

## **Assertions in Fictions: An Indirect Speech Act Account\***

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### **Abstract**

I contrast in this paper the account I favor for how fictions can convey knowledge with Green's views on the topic. On my account, this obtains because fictional works *make assertions* and other acts such as conjectures, suppositions, or acts of putting forward contents for our consideration; and the mechanism through which they do it is that of *speech act indirection*, of which conversational implicatures are a particular case. There are two main points of disagreement with Green in this proposal. First, it requires that assertions can be made indirectly, which Green (2007, 2015) questions on the grounds of the intuitive distinction between *lying* and *misleading*. Second, it requires that verbal fiction-making doesn't consist merely in "acts of speech" (Green 2015), but in straightforward speech acts.

*Keywords:* assertion; implicature; fiction; indirect speech acts.

### **1. Introduction**

I share many views on assertion and speech acts in general with Mitch Green. The details of our views differ, as it is bound to happen in philosophy. While Green offers a sophisticated

expressive account, I (García-Carpintero 2004, 2018, forthcoming) defend instead what I regard as at least a complex (if not sophisticated) version of a normative, constitutive norms view. Sophistication makes for convergence. Thus, Green's (2007, 2009) reliance on norms through his appeal to a "Handicap Principle" greatly improves in my view on Gricean expressive non-normative accounts like Bach's & Harnish's (1979), as on Davis's (2003) bare intentionalism. Asserting  $p$  is according to Green (roughly) expressing that one believes  $p$  by deploying a device designed (by natural or social selection) for that purpose, which, when one is sincere, affords knowledge that one does believe  $p$ , insofar as one subjects oneself thereby to a specific norm that would make insincerity costly. The norm in question is not far from the one I myself promote for core assertions (García-Carpintero 2004, 2018, forthcoming). In turn, I argue (*op. cit.*) that it is not enough to analyse assertion in terms of constitutive norms. An account must also be given for why such constitutive norms have come to be enforced; and such explanation would in my view mention aspects of design and expression very close to what Green (2007, 2009) calls 'showing', which figures prominently in his proposal.

The differences between our views thus concern what in the respective accounts is taken to be *essential*, or *constitutive* of the acts – whether something fundamentally psychological in nature or something fundamentally normative instead. Such issues however, although of course important for philosophical theorizing itself, are rather subtle, difficult to adjudicate if at all decidable, and as a result one is in my view entitled to adopt about them a Yablonian "quizzicalist" (fictionalist) attitude, declining going into them beyond the articulation of one's own story in a way as clear as possible, in contrast to the alternatives.

This contribution is about how we can learn from fictions, on the assumption that I also share with Green (and others like Friend 2008, 2014, Ichino & Currie 2017, Reicher 2012, or Stock 2017a) that we do. When it comes to this more specific topic, I have also promoted views very close to many of those that Green has been defending over the years. In particular,

I (García-Carpintero 2016) support Literary Cognitivism (LC) in the way Green (2017a, 48) defines it: “literary fiction can be a source of knowledge in a way that depends crucially on its being fictional”. I might agree with the account that Green (2010, 2016, 2017a) has provided, as I explain below (§4). We also agree that literary fictions are sources of knowledge in more straightforward ways, as in the following two examples – even though, against what he contends, for reasons given below (§4) these examples in my view also support LC:

- (1) New Providence, the island containing Nassau, the capital of the Bahamas, is a drab sandy slab of land fringed with some of the most beautiful beaches in the world. (I. Fleming, *Thunderball*, 1963, London, Pan Books, 116; quoted in Friend 2008, 159).
- (2) Nonhuman animals have gone to court before. Arguably, the first ALF action in the United States was the release of two dolphins in 1977 from the University of Hawaii. The men responsible were charged with grand theft. (K. J. Fowler, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*, 305; quoted in Stock, 2017a, 24).

