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The Logical Status of Narrative Discourse: An essay in the pragmatics of narrative speech

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Far from being the object that antedates the viewpoint, it would seem that it is the viewpoint which creates the object. Besides, nothing tells us in advance that one way of considering the fact in question takes precedence over the other or is in any way superior to them.

(Saussure, 1974: 8)

0. Introduction:

Any theory of language will, and quite properly, involve a certain degree of idealization. The danger is that the theory will presuppose an unanalyzed ideal of what language is or does, one which will exclude as 'ungrammatical' or 'rule-violating' a great deal of empirical speech data. Such ideals are, for example, those which implicitly see speech as exclusively concerned with the conducting of everyday practical affairs; which take the literal meaning of a sentence to be directly related to its conversational meaning; which implicitly exalt the information-exchange function of a language above all other speech functions.

One particular result of a literalist and information-exchange ideal is that literary discourse is set apart as an 'unnatural' use of language. There is, of course, a strong tradition in literary theory, predating the advent of modern linguistics, of seeing literary language in terms of the suspension or violation of the normal rules for language use. Linguistics has only reinforced this prejudice, e.g. Bloomfield (1933:21-22), according to which the language of literature - often without distinction being made between verse and prose (1) - is a special language distinct in significant

(*) I wish to express my gratitude to the anonymous readers of the paper for their helpful editorial suggestions. For whatever may be the virtues and shortcomings of the content, I alone am responsible.

(1) Fowler (1980) draws attention to this curiosity:
So deep-rooted is the assumption that there is a special 'poetic language' or 'literary language' that it has been impressed on the very language that we use to write about the issue.
respects from, and not subject to the same laws (of meaning, function, relevance, etc) as, the practical language of everyday verbal interaction.

The aim of the present paper is to critically examine and contrast two theories or approaches regarding the illocutionary status of narrative discourse: on the one hand, that represented by Searle (1975), Ohmann (1971a, 1971b, 1972, 1973), and Smith (1970, 1978), and, on the other hand, by Labov (1967, 1972) and Pratt (1977). I propose to show that the former—I shall call it the 'pretence hypothesis'—projects an unacceptable ideal of 'normal' language use, and consequently a counterintuitive and logically inconsistent representation of the status of fictional discourse.

Narrating, I shall argue, is a natural use of language, and the telling of stories on a par with other linguistic acts (2). As a text, a narrative will perform an illocutionary function on a par with the sentential illocutionary acts of criticizing, boasting, praising, predicting, and the like; in this lies a narrative's social meaning, comparable to the 'illocutionary point' of the single sentence (3).

1. «Let's Pretend»: narrating as a language game:

1. 1. 'Fiction' versus 'Literature'.

Searle preface his study of fictional discourse with a distinction between fiction and literature. A work may be both fiction and literature, though the one does not follow from the other. To call a stretch of language 'literature' (in the sense of belles-lettres) is to take an evaluative attitude towards it; it is not to name an internal property of the stretch of language. To call a work 'fiction', on the other hand, is to make a claim about the truth status of its propositions, i.e., about their relationship to the world outside the text. Searle states that he will be concerned with fiction (logico-semantic issues) and not with literature (aesthetic issues).

The title of my book The Languages of Literature (1971) is often mis-cited as The Language of Literature, doubtless as a result of the habit I have just mentioned. The plural is, of course, quite deliberate... there is no linguistic constant that will criterially distinguish and unite all literature....


(3) The term 'illocution' applies more properly to utterances than to sentences. The indeterminacy attached to 'utterance' would have created more confusion than clarity in the present context, however; so I use the word 'sentence' as a shorthand or metaphor for that stretch of speech which is grammatically self-sufficient and which promotes a single proposition.
This being so, it may seem theoretically untidy to compare and contrast the 'pretence' hypothesis with the theory of narrative (§ 2 & 3, below) proposed by Labov and developed by Pratt, since they have different objects of analysis. I shall suggest, however, that the 'pretence' theorists are in fact asking the wrong (i.e. an unnecessary) question, as the fiction/non-fiction distinction is not of paramount importance in narration.

1. 2. The pseudo-speech act (1): Searle's analysis:

According to speech act theory, in the making of an assertion a speaker/writer is bound to comply with certain quite specific semantic and pragmatic rules: the essential, preparatory and sincerity rules. (See Searle 1969). If a speaker fails to do so, then his assertion is defective.

But in the case of fictional utterances none of these rules is complied with. Consider the following extract from *Barnaby Rudge*:

(1) While Newgate was burning on the previous night, Barnaby and his father, having been passed among the outskirts of the mob, gazing at the flames like men who had been suddenly roused from sleep.

Dickens's utterance of (1) is not a commitment to the truth of the propositions that, while Newgate was burning, Barnaby Rudge and his father were passed among the crowd form hand to hand, that they stood in Smithfield and gazed at the flames. According to Searle (1975: 323), «such a proposition may or may not be true, but [the writer] has no commitment whatever as regards its truth». It therefore follows that, whether or not the writer may be able to provide evidence for its truth, he is not committed to doing so. And he is, further, not to be held insincere if in fact he does not for one moment believe what he has uttered to be the truth.

All this seems self-evident and common-sensical: one does not expect more of fictional discourse. But if the writer of fiction, whose utterance does not comply with the constitutive rules of the act of asserting, is not therefore making assertions, what kind of illocutionary act can he be performing?

A solution which Searle rejects as incorrect is that a writer of novels is, in fact, performing the illocutionary act of telling a story or writing a novel. On this theory, accounts of actual past events, in newspapers, history books, and the like, contain one class of illocutionary acts (statements, assertions, descriptions, explanations,...) while fictional literature contains another class of illocutionary acts, such as 'writing stories', 'writing plays', and the like. The speaker/writer of fiction, in other words, has his own repertoire of illocutionary acts which are of the same form as, but in addition to, the standard illocutionary acts of non-fictional discourse.
Searle's argument against this analysis (q.v. 1975:324) that in order to understand a work of fiction on these terms one would have to learn a whole new set of meanings for the words and possible sentences in the language is undoubtedly correct. (But if we dispense with the fiction/non-fiction distinction, as I point out in §3.3, we avoid this problem, and may still permit ourselves to speak of the illocutionary act of 'narrating').

If then a writer of fiction is not performing the illocutionary act of writing a novel because there is no such illocutionary act, then what is he doing?

The writer of a novel, on Searle's analysis, is «pretending...to make an assertion, or acting as if [he] were making an assertion, or going through the motions of making an assertion, or imitating the making of an assertion» (ibid). He is pretending in what Searle calls the 'non-deceptive' sense of the word, just as one may pretend to be Ronald Reagan in a game of charades or as an impressionist before an audience. There is, in other words, a pact of complicity between the producer and receiver of a fiction to the effect that the former may act as though he were performing a series of illocutionary acts, normally, in fiction, of the representative kind (assertions, descriptions,...).

