. In order for this to be successful, a threshold of resemblances must be met. Since it is not correctly cited as a quotation from *Anna Karenina*, it must be sufficiently representational of that previous utterance in order for it to be recognized — which it is. (12) would not meet that threshold since it lacks any kind of resemblance to (10).

Each of the instances of cross-quoting discussed in this section share something in common. This is that the use of a quotation from a real person or from another fiction is a means of importing common ground presuppositions from that real person and their historical context or from that fictional world. To use the language of Maier & Semeijn (this volume), it's a means of introducing a fully-conceived workspace into the fiction. When the novel *Immortality* introduces the characters of Goethe, Hemingway, and von Arnim, it prompts the reader to import a workspace of common ground presuppositions about those real persons into the fictional storyworld of the novel. When Nabokov purports to quote Tolstoy in the opening of *Ada*, it prompts the reader to import a workspace of common ground presuppositions about Tolstoy generally or *Anna Karenina* particularly. As a narrative tool this is obviously quite powerful. Its function is quite different than that of simply introducing a purely fictional character who comes with no common ground presuppositions, no emotional valence, no prior beliefs.

As a preview of the next section, it might be worth thinking about whether these kinds of narrative tools are really invitations to imagine, or whether they are invitations to believe. Many fictions, especially literary fictions, have non-fictional goals — the author uses the story to make assertions about the nature of love, genius, narcissism, death, etc. Rather than thinking about invitations to imagine, we could think about this as an invitation to believe via the imagination. It is an interesting empirical question whether readers suspend their disbelief or construct their disbelief.<sup>20</sup> If it is the latter then they approach the fiction as of a piece with other cognitive

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<sup>20</sup> Gerrig (1993); Matravets (2010, 2014); cf. García-Carpintero (2016: 7).

engagements: taken as true until indicated otherwise. This makes sense within a ‘principle of minimal departure’ view of fictional interpretation. We assume that the common ground for interpretation is the set of our presuppositions about the real world. When we encounter dissonance we revise. This would invert the standard view such that readers are not prompted to make-believe as much as they are prompted to believe until they mark those beliefs as fictional.

#### 4. Fiction and nonfiction

“The duty of literature is to fight fiction. It is to find a way into the world as it is.”<sup>21</sup>

Quotations in fictional works are prescriptions to make-believe that someone in a storyworld said something, where that someone is a character or a real person who has been fictionalized. I would like to close with some considerations about why a prescription to make-believe that someone said something is not unique to fictional quotations and reports. There are structural similarities between fictional and nonfictional quotation, and these similarities are used to make both fictional and nonfictional reports comprehensible.

Direct and indirect reports have the structure of a very short story. They require the audience to imagine a prior speech context, with a time, place, speaker and other contextually relevant information. The use of the report in the reporting context invites the audience to engage in this imaginative act in order to satisfy some narrative or communicative goals that the speaker has. This is the case in both fictional and nonfictional reporting contexts. To see this, consider how nonfictional quotation can prompt the imagination of another speech event even in cases where that speech event never occurred:

(15) “Suppose you are debating the choice between physical therapy and medication. On one hand you might say, ‘I simply don’t have the time to commit to long term physical therapy. I want immediate results’.”

This takes the form of direct quotation, it takes or imitates the perspective of another speaker, and indexes the speech to that speaker. However, the quotation is attributed to a speaker who is hypothetical. The quotation is non-specific because it does not indicate that a token utterance has occurred in the past, but only that one could have occurred. It also does not pick out an utterance of any particular speaker, but rather just the generic ‘you’, who might have uttered something. In so doing, the speaker invites the audience to make believe that she is in a speech context entertaining a choice between physical therapy and medication, and that she is talking through her decision process. Here is a variation:

(16) “On game nights in my family we always said, ‘we play to win’.”