I am expected to focus on disagreements in this piece, though. I will do that by contrasting the account I favor for how fictions can convey knowledge, which with small variations applies both to cases such as (1) and (2), and the cases that Green provides in support of LC. On my account, fictional works *make assertions* and other acts in what Green (2017b) calls *assertive family*, such as conjectures, suppositions, or acts of putting forward contents for our consideration; and the mechanism through which they do it is that of *speech act indirection*, of which conversational implicatures are a particular case.

There are two main points of disagreement with Green in this proposal, if I understand his views correctly. First, it requires that assertions can be made indirectly, which Green (2007, 2015) questions on account of the need to respect the intuitive distinction between *lying* and *misleading*. Second, it requires that verbal fiction-making doesn't consist merely in “acts of speech” (Green 2015), but in straightforward speech acts. A further disagreement coming

together with these two lies in that I reject the Austinian appeal to the performative formula that Green (2015) favors as criterion for illocutionary types. And there is finally the already indicated issue about the support lent to LC by (1) and (2). These disagreements are in a way minor, vis-à-vis those indicated above regarding the nature of speech acts. Given the quizzicalist take I lean towards on these more fundamental issues, however, in another way I find them more serious. This is because they concern explanatory issues with direct empirical implications, towards which I am much more reluctant to adopt such a cavalier attitude.

Here is how I will proceed. In §2 I'll sum up the reasons I have offered elsewhere (García-Carpintero 2018) in reply to Green's argument for the view that assertion must be explicit (i.e., a *saying*), based on the distinction between lying and misleading. §3 argues that fiction-making is a *sui generis* speech act, not merely an act of speech. §4 explains assertions and other assertoric acts in fictions as cases of indirection. §5 concludes.

## **2. Indirect Assertion: Lying and Misleading**

In this section I will summarize the reasons I have given at more length elsewhere (García-Carpintero 2018) in reply to Green's argument (2007, 2015) against indirect assertion based on the need to capture the intuitive distinction between lying and misleading. The argument assumes that insincerely asserting suffices for lying. In reply, while agreeing with Green (against Mahon (2016), for one) that lying requires asserting, I'll suggest that what suffices for lying is not *insincerely asserting*, but rather insincerely asserting *in an explicit way*. This makes the view that one can make indirect assertions compatible with the lying/misleading distinction: in making an insincere *indirect* assertion, one doesn't lie but merely misleads.

Green (2015, 22-3; see also Green 2007, 102-3) articulates the argument thus:

While indirect communication is ubiquitous, indirect speech acts are less common than might first appear. Consider an example of a type often used to illustrate indirect speech acts. A asks B, ‘Can you come to dinner with us tonight?’, and B replies, ‘I have to study.’ B makes it clear that she is too busy to join A for dinner. However, must we conclude that she has done this by illocuting, for instance stating that she is too busy to join A for dinner? This seems unlikely. After all, if B did not think that her studying would prevent her from joining A for dinner, she would be misleading in saying what she does, but not a liar; yet if in answering as she has, she is asserting that she is unable to join A for dinner, she would be lying if she took her study plans not to interfere with dinner plans.

In a nutshell, Green’s argument goes like this: intuitively, those indirectly conveying putative assertions of contents they know to be false are not lying, but merely misleading their audiences; hence they cannot be asserting, because asserting what one believes to be false suffices for lying. If S implicates  $p$ , while S doesn’t believe  $p$ , S misleads but doesn’t lie about  $p$ . Hence, S doesn’t assert  $p$ , for otherwise S would be lying.

The text quoted only says that indirect communication “is less common” than assumed; Green (2017b, 7, 10), while still claiming on the basis of the lying/misleading distinction that “conversational implicature is not a species of assertion”, allows that “some, albeit unusual cases of indirect assertions are possible”. In personal communication, he tells me he had in mind here cases like *putting 2 and 2 together*. X and Y are detectives trying to solve a crime. X tell Y that it was either Jones or Smith. After a few moments of evidence-gathering and calculation, X also assert that it was not Jones. On Green’s views, X is thereby *assertorically committed* to the conclusion that Smith is the culprit, but not all entailments of things one assert to which one is assertorically committed are thereby assertions (Green 1999, 89). But in