1.3. The pseudo-speech act (2): Ohmann's analysis:

Ohmann's analysis is, despite differences in detail, substantially the same as that of Searle. He notes, as does Searle, that the writer of fiction is not committed to the truth of what he writes and that the literary work cannot therefore be held accountable to standards of verity. By this account, statement-like constructions in literature-and perhaps whole poems or novels- function as pseudo-propositions, somehow stripped of their power to assert (1971a:5). This impediment, according to Ohmann, applies equally to such sentences as «it is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife» (Austen), and «All happy families are alike but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way» (Tolstoy). The truth or falsity of these sentences is irrelevant; it would be perverse to fault a novel on the grounds of the untruth of such a sentence, and would demonstrate a contractual failure on the part of the reader. For generics and other such propositions, e.g., of historical events, which, outside of a fiction, might be bound to the standard rules for the performance of illocutionary acts, are, in context, integral parts of the narrative, dominated by the 'preference' operator at the textual level, and are therefore to be regarded and are regarded by the compliant reader-as narrational sentences and not as non-narrational statements with which the text is punctuated.

Ohmann asks the same question of fictional discourse that Searle has asked. If the writer is not performing illocutionary acts, if the sentences
he utters comply with none of the rules for the performance of illocutionary acts, then what is he doing? Ohmann's account is not essentially dissimilar to that given by Searle: the sentences of a work of fiction may be held to be uttered by a fictional speaker, as is clearly feasible in the case of first person narratives. «The writer pretends to report discourses, and the reader accepts the pretence. Specifically, the reader constructs (imagines) a speaker and a set of circumstances to accompany the quasi-speech-act, and make it felicitous» (ibid:14). The pretence, as we shall see to be the case in Searle's analysis also, extends over the conditions for felicity, not over the propositions themselves.

Let us examine this point more closely. Searle and Ohmann do no more than sketch the outlines of a theory, and do not examine the finer details that follow from their claims. In one reading of Searle's analysis (for I believe that his notion of 'pretence' allows of more than one reading, and which leads therefore to a certain inconsistency which I point out in §2.5), the writer's pretending to perform illocutionary acts may be understood in the following way. The writer is pretending that, or acting as though, the rules constitutive of making assertions, giving descriptions, and so on, have been complied with. That is, he is pretending that he commits himself to the truth of the expressed proposition, that there is evidence for the truth of the proposition, and that he is able to supply such evidence, and that he believes the proposition to be true. The effective range of the pretence is over the rules for the non-defective performance of illocutionary acts, not over the propositions themselves. I do not pretend, for example, that Cinderella went to the ball; rather, I pretend that I am able to assert it.

If I lie, I am, in the same way, pretending that the conditions for the making of an assertion have been complied with. Searle distinguishes two senses of the word 'pretend', the one with intent to deceive, that is, lying, and the other without an intent to deceive. The difference between the two senses is that, in the second sense, as in a game of charades, the pretence is contained or formalised by a set of extralinguistic, non-semantic conventions which suspend the connection that should normally hold between words and the world. It is the existence of these conventions that distinguishes fiction from lying, and which permits the writer «to go through the motions of making statements even though he has no intention to deceive» (1975:326). The writer's utterance act is real, and is indistinguishable from the utterance acts of serious discourse, claims Searle; but the illocutionary act is pretended. The writer uses words with their normal meanings, but their connection with the world is only pretended.

If the pretence applies to the rules for the making of an assertion, then the set of conventions that the writer of fiction invokes require that his readers collude with him in imagining that the world is such that, or that
there is a possible world such that, it meets all the conditions necessary for the sentences he utters to constitute sincere, non-defective assertions. In lying, one breaks the standard rules for the performance of illocutionary acts; in the writing of fiction, a set of auxiliary conventions overrides the standard operation of these rules.

1. 4. The New Mimesis: Smith’s analysis:

Smith (1970, 1978) suggests an analysis of fictional discourse which, it will be seen, constitutes a plausible logical development of Searle’s theory.

‘Poetry’—by which she means all fictional discourse—is, for Smith, mimetic, in the sense that what poems «represent ‘in the medium of language’, is language, or more accurately, speech, human discourse. As a verbal composition, a poem is distinctively and characteristically not a natural utterance, but the representation of one» (1970:268-9). By ‘representation’ she does not mean a reproduction of any actual and particular utterance, but rather the fabrication of fictive utterances «of which there are existing or possible instances or types ... In other words, to say that an artist has represented a certain object is to say that he has constructed a fictive member of an identifiable class of natural (real) objects or events» (ibid). Poetry represents exclusively verbal events, human discourse. In performing utterance acts, the writer fabricates fictive illocutionary acts, fictive representations of real discourse.

The similarity between this and Searle’s analysis of fictional discourse is obvious. It is more clearly seen in the continuation of Smith’s argument which, for the sake of easy comparison, I quote in full:

What is central to the concept of the poem as a fictive utterance is not that the speaker is a ‘character’ distinct from the poet, or that the audience purportedly addressed, the emotions expressed, and the events alluded to are fictional, but that the speaking, addressing, expressing and alluding are themselves fictive verbal acts. To be sure, a fictive utterance will often resemble a possible natural utterance very closely, for the distinction is not primarily one of linguistic form... The distinction lies, rather, in a set of conventions shared by poet and reader, according to which certain identifiable linguistic structures are taken to be not the verbal acts they resemble, but representations of such acts. (op.cit:271)

Now, just as utterances in natural (i.e. non-fictional) discourse do not occur in isolation but as constituent units of an extended text, so fictive utterances, as representations of natural utterances, are integrated in higher level textual units. Thus Butor’s L’Emploi du temps and James’s ‘Diary of a Man of Fifty’, for example, are representations of a type of
discourse which we call diary or journal, Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* a representation of a travel narrative; Richardson’s *Clarissa* of a collection of letters; Melville’s *Billy Budd* of a biography; Dickens’s *David Copperfield* an autobiography. In brief, “What a text of a novel represents is, precisely, a text”. (op.cit:274).

2. **The Case against the ‘pretence’ theorists:**

2.1. **The problem of Free Indirect Style:**

The argument that the speech acts of fictional discourse are in fact pretended speech acts invites a number of reasonable objections.

Let us take, first, the problem of free indirect style (FIS) and of the omniscient narrator (who has ‘inside information’) in fiction. Among the rules constitutive of the making of assertions are that one should have reason to believe and be able to provide evidence for what one asserts. The problem incurred by the ‘pretence’ theory in this case is that a (purportedly or pretended) real speaker, if he is assumed to be equipped with only human faculties, simply does not have access to the mental states and acts of other individuals. If we accept the pretence theory that the speaker pretends to make, or goes through the motions of making, assertions, then the assertion he makes will be, in the case of FIS, quite simply defective. For either he is making claims to knowledge of that to which he has no direct access, and therefore can neither know nor provide evidence for; or, alternatively, he is omniscient, in which case he does not correspond to any imaginable real, living speaker, and hence cannot fulfil felicity conditions for making assertions. Further, if the speaker is to be taken as omniscient, then it follows that we (apparently, and wrongly) assume his characters to be real people in the world, like ourselves. We thereby commit ourselves not only to the assumption that the speaker has some sort of privileged telepathic status by virtue of which he can see into the minds of these real people, but also to the truth of the speaker’s assertions, thus undercutting the whole notion of fiction, or storytelling, or ultimately narration.