This quotation takes a direct form, but, there is no unique prior speech context being picked out. There are a few speakers potentially being quoted: members of the speaker’s family. And there is some loose specificity of context: game nights in the speaker’s family. But otherwise, the quotation is referring to an expression used in a vague context with a vague set of speakers who may or may not have said exactly those words. The speaker intends for the audience to imagine a

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<sup>21</sup> Karl Ove Knausgaard quoted in *The New Yorker* (2018). <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-new-yorker-interview/karl-ove-knausgaard-the-duty-of-literature-is-to-fight-fiction>. Last accessed 2 Oct 2020.

prior speech event in which the speaker said these words. This is not deceptive, even if we are to assume that there was no unique speech context that occurred. These kinds of quotations are meant to convey an attitude toward game night in the speaker's family, not to abide by semantic conventions for direct quotation. The use of quotation to tell a story about game night is a narrative device to tell a story about her family because reports of speech resonate. It is also similar to what the narrator of *The Age of Innocence* is doing by having Mrs. Mingott quote her conversation with Mrs. Beaufort: it is telling us about an attitude toward a speech event by means of telling us that the speech event occurred.

Fictional and nonfictional reports have this storytelling structure. Speakers use reports to get audiences to either recall or imagine a displaced context and something that took place in that context. Thus far, I have been discussing the functions of metalinguistic acts in works of fiction, with attention to how they permit secondary narration in a work, and how they can meet rhetorical, narrative, and assertoric goals by importing common ground presuppositions toward other storyworlds, speakers, or real persons. This, too, has something in common with nonfictional reports. Speakers sometimes quote the speech of other persons because audiences care about the thoughts and perspectives of other persons, even if those persons are unknown to them. In the example of the mudslide reporter, there is no reason for a newspaper reader to care about what any given person said about the mudslide; the information offered is identical if the mudslide reporter merely described the effects of the mudslide. Hearing speech reports of other people makes the story both psychologically compelling and easier to understand. I speculate that this is the case in most cases of ordinary nonfictional storytelling as well. We quote the speech of others largely to make our stories more interesting — in addition to documenting *what is said*.<sup>22</sup> When ordinary speakers tell nonfictional stories they are trying to imitate fictional storytellers and not court stenographers. Both fictional and nonfictional storytelling uses of metalinguistic devices use these devices to import common ground presuppositions. And, while they both permit secondary narration, they also both permit the merge of real and near-real utterance contexts (as in (8) and (9) above).<sup>23</sup>

#### 4.1 Imagination and make-believe

Given this, what differentiates fictional and nonfictional metalinguistic acts? It is helpful to distinguish between a prescription to imagine and prescription to make-believe with the following first-pass principle:

*Imagination and the Metalinguistic:* imagination as a cognitive act is broader than, but contains, make-believe as a cognitive act. Imagination is required for interpreting

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<sup>22</sup> See Dessalles (2007); Van Hoek (2003) for discussions of how storytelling and prompts to imagine other worlds are both unique to human communication and characteristic of our speech.

<sup>23</sup> This merging of real and near-real contexts is asymmetrical in fictional and non-fictional contexts. The real world includes all fictional entities as fictions. Real speakers quote fictions regularly (“with great power comes great responsibility”). Any given fictional world may or may not include all of the fictional entities that are part of the real world, nor all of the real entities that are part of the real world. A fictional world may allow for agentic interaction between real and fiction entities or persons, but the real world does not (literally) allow for this (i.e., I can quote Spiderman but I cannot have a conversation with Spiderman qua fictional entity).

all metalinguistic acts. Make-believe, as a special case of imagination, is required for interpreting fictional metalinguistic acts because they must be placed in a story world.

Quotation in nonfictional works invites the audience to imagine a prior speech context that is not present but is real. Quotation in fictional works invites the audience to imagine a speech context that is to be placed in a storyworld.<sup>24</sup> The nonfictional use of metalinguistic acts prompts an audience to imagine a speech context that took place at another time, and perhaps in another place and amongst other speakers. Nonfictional reporters can also prescribe the imagining of hypothetical contexts (15), or compiled contexts (16), knowing that they are not and will not be real. However, this does not mean that these imagined contexts are make-believe. We are not to imagine that they are part of a story world distinct from the real world. But, doxastically, these imaginings and make-beliefs are not that far apart. They involve the mental construction of scenes, contexts, or worlds that are not perceptually or experientially present. They involve an exchange between a speaker and an audience in order to make this construction possible.<sup>25</sup>