this example it does seem that X is (indirectly) asserting that Jones is the culprit, and Green wants to allow for it as possible exceptions.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps this was already implicit in the admission that cases of indirect assertions like this are possible, but I would like to emphasize that they are not consistent with the claim that assertions cannot be conversationally implicated. For I take the assertion here to be a conversational implicature. It is one analogous to an example from Davis (1998, 6), in which the implicated content entails what is said: a taxpayer answers the auditors question ‘Is it true that you or your spouse is 65 or older or blind?’ by saying, ‘I am 67.’, thereby logically but also conversationally implicating that either he or his spouse is 65 or over or blind.<sup>2</sup> Examples (1)-(2) above are in fact extreme cases of this, in which the implicated assertion is the very same one conventionally put forward by the sentence. In any case, the conversationally implicated assertions I want to allow for go beyond this sort of case.

The problem with Green’s argument against this lies in the assumption that asserting what one believes to be false *suffices* for lying. The condition that has been traditionally taken as necessary for lying regarding *p* to account for the distinction between lying and misleading is not (plainly) asserting *p* (in a substantive, not merely verbal sense García-Carpintero (2018) characterizes in detail) but rather *stating* or *saying* it, in a very specific, technical sense: something like *putting forward a sentence whose literal and direct use would be to assert p*, whether or not one does *assert* it – cf. Chisholm & Feehan (1977, 150-1), Mahon (2016, 4).

Mahon in fact *rejects* the necessity of an assertion condition for lying. I do not agree with him on this (García-Carpintero 2018). My proposal is rather this. The distinction between lying and misleading as regards to *p* does not consist in that only the former involves asserting *p*. Assertions, like other speech acts, are made in different ways: they can be implicit, indirect, merely hinted or insinuated (Searle 1979, ix); or they can be as explicit as possible, direct and literal: what is meant is then as close as possible to the semantic content of the sentence by

means of which they are made. The intuitive distinction between lying and misleading tracks this equally intuitive distinction between the implicit, hinted or insinuated, and the explicit, direct or literal. The distinction is hence compatible with the possibility of indirect assertions.<sup>3</sup> Green doesn't say anything against this way of tracing it, which fits the intuitive data. So this undermines his case against indirect assertions.

### 3. Fiction-Making as a *Sui Generis* Speech Act

Consider again the examples (1)-(2) above:

- (1) Utterance: 'New Providence, the island containing Nassau, the capital of the Bahamas, is a drab sandy slab of land fringed with some of the most beautiful beaches in the world' (from I. Fleming, *Thunderball*, 1963, London, Pan Books, 116; quoted in Friend 2008, 159); putative assertion: *Ditto*.
- (2) Utterance: 'Nonhuman animals have gone to court before. Arguably, the first ALF action in the United States was the release of two dolphins in 1977 from the University of Hawaii ...' (K. J. Fowler, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*, 305; from Stock, 2017a, 24); putative assertion: *Ditto*.

Why should we count the putative assertions allegedly made in (1)-(2) as indirect, if the content asserted is the same one literally conveyed by the sentence? In a nutshell, this is why:

(i) The utterances occur as part of a discourse that, as a whole, is put forward as a fiction. (ii) Following Currie (1990), I have argued (García-Carpintero, 2013, 2019) that we should understand fictions, against Searle (1974-5), as resulting from a specific speech act, fiction-making. Finally, (iii) the assertion is indirectly conveyed on the basis of the fiction-making act, along lines that I will articulate. I will elaborate on this in the next section. Before going

into it, however, I would like to discuss in this on the reasons to think of fiction-making as a specific speech act, and on whether it is itself indirect when made by means of utterances of sentences in the declarative or other moods.