If, on the other hand, and in contrast with the ‘pretence’ theory, the speaker is held to be not strictly asserting but narrating, then this problem does not arise, since a narrator, as teller of stories, is, on Searle’s and Ohmann’s own admission, not committed to the truth of the statements he utters. The act of narrating, acknowledged explicitly or implicitly by narrator and audience, liberates the former from the epistemological, metaphysical and ontological problems as to how he can be supposed to know what a character in his narrative is thinking or feeling. And this liberation is one of the distinctive entailments of the conventions of and felicity conditions for narrating (See §2.8).
2. 2. The limits to complicity (1): The infinite regress:

The second problem with, and consequent objection to, the theory of pretended speech acts is similar to the first. Some fictional worlds are so blatantly and preposterously fictional that it is impossible to imagine or pretend a real or at least plausible speaker who could sincerely and non-defectively utter the text. Fantasy, fairy-tales, and science fiction are three such types of text. One would be hard put to to imagine a speaker who is qualified to assert the text of, for example, Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse 5* or Tolkein’s *The Silmarillion*. It is, on the other hand, quite in accordance with common sense to regard the speaker as a narrator telling a story.

But suppose that one did imagine a speaker such that, and in a world such that, he were able to comply with the rules constitutive of performing illocutionary acts. Would not our speaker then be as much of a fiction, and in need of as much theoretical justification, as the fictional world itself? This would involve us in an unacceptable regress of pretences.

2. 3. «Lemme Tell you a Story»: the noisy narrator:

A third objection to the theory of pretended speech acts would be to point out that in numerous fictional works the narrator explicitly announces that he is telling a story, inventing a fiction. He may employ various devices to indicate throughout the work that the work is an invented fiction and that he, the narrator, is the author and demiurge behind the story, e.g. Diderot’s *Jacques le fataliste* and Fielding’s *Tom Jones*. Indeed, many novels have given explicit recognition to the demiurgic role of the storyteller by indulging in authorial games, as in Vonnegut’s *Breakfast of Champions*, Flann O’ Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds*, and Spike Milligan’s *Puckoon*. As the works listed here suggest, such games may be a potent source of humour.

Paradoxically, in view of the objections raised above, Searle’s theory is not wholly incompatible, in a certain limited respect, with the alternative ‘narrational’ theory of fictional discourse at which I have been hinting (and which I elaborate below, § 3). The point is not an easy one to explain. A fiction may indeed contain pretended speech acts, but as a narrative device. That is, a narrator may elect to pretend that the events he relates are true and that he is no more than, e.g. a chronicler. In this sense, it is not, as Searle considered, the pretence, that makes possible the fiction, but rather the conventions of fiction that make possible the pretence. In such a case, fiction is masquerading as some other non-fictional form of discourse; it is fiction pretending to be something other than fiction. This is the case with, for example, Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* and Robinson Crusoe, and so on.
2. 4. Smith’s unnatural act: ‘poetry’ as parasite:

A fourth objection is that to argue, as Smith does and as Searle implies one should, that novels are ‘representations’ of natural utterances is to imply that the writing of fictions is in some way an unnatural act, perhaps parasitic upon ‘natural narratives’ (Labov’s term, see §3); (thus, for example, An American Dream would be a ‘representation of a ‘natural narrative’). If, however, there are, as I have argued above, textual features that identify a fiction as such (e.g. a preposterously fictional words, narrative games, free indirect style,...), then fiction has, it seems to me, as much right to be considered natural discourse as any other type of discourse. Indeed, that a writer can pretend not to be writing fictions seems sufficient testimony to its status as a natural use of language. A novel can only be, ultimately, a ‘representation’ of a novel.

Smith’s argument, on the other hand, implies a much impoverished notion of what a fiction is.

2. 5. The ambiguity of Searle’s fictions:

The next problem is concerned with fictivity. In brief, Searle is working with not one but two notions of what is fictional. On the one hand, it is defined in terms of what will and what will not count as true propositions about real events and states of affairs in the world, and, on the other hand, it is defined in terms of what will and what will not count as sincere and non-defective assertions of such propositions. These two criteria of fictivity are not equivalent, and that which counts as fiction under the one will not necessarily do so under the other.

The confusion of the two notions of fiction is particularly evident in the last three pages of Searle’s essay, leading Searle to a compromise position wherein he finds himself compelled «to make a final distinction, that between a work of fiction and fictional discourse. A work of fiction need not consist entirely of, and in general will not consist entirely of, fictional discourse» (1975:332). Thus, for example, we know that John Watson M.D. is a fictional character, therefore any actions recounted by Watson as narrator is which he and Holmes are involved are necessarily fictional, and not susceptible to criteria of truth and verifiability. And yet, claims Searle (ibid : 331), «if Sherlock Holmes and Watson go from Baker Street to Paddington Station by a route which is geographically impossible, we will know that Conan Doyle blundered» (4). Here, on the one hand, we have a conception of truth in terms of a speaker’s qualifications for the making of an assertion; and, on the other hand, in terms of what is objectively true with respect to the reader’s knowledge. Then, ironically, it is Conan Doyle and not Dr Watson, the apparent speaker, who is to take the blame.

(4) But what, indeed, constitutes an authorial blunder? Certainly the eccentric geography of, e.g., To The Lighthouse does not seem to me to betoken some serious lacuna in V. Woolf’s education.
First person narrative is a particular problem in this respect. In Robert Graves's *Claudius the God*, for example, many events are reported that are objectively true, and therefore non-fictional; yet they are only pseudo assertions, and therefore fictional, since the narrator «Claudius» (as opposed to the historical Claudius) is a creation of Graves's.

To take yet another example, Mailer's *Armies of the Night* is, according to Searle (op.cit:319), to be counted as non-fiction. Yet it is told in the third person. It is, indeed, non-fiction in the sense that the facts recounted are objectively and historically true; but on the other definition of fictivity, must be counted as fictional since the speaker, if he refers to Mailer in the third person, cannot, given the normal rule of language according to which a speaker refers to himself as 'I', be Mailer and must therefore be a fictional and pretended speaker who is consequently disqualified from making authentic and non-defective assertions. Intuitively the most sensible strategy in such cases is to regard the works as narratives and instances of the narrative use of language rather than to become embroiled in Searle's logical acrobatics. After all, the line of demarcation between fiction and non-fiction (i.e. what is objectively true) is often indeterminate: non-fictional discourse may contain elements of fiction (e.g. reconstructed dialogue) and fictional discourse may contain elements of non-fiction (e.g., as in historical novels). The line between narrating and other uses of speech, however, is fairly clear, as I argue later in detail, and narration will be seen to display a number of features, such as its use of tense, deictics, FIS, of (as in *Armies of the Night*) the ability of the speaker to refer to himself in the third person, and the like, which, as I shall show below in my review of Labov and Pratt, are peculiar to this use of language such as to alert the reader to the fact that he is being told a story.