## 4.2 Fact and fiction

If I could end on an even more speculative note, I would say that this may provide support for a unified view of our doxastic and attitudinal states toward fiction and nonfiction. The existence of cross-over states — daydreaming, fear of the ocean after watching *Jaws*, forming beliefs about the real Abraham Lincoln and his grief after reading *Lincoln in the Bardo* — are all evidence of a tendency to take the same range of attitudes toward fiction and non-fiction. Believing facts and disbelieving fictions have to be cultivated in both cases depending on a person's presuppositions, prior experience, and disposition. So, even though our attitudes toward fiction and nonfiction stand in close proximity, they are not the same, which is why we can construct or suspend disbelief, and can talk ourselves out of believing that which *feels* true (e.g., that a girl can be possessed and spin her head around and around), and talk ourselves into believing that which *feels* false (e.g., the gravitational pull of a black hole can distort time and space).

The problem of integrating fictional and nonfictional narrative<sup>26</sup> is central to the problem of cross-quoting analyzed in section 3, just as it is central to other kinds of puzzles about fictions, such as imaginative resistance. The reader of a fiction performs a great deal of construction (which is a kind of imaginative work) in the relevant storification of the real world in the storyworld, the removal of that which is incompatible with the storyworld, and the understanding that aspects of the real world have agency and are subject to alteration in the storyworld. All of this must be integrated with that which is purely fictional in the work. The reader can then

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<sup>24</sup> The imagination used in producing and interpreting nonfictional metalinguistics acts is belief-about-the-world-directed; deliberate, occurrent, and social (Walton 1990); recreative (Currie & Ravenscroft 2002); attitudinal (Van Leeuwen 2013, 2014); instructive (Kind & Kung (2016). The make-believe used in producing and interpreting fictional metalinguistic acts is belief-about-the-storyworld-directed; deliberate, social (Walton 1990); recreative (Currie & Ravenscroft 2002); constructive (Van Leeuwen 2013, 2014); transcendent (Kind & Kung 2016).

<sup>25</sup> See Maier (2017) and his respondents for an interesting discussion of the basis of these imaginative constructions.

<sup>26</sup> As discussed by Gerrig (1993); Davies (2016); Matravers (2014), and others.

extract fictional truths from the work. Finally, from this construction the reader extracts nonfictional truths as well. Getting the reader to arrive at this final step is what distinguishes better and worse storytelling, and, perhaps, literature from fiction. In the epigram to this section, this is what Knausgaard seems to be saying: the purpose of literature is to present non-fictional truths about the world as it is to the reader and to get the reader to believe them. It is to get the reader to believe via the imagination. If the reader remains in the position of simply understanding the fictional narrative as such then the author of a work of literature has failed. In all cases — literary and non-literary fictions — an author is successful just in case they are able to get the audience to believe what they want them to believe.<sup>27</sup> This could be belief about the effects of demonic possession on a child, or it could be belief about the disappointments of immortality. This is done through pure fictions, near-real entities, description, quotation — by whatever means are necessary for the adoption of belief. If I tell you that thieves want to be caught, you might resist that belief. If you read *Crime and Punishment*, you might not resist that belief anymore. If there is imaginative resistance to some-such belief, then the author has failed to bring the audience to *p*.<sup>28</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented an analysis of some of the functions of metalinguistic acts in fiction. I have emphasized the way in which metalinguistic acts can be used in fiction for storytelling purposes and to further the assertoric, nonfictional goals of an author. I have defended a view of fictional quotation as taking place within a single story world, and argued that this involves both storifying the real world into the fictional world, but also fictionalizing real persons into near-real characters when those characters are quoted in a story world. I argued that we use quotation in storytelling largely because representations of the speech, perceptions, and attitudes of other persons — most readily represented in language — is compelling, structures and informs our interpretations, and allows us to import a common ground for understanding. I concluded with a speculation about the way in which reports inside and outside of fiction have a storytelling structure and require acts of imagination, but that reports inside of fiction require acts of make-believe as well. I further speculated that this unity in imaginative acts goes some way toward explaining the similarity in doxastic and attitudinal engagement with fact and fiction.

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<sup>27</sup> In a more complete account, this should be amended to extend beyond doxastic states. If the goal of the author is to bring about an emotional state, for example, rather than a belief state, then that would be the measure of success.

<sup>28</sup> See García-Carpintero (this volume) for an interesting discussion of similar views.

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