Currie (1990, 15) follows Searle (1974-5, 60) in taking utterances produced in fiction-making to be *literal*. If one means by this that the fiction-making act actually made precisely fits what is semantically codified in the sentence uttered,<sup>4</sup> I do not think this is correct. For, with most contemporary semanticists, I take it that some force-indications (at least, those distinguishing declaratives, interrogatives and directives) are semantically conveyed.<sup>5</sup> And I do not think fiction-making fits that semantic contribution of the declarative mood: I would only count assertions and related acts in Green's (2017b) *assertive family* (guesses, conjectures, suppositions) as literally made with declarative sentences. Should we hence count fiction-making, when done with sentences, as already an indirect speech act itself? That is not so straightforward, as I'll presently explain. But I need to discuss before one of the potential disagreements between me and Green announced at the start. I will thereby elaborate on my reasons to take fictions to result from a speech act, fiction-making.

Green also appears to reject that fiction-making is a literal speech act, but for a reason that I cannot share: to wit, that it is not a speech act at all. Although, like me, he agrees with Currie and Walton that "a fiction is an artifact comprising series of sentences whose contents are presented as to be imagined" (2017a, 48), like Walton he doesn't appear to take fiction-making to be a specific, *sui generis* speech act on account of this.<sup>6</sup> In presenting us with series of sentences for us to imagine their contents, he seems to suggest that the fiction-maker just performs an "act of speech", rather than a *speech act* proper (*ibid.*, 54).<sup>7</sup> For he provides as an utterance illustrating his account of how fictions can provide knowledge one that "is not an assertion of any other illocutionary act". He (2017a, 54-5; 2017c, 1601-2) also mentions suppositions as another model, so perhaps he does mean to explain fictions as resulting from



speech acts – albeit not specific ones, just suppositions. In what follows, I sum up my reasons for the specific speech act view and against any of the two models.

There is a clear intuitive distinction between *acts of speech* in general (clearing up one's throat by uttering words, rehearsing a speech, *perlocutionary acts* such as *convincing* or *frightening* people, or Austinian *misfires* – an order given without the required authority, a promise not accepted) and *speech acts* proper, in the sense that Austin (1962) was after – *illocutionary acts*, in his terms. But there is considerable controversy about how to properly delimit the latter. Green (2015, 2017b) adopts Austin's own criterion, namely, that the act can be performed by means of performative sentences. But I don't think we should go this path.

In adopting the performative characterization, Austin appears to be motivated by his speech-act conventionalism. Green and I agree however that the criterion by itself doesn't provide any support for conventionalism, because the fact that something might be done by conventional means doesn't make it conventional in any interesting sense. We also agree that speech-act conventionalism is wrong anyway, for cases such as assertions and promises – as opposed to declarations such as marrying or naming, and perhaps commands. Moreover, there are clear intuitive counterexamples to the performative delineation. As Sadock (2004, 56) points out, most theorists count *threats* as illocutionary acts, but they can hardly be done by means of the performative formula. *Bribes* make for a similar case. *Depicting* the way for you to come home by drawing a map is also intuitively an illocutionary act, which obviously cannot be done with the performative formula.<sup>8</sup>

The reasons explaining why those acts cannot usually be made in that way are similar: an incompatibility between the goals of the acts and the resources that the performative formula allows for carrying them out. It should be clear that, by the same token, allowing for indirect assertions requires us to reject the performative criterion. Threats and bribes can rarely be made explicit, because it is in their nature that they usually can work only by being hinted or

insinuated. In the same vein, I want to allow for indirectly made speech acts, including assertions – i.e., for merely hinted or insinuated ones. Following Vendler (1976) in his apt objection to Strawson’s (1964) reliance on the performative criterion, I would say that it is not because they are not illocutionary acts that bribes or hinted assertions cannot be made with the performative formula; it is just because an attempt at doing them in such a way would be to commit “illocutionary suicide”. Searle (1979, ix) offers the proper take on this, by suggesting that hinting and insinuating are just *manners* or *styles* in which illocutionary acts are made, as opposed to ways of depriving them of their illocutionary character.