2.6. The limits to complicity (2): the problem of definite descriptions:

The final point I wish to make not only brings to light another problem entailed by the 'pretence' theory, but also points to a characteristic of narrative as a special type of speech act and to the nature of fictional discourse. In order that a sentence like *The minotaur devoured the children* be acceptable as an assertion, we must contextualise it in a particular 'world', i.e., be in a position to make explicit the conditions under which it constitutes an assertion. In the present case, we may contextualise it as the 'world' of Greek myth. In other words, we are able to make authentic assertions about states of affairs obtaining within and restricted to finite alternative worlds existing beyond or beside the empirical world of daily life. In the present case, we are able to do so to the extent that we share common specific cultural knowledge of Greek myth, such that *minotaur* although not existing as a real entity anywhere in the world

16
identifies the same cultural item for me and you and all initiated speakers. The use of the definite description is therefore unproblematical: we know what the minotaur is.

Now consider the following:

(2) The matron had given her leave to go out as soon as the women's tea was over, and Maria looked forward to her evening out.

This, the opening of 'Clay', by James Joyce, is not, certainly, serious discourse, as Searle uses the expression; Maria and the matron, that is, are not persons who exist in the world outside of Joyce's fiction. Nor is it serious discourse about fictional or mythical beings, since the characters do not exist prior to Joyce's writing about them. Searle would claim that, just as in the whole sentence the speaker pretends to make an assertion, so, in speaking of Maria and the matron, he pretends to refer (another speech act). Now the use of proper names and definite descriptions implies that the identity of the things or persons so designated is known (anaphoric or exophoric reference) or about to be made known by some qualifying phrase (cataphoric reference, e.g., Sir Terence Beckett, chairman of the CBI). If we follow Searle's analysis, that a speaker of fictional discourse pretends to make assertions and pretends to refer, then «to the extent that we share in the pretence, we will also pretend that there is such-and-such a person» (1975:330), but, further, we are also bound to the pretence that, in the event of a proper name or definite description, we already know who this person is. Let me make this point more clearly: it is understood, on Searle's analysis, that within the framework of pretence the rules of language use otherwise operate normally. Now, a fundamental rule of conversation is that a speaker should make his contribution as informative as is required. (Grice 1968). If Joyce has complied with this rule of conversation then, on Searle's analysis, we already know (or, rather, pretend to know) who the persons referred to by name and by definite description are. This is certainly to demand a great deal of our powers of pretence, and is in any case contrary to our experience of reading fiction. We do not know who the matron is, nor who Maria is, but we expect that writer will in the due course of time tell us that, and tell us under what circumstances and for what reason he has brought them together, and so on. The matron is simply, for the present, the matron. The writer, beginning his story in medias res, is indicating, by the use of the definite article, precisely that he is beginning his story in medias res, i.e., that he could have, had he so desired, begun his story at some earlier point in the action, formally identified the characters and situation, and the rest. The definite description and proper name are, in other words, (inferred to be) contextualised with respect to the world of the fiction and not with respect to the extratextual world of the speaker and his audience. The matron is the matron who is known to (i.e., defi-
nitised for) Maria, to the cook, to the Board ladies; but not to the reader. Of the two contexts, fictional discourse (as a cultural reality) and the world of a particular fiction, the reader can only draw on his knowledge of the former.

2. 7. Truth, trust, and felicity:

What the writer of fiction is doing, I suggest, is not pretending to make assertions about (purportedly) actual events and states of affairs, but rather actually making assertions of a particular kind whose function is to evoke an imaginary or 'possible' world. This needs to be more fully explained. Both Searle and Ohmann rightly note that the writer of fiction makes no commitment to the truth of his utterances, their strategy being to claim that the speech acts in fictional discourse are therefore pretended speech acts. An alternative strategy (see § 3) is to take them as real speech acts by a speaker occupying the special locus (i.e. systemically defined role) of narrator. To do so evidently means to understand the term 'speech act' in a way other than that given by Searle.

Searle's account gives, I suggest, an unnecessarily narrow conception of language use, which is reflected in Searle's designation of a class of illocutionary acts as 'representatives', as though the only purpose served by declarative sentences were to represent objective facts about the world and, in their utterance, «to commit the speaker ... to something's being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition» (1973:354). It should be clear that Searle is in fact concerned only with one particular domain of language use, which is in the exchange of practical information and the conducting of everyday practical affairs. In this use of language, truth is not first and foremost an essential property of the expressed proposition itself but, more fundamentally, a condition of the trust that the hearer places in the speaker when understanding the speaker to be using language in a serious pragmatically-oriented way. In serious discourse, to knowingly make a false declaration is to break that trust; but in non-serious discourse that trust is understood by speech participants not to apply, since the outcome of no event or state of affairs in the world is understood to depend upon the truth of what is asserted. The only thing that the speaker is committed to is to make clear to the hearer, or to ascertain that it is clear to the hearer, whether the sentences he utters are intended to be serious or not.

Any sentence will otherwise have the meaning it has by virtue of its being a sentence in the language. The instantial meaning of a sentence may be further determined relative to its pragmatic context or to one or more possible worlds consistent with the interlocutors' knowledge or beliefs, etc; but its meaning can be taken independently of its truth as a statement about an actual state of affairs. The following argument will make this clear:
2. 8. Other worlds: towards a more realistic theory:

My hypothesis concerning the attitudinal status of narrative discourse will view narrative as: the elaboration of imaginary worlds for the purpose of exploring particular moral, ethical, political, affective, aesthetic, philosophical, etc, issues that are considered problematical or interesting or important in the real world. This disposition or attitude towards the propositions on the part of the speaker is conventionally understood and consented to by the hearer/reader. The sentences are understood to be constructing a story. We have a set of metalingual terms which give recognition to this fact: 'story', 'telling a story', 'narrating/narrator/...', etc. Just as we may name a speech act of an individual in such a way as to indicate our recognition of that speech act - 'He asked me a question,' 'He made me a promise', 'He insulted my wife,' - so we may do the same for narration - 'He told me a story.' Similarly, just as certain things are 'promisable' or 'askable' or 'insulting' because certain conditions for the making of promises or the asking of questions or the throwing of insults are fulfilled, so certain things may be 'tellable' (See § 3).

All so-called performative verbs and names of illocutionary acts have a metalingual status, in the sense that they may be used to refer to, or may be substituted for in a report of, whole sentences which do not themselves contain the metalingual term. For example, if someone says to me 'I'll fix your car for you' and then fails to do so, I may with some justification complain 'But you promised'. Similarly, in (3) the use of the verb 'insult' in the second clause is justified by a metalingual reading of the first clause:

(3) He called her a bitch and then she insulted him

Given the metalingual status of such terms, we should distinguish between explicit performative sentences and sentences which are not so. The metalingual terms are pragmatic terms, belonging to pragmatic theory; explicit performatives, on the other hand, come within the domain of and are to be accounted for by semantic theory. Compare (4) and (5):

(4) I'll fix your car for you
(5) I promise I'll fix your car for you

The speech act rules that Searle proposes for the illocutionary act of promising are more or less the kind of information a dictionary would give about the lexical meaning of 'promise'. In other words, sentence (5) semantically entails, for example, sentence (6):

(6) I am, of course, not referring here to a conscious or explicit intention on the part of speakers, but rather to a social mechanism inherent in the institution of storytelling itself. See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, reference in note 2 above.
(6) I undertake the obligation to fix your car for you

(4) on the other hand, **pragmatically** presupposes that I undertake that obligation.

Promises pragmatically presuppose that the speaker undertakes an obligation to do something which will benefit or gratify his hearer; questions pragmatically presuppose that the questioner wishes to elicit information from his hearer; requests pragmatically presuppose that the speaker wishes his addressee to perform a certain action; and so on. The proposition expressed in each of the speech acts is, because of the pragmatically orientated nature of the speech acts themselves, understood and can only be understood to relate to the practical affairs and interests of the interlocutors. If a speaker says, for example, 'What's the time? or 'Pass the salt, please' then, by virtue of the syntactic and semantic structure of the utterance, he is implicating his hearer in some real and actual social contract between them.

Now let us return to declarative sentences. Compare (2) and (7):

(2) The matron had given her leave to go out as soon as the women's tea was over, and Maria looked forward to her evening out.

(7) I assert that the matron had given Maria leave to go out as soon as the women's tea was over; I assert that Maria looked forward to her evening out.

An ordinary declarative sentence, as a simple evocation of a state of affairs, explicitly implicates neither speaker nor hearer in any future action in the real world, in the way that promises, requests, and so on, do. I can make such a statement as (2) without bringing into the interactional arena such considerations as the relative authority or status, knowledge or power, of myself and my addressee. Sentence (2), in other words, and in contrast with (7) (leaving aside its 'court-of-law' strangeness) makes no claims for the truth of the expressed proposition and, taken in the null context as a sentence in the language, requires no act of trust on the part of the hearer. The illocutionary point of the utterance in (2), and in contrast with (7), is left indeterminate. In a given context the illocutionary point is supplied by the speaker and by the context itself, e.g., in the present instance, as fictional discourse. That is, it is **pragmatically** presupposed rather than, as in (7), given in the semantic description. We might like to think in terms of some metalingual category such as 'narrating', by analogy to 'promising'. The metalingual term is useful only in so far as it conveniently names a particular attitude or disposition towards the propositions expressed. In the case of fictional utterances, the appropriate attitude is not one of trust, since the propositional content has no practical interest for the hearer, but, as I shall show, below, of contemplation and evaluation.
Concomitantly, since the propositions in fictional discourse do not have an information-bearing function and therefore do not involve criteria of truth or the hearer's trust that the speaker is telling the truth, i.e., not misleading him, they need not be taken to refer to this world, the paramount reality, or, in logical terms, to any of the possible worlds that may be pragmatically related to the practical affairs of the speaker and hearer.

Indeed one of our most important mental abilities is that of being able to evoke and manipulate, through language, hypothetical, possible, or imaginary worlds for the purpose of exploring problems, comparing alternatives, planning future actions, and so on. That this ability is fundamental to our normal processes of thinking is testified to by the ubiquity of such possible-world-evoking devices as, for instance, modal verbs (may, can, must, ought, etc), certain tense forms (e.g., the conditional), propositional attitude verbs (believe, dream, wish, imagine, predict, etc), certain syntactic constructions (e.g., the conditional), and so on. The speaker's implied disposition or attitude can extend over quite considerable stretches of discourse. The attitude may be syntactically recalled in each clause, as in (8):

(8) Gonzalo: Had I plantation of this isle, my lord
Antonio: He'd sow't with nettle-seed.
Sebastian: Or docks or mallows.
Gon: And were the king on't, what would I do?
Seb: Scape being drunk for want of wine.
Gon: I' th'commonwealth I would by contraries Execute all things; for no kind of traffic Would I admit; no name of magistrates; Letters should not be known; riches, poverty, And use of service none; contract, succession, Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none; No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil; No occupation; all men idle, all; And women, too, but innocent and pure; No sovereignty

Seb: Yet he would be king on't.

By all three speakers the hypothetical nature of the facts is confirmed by the repeated use of the conditional would, should, and the pseudo-subjunctive were, had.

The hypothetical or imaginary nature of the facts expressed need not, however, be syntactically or morphologically reasserted in every clause:

(9) A patient who was having a good many indications of neurotic maladjustment in his married life dreamed that he, his wife, and his superior officer were travelling from Texas in a northeasterly direction. I was drowsy, so much
so that when the train stopped at some station I turned lazily to them and asked where we were. They said it was Macalester, Oklahoma. Then the train moved on; I was still sleepy, but a man I used to know in Germany called me on the phone and talked with me about a benefit affair that was to be given». (Menninger 1945:272)

This example, in fact, constitutes an interesting problem for Searle’s theory of fictional discourse. For the sentences of the report clearly do not fall within the class of fictional utterances, and yet they do not, on the other hand, make statements about actual states of affairs in the world. (Cf. Pratt 1977 :91).

In conclusion, we may say that the writer of fiction elaborates an imaginary world through the exercise in language of the mental ability to conceive different worlds. In this respect he has much in common with the theoretical scientist, the philosopher, the military strategist, etc., though the analogy should not be pushed too far. Nonetheless the quality of my experience of reading, say, Lawrence’s Women in Love or David Lindsay’s Voyage to Arcturus is not greatly different from that of reading Plato’s Symposium or William Morris’s News from Nowhere. Parable and allegory, devices available to the philosopher, bridge the gap between fiction and non-fictional discourse, and give an insight into the ontological status of fictional worlds. I suggested above that the reader of fiction is aware of two distinct contexts: fiction as a real-world activity in language, and the particular fictional world (which becomes a context of special knowledge that he shares with the writer in the course of his reading). The internally consistent fictional world figures forth a series of values, actions, dilemmas and so on which are integral to the fictional narrative. But the alternative world of the fiction also exists, as an imagined alternative world, in the real world of the author and his audience, and the actions, values, and dilemmas that it figures forth are scrutinised and interpreted by the reader relative to his knowledge of and beliefs about his own world, his own society, and to his own values.

Searle suggests that in some way as yet unclear a fictional work conveys a serious speech act, its ‘message’, through the text even though the message may not be explicitly enunciated in the text. A similar point is made by Ohmann, and although, as I have argued, it is not possible to agree in full with Searle’s and Ohmann’s analyses of fictional discourse, Ohmann’s point in this instance seems particularly accurate. For Ohmann, «reading literature is ethical activity». The voices of narrator and of the characters evoke systems of values, ideologies, moral and ethical judgements, in which the reader is implicated as witness; he must
give consent to the ethos of the created society, or reserve his endorsement to one degree or another. Either way, the poem calls his political imagination into play, presses him into political choice (1973 : 102).
It is in this way that I shall view narrative as the elaboration of imaginary worlds for the purpose of exploring or commenting upon particular moral, ethical, political, affective, aesthetic, philosophical, etc., issues that are held to be important in the real world.