Be this as it may, the appeal to the performative criterion or to speaker-meaning wouldn’t help to support the view that verbal fictions consist of mere acts of speech, because there wouldn’t be anything untoward in embedding the content of a fiction in the performative formula: I hereby invite you to imagine that .... Why then shouldn’t they be speech acts, as Currie and I think they are? This is not the place to try to characterize the nature of speech acts in general, assuming they have one. But there is something sufficiently theory-neutral we can observe about paradigm cases, such as assertions, requests, questions and promises, that may help us here. They involve speakers’ commitments vis-à-vis sufficiently determinate representational contents, whether or not these commitments are constitutive of the acts (as normative accounts would want) or just derivative from their non-normative nature, given norms with other sources, perhaps morality or rationality.<sup>9</sup> These commitments are such that their failure usually lead to criticisms of the speakers: *what you told me is not true; I don’t see any reason to do what you ask me to; the question you are asking has no answer; I don’t see why I should have any interest in your doing what you promise me to do ...*

Now, there are corresponding things we say about fictions, and hence I take this to be a good intuitive reason to count them as communicative acts – speech acts of a specific category, not mere acts of speech –, see Grant (2001, 400), Sutrop (2002). We have an

intuitive notion of the *plot*, *story* or *content* presented in a fiction. This is what, on Walton's (1990) view (from which all current speech act accounts take inspiration, even though his is not one), the fiction requires imagining for a competent engagement with it, if the question arises. This is also what Lewis (1978) tries to capture as *truth in fiction*, with his preferred possible worlds framework. Now, we criticize fictions relative to this notion, in ways that suggest a proprietary illocutionary force (vis-à-vis such propositional contents) of the kind that Currie (1990) and Stock (2017b) articulate in Walton-inspired Gricean terms – as proposals to imagine – whereas I (García-Carpintero 2013, 2016, 2019) have tried to capture it in normative terms. Thus, we complain that the plot is *boring* (to imagine), or implausible, or just impossible to make out – thereby upsetting, or simply blocking, the imaginative project of engaging with the relevant fiction.<sup>10</sup>

With this in place, we can raise a serious challenge to Green's characterization of fictions as comprising mere "acts of speech", or at best putting forward contents for us to suppose. In a quotation above he defines them as "series of sentences whose contents are presented as to be imagined". This is consistent with his view that they are just acts of speech. But we can now see that this is clearly inadequate. Nabokov's Kinbote in *Pale Fire* is a textbook case of an unreliable narrator. When he tells us that a Zemblan assassin intending to kill Zembla's deposed king (i.e., Kinbote himself) accidentally killed the poet Shade, we are not supposed to take this to be true in the fiction, part of the story we are presented to be imagined. We must infer instead that the killer is the insane Jack Grey, who wanted to kill the judge who put him away, mistaking Shade for him.<sup>11</sup> The sentences comprising the fiction are there for us to entertain or suppose their contents, indeed; but this doesn't mean that we are always required to imagine such contents, in the sense relevant for the proper appraisal of fictions on account of their true nature. In many cases we are required to imagine instead other contents that we only arrive at through inferences, based in part on that of the sentences comprising the fiction.

In (García-Carpintero 2007), I gave another compelling example, intended to refute Lewis' (1978) account of truth-in-fiction. On that account, the worlds constituting the fictional content “are the worlds where the fiction is told, but as known fact rather than fiction. The act of storytelling occurs, just as it does here at our world; but there it *is* what here it falsely purports to be: truth-telling about matters whereof the teller has knowledge” (*ibid*, 266). I quoted in full (my own translation of) a short story by Julio Cortázar, “A Continuity of Parks”. It features a reader “transported” to what he reasonably takes to be a merely fictional story which, unfortunately unbeknownst to him, narrates a succession of events in fact simultaneously unfolding while he reads, eventually leading to (one is supposed to infer) his being killed “offscreen” in the story’s denouement. This is the central plot element of the fiction, the proposition that any competent interpreter must imagine, for her to properly appreciate it. However, as I explain there, we would never have concluded it from the assumption that we are confronted with assertions in nearby worlds, trying to find out what the fictional narrator puts forward there “as known fact”. Rather, we appear to take the fiction as presented by a fiction-maker, motivated to generate interesting imaginings.