Another way of saying that they are narratively important, (i.e that they can be narrative topoi), is to say that they are 'tellable'. Pratt (1975) appropriates Labov's (1972) term 'tellability' and elaborates a definition of the term. This constitutes the basis of what I shall call the 'Labov-Pratt hypothesis'; like the 'pretence hypothesis', it will be used as a term of convenience to name a particular approach towards narrative discourse.

This approach was originally designed for the analysis of oral narratives. Pratt is concerned, however, with written narrative. The written medium permits there to be no ostensible narrator; unlike oral narratives, the story may be conveyed in the absence of a physical tangible storyteller. The physical tangible text is, as it were, a surrogate for the narrator. This consequently allows the narrative voice to be elided so as to permit such sophisticated devices as free indirect style. Such devices are, of course, not unknown in oral narrative: storytellers may adopt the point of view and 'voice' of, for example, animals or gods. But the graphological resources of the written medium permit greater sophistication.

3. The act of Narration:

3.1. Assertability versus tellability

Grice's maxim of Relation states simply 'Be relevant'. Now, it seems clear that in certain circumstances one may make statements which have not been elicited by some prior utterance in the course of conversation, that have no obvious bearing on the immediate context of activity, and that taken literally as a statement of events are pointless with respect to the practical interests of one's interlocutor. Consider the remark:

(10) Harry walked to work today

Supposing it were already known to my interlocutor that Harry's clutch had burnt out on the previous day, I could make this remark relevantly and appropriately in answer to or in anticipation of, for example, the question 'How did Harry get to work today'? But there is another kind of circumstance under which, unsolicited and without anticipating a question to which my remark might constitute a relevant answer, I can volunteer the remark (10). Suppose Harry were known never to go anywhere on foot, to use his car for even the very shortest of journeys. In uttering (10), I am not merely making an assertion, I am displaying a piece of news which I suppose and hope will capture the interest (and amazement!) of my hearer. The remark has the force of an exclamation which will (I hope) prompt my interlocutor to request an explanation or elaboration, or, indeed, which will justify my giving an elaboration, unsolicited, in
anticipation of my interlocutor's interest. According to Pratt (1977: 136) my statement that Harry walked to work today would not only be assertable but also tellable. The principal motive behind uttering such a sentence is not to give information but to arouse my hearer's interest and incline his attention to my account (anecdote, etc.), irrespective of the information-value of its constituent propositions.

The distinction between simple assertability and tellability is not an easy one to state clearly. Certainly sentence (10) is an assertion, and its literal meaning is the meaning it has by virtue of its being an assertion of a sentence in the English language. But it creates its own context, as it were; it announces itself as a (minimal) story or as an invitation to listen to a story. Pratt writes (op.cit:136):

> In making an assertion whose relevance is tellability, a speaker is not only reporting but also verbally displaying a state of affairs, inviting his addressee (s) to join him in contemplating it, evaluating it, and responding to it. His point is to produce in his hearer not only belief but also an imaginative and affective involvement in the state of affairs he is representing and an evaluative stance towards it.

3. 2. Tellability, topos, and the cultural context:

Pratt's analysis of tellability, as it stands and without qualification, is potentially ambiguous on the following account. The problem arises, it seems to me, in her attempt to account for the fact that assertions like (10) can be appropriately made without external prompting by, e.g., an interlocutor or by some other situational factor which might confirm its relevance. To explain the motivation of such an utterance, Pratt argues that "assertions whose relevance is tellability must represent states of affairs that are held to be unusual, contrary to expectations, or otherwise problematic; the speaker intends his hearer(s) to share his wonder, amusement, terror, or admiration of the event" (ibid). In one sense this is quite true; but it is neither exclusively nor even necessarily the case that the recounted events themselves be intrinsically "unusual, contrary to expectations, or otherwise problematic". This may be the purpose of the telling, and certainly one expects events recounted to be interesting enough to capture and retain an audience's attention, but this is not the defining criterion of the event's tellability.

Tellability is not a property inherent in the event itself, but one credited to the event in the course of its telling as its function as an acknowledged narrative topos is established. There is an historical and cultural dimension to tellability which neither Labov nor Pratt make explicit. In a given culture at a given moment in its history there will be certain events (actions, forms of behaviour, etc.) which are tellable and many more which are not; those which are tellable are so by virtue, not of any intrinsic interest or unusualness, but of the point or message or moral
which they convey in fulfilment of their function as **topoi**. Only when
the event is, by the teller, presented as, and by the tellee, perceived as
realizing some abstract **topos** (conceived to the same degree of abstrac-
tions as, e.g., Propp's functions; see example below) does the event,
otherwise without narrative significance, become tellable.

Further, there seem to be certain connections between the moral or
message or point of a narrative, the **topos**, and the illocutionary stance of
the teller. Consider the following oral narrative transcribed by Labov
(1972:367):

(11) When I was in fourth grade - no, it was in third
grade. - This boy he stole my glove and said that his father
found it downtown on the ground. (And you fight him?) I
told him that it was impossible for him to find downtown
'cause all those people were walking by and just his father
was the only one that found it? So he got all (mad). Then I
fought him. I knocked him all out in the street. So he say he
give, and I kept on hitting him. Then he started crying and
ran home to his father. And the father told him that he ain't
find no glove. (Words in parentheses are those of the inter-
viewer).

The initial reason for telling the story had been given by the interviewer
himself who has asked his informant if he had ever been in a fight. But to
the teller of (11) this seems to have been an inadequate pretext for a story,
i.e., not in itself tellable, and so he responds by making a second point by
which he gives some narrative significance to the 'fight' theme: «Every
line and almost every element of the syntax contributes to the point, and
that point is self-aggrandizement. Each element of the narrative is desigi-
ted to make Norris look good and 'this boy' look bad” (op.cit:368). That is, the fight in itself is not perceived by Norris as tellable; the events
are important only in so far as they illustrate or contribute towards a de-
scription of Norris's self-image. «Each part of the narrative shows a diffe-
rent side of his ideal character. In the account of the verbal exchange that
led up to the fight, Norris is cool, logical, good with his mouth, and
strong in insisting on his own right. In the second part, he appears as the
most dangerous kind of fighter» (ibid).

The point or message of the narrative is the establishment of Norris's
self-image as calm, of good character, and courageous; the **topos** is the
winning of a virtuous fight; and the illocutionary point is, perhaps, boas-
ting or self-aggrandizement. The three seem intimately connected,
though it is not yet possible to state the connection in a systematic way.

We may state the case in another way, using familiar structuralist ter-
minology: **histoire**, the narrated event, is less important than the
manner in which it is presented, **discours**. The manner of presentation,
in turn, serves to foreground the point of the narrative. The narrator, in
accordance with the conventions for telling stories, is under pressure to present his narrative in such a way as to engage his audience's affective, moral, political, ethical, etc., imagination in the evaluation of the events; it is in this way that the narrator makes his point or conveys his 'message'. Simply recounting events, therefore, is insufficient, as may be seen from an account, by one of Labov's interviewees, of a television programme, 'The Man From U.N.C.L.E' (op.cit:367).