How are those inferences to be explained? As I have argued (García-Carpintero 2016), the speech-act view of fiction-making offers clear-cut answers, based on general principles. For these inferences work essentially along the lines of speech-act indirection in general, on the assumption that the “accepted purpose or direction” of the conversation that Grice’s (1975, 26) Cooperative Principle entreats us to take into account in general is in this particular case the one specific to fiction-making.<sup>12</sup> I fail to see how cases like these – central to our understanding of fictions – can be accounted for on the assumption that fictions comprise just “acts of speech” or suppositions. At the very least, they pose a serious challenge to that view.

Assuming thus on this basis that I am entitled to the speech-act view of fictions, I come back now to the question whether fiction-making itself should be considered an indirect

speech act, when verbally done. Konrad (2017, 53-4) has an interesting discussion of this. She dismisses the indirect speech act account, with an argument that I take to be flawed. She considers only *additive* indirection, on the model of Grice's "gas petrol" example, in which both the direct and the indirect act are actually performed. She argues on this basis that, when it comes to the fictional contribution of declarative utterances, the indirect-act view would thus entail that, implausibly, the "author's commitment to the normal rules of the assertive speech act would still remain" (*ibid.*). However, as Grice himself noticed and has been repeatedly pointed out after him (cf. e.g., Vandevcken 1991, 375-6, Meibauer 2009), there are *substitution* implicatures in addition to additive ones, in which the literally indicated act is not actually made; irony or hyperbole are good examples of that.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, I agree with Konrad that fiction-making is a direct speech act of its own, even when made by verbal means. I take it that this is the proper thing to say also about the case of declarations like *naming*, *marrying* or *giving out* players; there is no indirection going on in such cases. I take fiction-making to be done by the author pretending to do something – or having other actors doing the pretending. The pretend actions might be non-verbal, as in mime or ballet, or verbal; there is no significant difference in the two cases. Searle (1974-5) was right about this; he was only wrong in claiming that there is nothing more to fiction-making than pretense, for which he gave an unconvincing argument (Currie 1990, 12-16).<sup>14</sup>

I thus agree with Alward's (2009) take on "onstage illocution": it is just pretense. He, however, argues that this tells against speech act theories of fiction-making like Currie's or my own. His argument assumes that "fictional storytelling is best viewed as a species of theatrical performance in which storytellers portray the narrators of the stories they tell. As a result, the aforementioned theories of fictional discourse can be used without revision as accounts of theatrical discourse" (*op. cit.*, 321). This is wrong. I may grant that all verbal fictions have narrators, explicit or implicit ones, and also that actual storytellers of verbal

fictions “portray” such fictional narrators. But it doesn’t follow at all from this that “theories of fictional discourse can be used without revision as accounts of theatrical discourse”.

Alward’s argument for this is predicated on a confusion, hidden in the ambiguous expression ‘the goal of theatrical illocutionary action’ (*op. cit.*, 323). Actors in general, and the storyteller of a verbal fiction in particular, might play two different roles, with separate defining goals. First, the actor-role; I agree with Alward that this is just pretense. Second, the storyteller-role. The difference is clearer in the theatrical case, because the author of the play is typically someone else than the actors; but it is there nonetheless when the author is also an actor, and it equally exists for verbal storytellers if we grant that they are actors portraying narrators. Thus, in portraying an unreliable narrator such as Kinbote in the previous example, the storyteller in his first role portrays someone asserting *p*, while in his second capacity he invites his audience to imagine instead *not-p*. Currie and I are theorizing about the second role, not the first. The fact that the first can be understood as just pretense is thus compatible with the second role being accounted for as that of performing a specific speech act.