(12) This kid - Napoleon got shot and he had to go on a mission. And so this kid, he went with Solo. So they went and this guy - they went through this window, and they caught him. And then he beat up them other people. And they went and then he said that this old lady was his mother and then he - and at the end he say that he was the guy's friend.

The meaningless and disoriented effect of the account has deeper roots than the obscurity of pronominal reference and syntactic incompleteness (though, of course, this constitutes a not inconsiderable difficulty). The narrative account seems to have no point; none of the events is evaluated. Even if we were to reconstruct the narrative in a more or less coherent form, our response would still be a baffled «So what? What's he getting at?» It is still (minimally) a narrative, but something is unquestionably lacking. Here, fortunately, the reason or, at least, a reason for the giving of the account is supplied by the interviewer: «we asked for accounts of favourite television programs» (ibid). But the teller himself makes no affective, ethical, moral, or any other sort of evaluation of the events nor draws any sort of meaning from the story. There are no heroes and villains, no good or bad action; merely characters and events. The events are «unusual» («Napoleon got shot», «they went through this window» «he beat up them other people»), but they are not, as they stand, tellable. They have no point.

In a specially contrived situation for research purposes as in the case of Labov's interviews the failure of the narrator to evaluate his narrative has no consequence beyond its academic interest. But in real social interaction its significance is obvious. If in the course of a conversation I recount an anecdote but fail to make clear its relevance to the topic of the prior conversation, then I may be held to be speaking inappropriately by my hearers. On the other hand, if my sentences, taken literally and seriously as assertions, do not follow logically from the prior conversation, and yet the point or overall meaning that may be inferred from my story is able to follow logically from what has been said before, then I may be held by my hearers to be speaking relevantly and appropriately, and to have fulfilled the conditions for the performance of the speech act of narrating.

To return, therefore, to my original point, it should follow from the fact that a speaker is telling a story that his story has some point, that irrespective of the interest of the events themselves, the speaker has some reason for telling it.
3. 3. «Two uses of information»: narratives as verbal display:

Part of our practical (or socio) cultural competence is our ability to distinguish between, on the one hand, an assertion that bears some practical relevance to the immediate context of activity or to a proximate or potential context of activity and, on the other hand, an assertion whose purpose is to engage the interest and imagination of the hearer without committing the hearer to accepting it as an assertion of practical information. This is what I believe Pratt must mean by «two uses of information» (op.cit:139): the tellable need have no practical consequences in the life of either speaker or hearer. On the occasion of the utterance of a sentence like (10), its relevance derives not from the foregoing speech context but from the very fact of its utterance.

We may provisionally concur with Pratt that

The fiction/non-fiction distinction is neither as clear-cut nor as important as we might think, at least not in the realm of the tellable. Our capacity for verbally displaying and evaluating experience and for finding pleasure in such displays applies equally to experience which is claimed to be real as to that which is not. (ibid:143; cf also Weinrich 1973:100-101).

In short, the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is not of paramount importance, interest or relevance in prose narrative, because such texts do not have an ordinary informative function; it is not the speaker's intention that they should be tied to an extratextual context of activity. (Any such tie is incidental, not crucial). «This is probably why we so easily tolerate exaggeration, embellishment, and fictionalising in natural narrative» (ibid:145). Narrative is, in consequence of its lack of immediate pragmatic relevance, potentially tellable to a far wider range of hearers. Anybody, for example, can read, understand, and enjoy novels produced in his culture.

I believe it is important that the crucial defining criterion of narration be the illocutionary intentions of the speaker, that his utterance be taken as a verbal display; its constituent propositions, understood literally, having no intended practical relevance in the world and exacting no commitment to future actions or beliefs on the part of the hearer. That the actual events recounted be interesting, unusual, problematic, or contrary to expectations is, of course, important, but this is not so central to the definition of narrative as the speaker's metanarrative appeal to the evaluative faculty of the hearer.

3. 4. The medium and the message:

Now, some caution must be exercised here. It might be objected, for example, that parables, fables, and certain other types of narrative, constitute attempts on the part of the speaker or writer to influence the future
behaviour of his audience. This is true, but the plausibility of such an
objection only follows from a misinterpretation of the above argument.
The objection would derive from a failure to distinguish between, on the
one hand, assuming the literal truth of and acting upon the actual proposi-
tional content of the narrative and, on the other hand, assuming the
truth of and acting upon the lesson that is drawn from the narrative. The
point has been hinted at above already, and may be clearly illustrated.
Jesus, in telling the parable of the barren fig tree, is giving a lesson, not in
arboriculture, but in repentence. His audience was not expected to act
upon the events described but on the lesson of which the events are a fic-
tional illustration, offered for the contemplation of the audience and not
as a directive for future behaviour with respect to fig trees. Likewise, the
following fable by la Fontaine demands no future action or belief on the
part of the reader with respect to the events described:

La poule aux œufs d'or

(13) L'avare perd tout en voulant tout gagner.
    Je ne veux, pour le témoigner,
    Que celui dont la Poule, à ce que dit la fable,
    Pendaît tous les jours un œuf d'or.
    Il crut que dans son corps elle avait un trésor : 
    Il la tua, l’ouvrit, et la trouva semblable
    A celles dont les œufs ne lui rapportaient rien,
    S’étant lui-même ôté le plus beau de son bien.
    Belle leçon pour les gens chiches!
    Pendant ces derniers temps, combien en a-t-on vus
    Qui du soir au matin sont pauvres devenus,
    Pour vouloir trop tôt être riches!

The audience is invited to contemplate and evaluate the narrated situ-
tion, to concur with the maxim drawn from the fable, but, further, to
understand that the subject of the fable is avarice and not a particular hen
which laid golden eggs. The poet is asserting that avarice may lead one,
in one’s greed, to lose more than one gains, but is narrating the story of
the hen and its owner: it is a ‘fable’. Similarly, political novels like Henry
Adam's Democracy or George Orwell’s 1984 are composed of a series of
statements whose purpose is not to inform the reader of a certain state of
affairs in the real world (that there is an American Senator called Silas
Ratcliffe suspected of malpractice in the Treasury, that there is an indi-
vidual named Winston Smith who works in the Ministry of Truth..) but to
engage his ethical and evaluative faculties in the contemplation and
assessment of particular political concepts or issues. Labov (op.cit:317)
suggests, commenting on the natural narratives of his interviewees, that
«the narratives themselves may serve only as a framework for the evalu-
tion». This sheds new light on the intuition variously expressed in different theories of literature, that every literary work has a moral, 'message', or overall meaning above and beyond the literal meanings of its parts. In certain types of narrative, e.g., fables, and in certain early narratives this function of story-telling is made explicit. An elaborate nineteenth century example, from Hawthorne's David Swan, will serve as a clear demonstration of this:

(14) We can be but partially acquainted even with the events which actually influence our course through life, and our final destiny. There are innumerable other events, if such they may be called, which come close upon us, yet pass away without actual results, or even betraying their near approach, by the reflection of any light or shadow across our minds. Could we know all the vicissitudes of our fortunes, life would be too full of hope and fear, exultation and disappointment to afford us a single hour of true serenity. This idea may be illustrated by a page from the secret history of David Swan....

On this point, Searle's analysis of fictional discourse agrees with that proposed by Labov and Pratt, and, further, assumes the possibility, elsewhere discussed by Pratt, of regarding whole texts as vehicles for macro-speech-acts implicity embedded in the narrative (though no discussion will be made of this in the present paper as there are very serious points of difference between Pratt's proposals and those of Searle):

One aspect of the role that fictions play (in human social life) derives from the fact that serious (i.e., non-fictional) speech acts can be conveyed by fictional texts, even though the conveyed speech act is not represented in the text. Almost any important work of fiction conveys a 'message' or 'messages' which are conveyed by the text but are not in the text.

He goes on to add that

Only in such children's stories as contain the concluding «and the moral of the story is...» or in tiresomely didactic authors such as Tolstoy do we get an explicit representation of the serious speech acts which it is the point (or the main point) of the fictional text to convey. (1975:332)

This conclusion accords with Labov's contention that, in narratives by experienced narrators, the evaluative element of the story is embedded within the story itself rather than given explicity and directly by the narrator.

Even in stories which are apparently told, quite simply, because they are 'good stories', the reader is involved in moral, affective, political, and
other generally ideological dilemmas, in so far as he recognises a world in which characters behave in particular ways, hold certain beliefs, and so on.

3. 5. Identifying features of narrative discourse:

Having thus defined narrative and examined the notion of tellability, we may contrast this with other types of utterance relating (or purporting to relate) past events, e.g., statements to the police, and by witnesses in court, or explanations to one's wife of where one has been on arriving home drunk at three o'clock in the morning. However unusual the events and however intrinsically interesting the speaker's account, the point of his utterance is not to engage his hearer's imaginative, contemplative and evaluative faculties, but simply to assert or explain information immediately relevant to a real-life situation in which the speaker and hearer have to some degree a practical interest. The illocutionary stance of the speaker is correspondingly different, and his utterance will be taken in a different way, according to his illocutionary intentions.

Now, it is not always clear, from the grammatical form of a sentence, how the speaker intends that it should be taken. For example, I'll see you tomorrow may be (at least) a promise, a threat, an order, a prediction, a valediction, or an expression of hope. The same indeterminacy may characterise speech acts at the macro-level: does one take a given string of utterances as a narrative, a testimony, or what? The speech context will usually determine how the utterance is to be taken (e.g., «What the hell have you been doing till this hour?» or «A Novel»,...), but this is not always the case. There is a famous anecdote about a schoolmaster who told, in abbreviated form, the story of the fall of the walls of Jericho, to which a pupil responded by saying that his father was a builder and that he would ask him to come round in the morning. There was clearly a misunderstanding on the child's part of the teacher's illocutionary intentions.

It would be convenient if one could find in the textual surface structure of a narrative utterance some indication, analogous to the sentence-level illocutionary force-indicating device, by which it might be recognised to be narrative rather than any other kind of discourse. Labov (op.cit) lists and examines a number of features typical of narrative utterances; one would ideally like to be able to say why these features - abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result, and coda-should be present. That is, to make statements about their inevitability as narrative devices. Alternatively, one would like to be able to indicate features of narrative discourse which demonstrably do not occur in any other type of discourse. Three features, perhaps, immediately come to mind: quoted speech (i.e., attributed to a personage in the narrative in the form of direct speech), free indirect style, and the option of beginning in medias res. In respect of this last feature, just as 'tellability' infringes the maxim of Rela-
tion, so this may infringe the maxim of Quantity («Make your contribution as informative as is required») by introducing definite descriptions which have not been previously identified for the reader. Recalling Booth’s (1961) distinction between telling and showing, skilled narrators will often identify such terms through the narrative actions itself rather than by direct narrator commentary.

All of these features may be found in both natural narrative and in works of literary fiction; I discuss them more fully elsewhere. (Hutchison 1978).

4. Conclusion:

In view of the fact that

(i) the ability to produce and recognise narrative utterances and to distinguish these from non-narrative informational assertions does seem to constitute part of our practical or communicative competence;

(ii) that natural narrative and ‘literary’ narrative have many potent similarities in respect of form and illocutionary stance (‘tellability’), and that in any case the fiction/non-fiction distinction is not an important one in narrative discourse;

(iii) that narrating is a natural and typical use of language in conversational speech contexts (see, e.g., Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1975), it seems both unnecessary and unnatural to view narrative as resulting from a suspension of the rules governing non-narrative discourse. It seems more reasonable and more consistent with the fact of the narrative use of language in ordinary speech contexts to regard narrative as a type of discourse that, like any other, must be accounted for by the general rules for talk, i.e. as rule-governed rather than rule-violating.

To do so would require that the rules for talk be understood to be more comprehensive than, say, Grice’s rules for conversation which, as R. Lakoff (1973:297) observes, would only be strictly complied with in the most stuffy and mechanical of real conversations. In a «normal, interesting conversation» these rules «are apparently more honoured in the breech than in the observance». Larkin and O’Malley (1973) show that sentences which are wholly acceptable in normal conversation (i) as often as not break such theorised rules of conversation (e.g., the maxims of Quantity and Relation, the non-obviousness condition); (ii) serve illocutionary functions that are not allowed for by, e.g.; Grice and Searle (‘put downs’, ‘bitching’, ‘boasting’, and the like); (iii) have a purpose or intention (i.e., conversation meaning) that could not possibly be understood or inferred from the literal meaning of the sentence in the null context.

The conversational meaning of a sentence (i.e., its meaning by virtue of
the point in or purpose of uttering it) is inferred by the hearer from the pragmatic circumstances of its utterance. The hearer will know or be able to guess what the speaker is 'getting at' according to Lakoff's principle, that «I assume you're sane, unless proven otherwise, and will therefore assume that everything you do in a conversation is done for a reason» (op.cit:297).

Despite the proven merits of current theories of language use, they have led, according to Larkin and O'Malley (op.cit:316-7),

to the characterization of an idealized 'conversation', one in which there is an impersonal and rational exchange of information. Few conversations would match this 'ideal'... The informative exchange ideal cannot be taken as paradigmatic for most conversational interactions (and may not be paradigmatic even for rational discourses that occur in the real world)... The real questions we are encountering here are related to how language functions, for people, individually and socially, and how its structure is grounded in its use.

There is a pressing need to critically re-examine the ideals on which current theories of language use are founded. A theory which excludes narrative discourse from the domain of 'normal' language usage is, it seems to me, in need of revision if it is to a balanced account of actual conversational behaviour. As is demonstrated by Pratt (1977), Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1975), Polanyi (1978), and others, storytelling, far from being a special domain of language activity with its own peculiar 'anti-rules', is strongly represented in a great deal of everyday conversation. Labov is therefore, I believe, right in stressing that narrating is a natural use of language, on all fours with other uses in daily social intercourse. The distinctive features of narrative «which poeticians believed constituted the «literariness» of novels... occur in novels not because they are novels (i.e. literature) but because they are members of some other more general category of speech act» (Pratt 1977:69).
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