#### **4. Assertions in Fiction as Indirection**

I’ll finally move to assertions in fiction. As indicated at the outset, with Green, other writers (Friend 2014, Reicher 2012, Stock 2017a) and common sense I assume that fictions can make assertions, (1) and (2) being good examples for that. Now, on my own account the assertions in question are dependent on the primarily fiction-made content – via genre assumptions about fiction-made contents that are also put forward as providing knowledge by fiction-makers with certain ambitions. Following Stock (2017a, 24, 29, 32) I take it that when Fowler wrote (2) she was not just fiction-making its content, although certainly she was doing

that too – for the content put forward to be imagined by the full “utterance” constituting the novel is to be determined in part by the content of (2). I take it that she was also asserting it, providing her readers with correct information she had properly researched, and liable to being correctly criticized if the claim is false or merely accidentally true. And I suggest that she was asserting it *in virtue of* fiction-making it; i.e., that its role in the constitution of the fiction that she was producing is essential in explaining that she was also assertorically committing herself to this. This is on account of the type of fiction that this is supposed to be, and the sort of claims that authors like Fowler are understood to commit themselves to by producing such fictions. This would hence be an indirect assertion; but one made by uttering a sentence whose literal content is precisely the asserted one.

Standard accounts of implicatures and speech act indirection provides an adequate framework for how this works.<sup>15</sup> The details can be developed along lines that others have already given. In his classical discussion of “truth in fiction”, Lewis (1978) envisaged two ways of learning from fiction that provide such elaboration. The first, applying to (1) and (2), he derives from the role played by an assumption that has come to be known (after Walton (1990)) as the *Reality Principle* in going beyond what is explicitly presented in fictions in order to determine their content – a principle roughly to the effect that we can take to be “true in the fiction” what is true *simpliciter*, to the extent that it is consistent with what is explicitly made part of the content of the fiction: “There may be an understanding between the author and his readers to the effect that what is true in his fiction, on general questions if not on particulars, is not to depart from what he takes to be the truth”.<sup>16</sup> Along similar lines, Gendler (2000, 76) has explained how principles allowing the import of truths about the actual world to the content of fictions are a coin whose reverse side are corresponding *export principles*, allowing audiences in some cases (realist fiction genres, such as historical novels, biopics, etc.) to infer from fictional contents truths about the actual world.<sup>17</sup>

This first mechanism accounting for how we can learn straightforward empirical truths from fictions implements standard accounts of indirection in a specific way: the genre-codified “understanding between the author and his readers” that Lewis talks about can be seen as an invocation of the maxim of Relation, circumscribed to the specific conversations that engagements with fictions in the relevant genres are, and their specific illocutionary aims. In brief, the Gricean derivation I thus envisage goes along the following lines: “The author of (2) invites me to imagine its content, committing herself to the imaginative project of which this is part being worth-indulging for readers like me. This is part of a fiction with serious ambitions, one of whose themes is animal rights. For such an imaginative project to be worth carrying out, propositions like (2) stating the facts that frame the thematic moral issues that the author raises for readers to consider should be true. Hence, the author is also assertorically committing to (2).”<sup>18</sup>

Given this, unlike Green I take these cases to already support Literary Cognitivism (LC) in the way he (2017a, 48) defines it: “literary fiction can be a source of knowledge in a way that depends crucially on its being fictional”. Green’s (2016, 286) reason against this is not that he understands LC to require that the knowledge in question could not be provided by non-fictional means; he explicitly rejects this interpretation. His reason appears to be that the fictional settings in which (1) and (2) are embedded are not “crucial” to our acquiring the relevant pieces of factual knowledge. However, on the suggested account the assertions are in fact inferred given a maxim of relation specific to the relevant fiction-making *genre*: it is the positive evaluation of the imaginative projects proposed by the fictions as such, given the fundamental illocutionary category to which they belong, which requires that their settings are sufficiently realistic. I think it is reasonable to count this as “crucial” enough to the specific fictional character of those works for these cases to already validate LC.



I agree with Green however that a second way by which we can learn propositions from fictions more clearly establishes LC. Lewis (1978, 278-9) also envisaged it:

Fiction can offer us contingent truths about this world. It cannot take the place of non-fictional evidence, to be sure. But sometimes evidence is not lacking. We who have lived in the world for a while have plenty of evidence, but we may not have learned as much from it as we could have done. This evidence bears on a certain proposition. If only that proposition is formulated, straightway it will be apparent that we have very good evidence for it. If not, we will continue not to know it. Here, fiction can help us. If we are given a fiction such that the proposition is obviously true in it, we are led to ask: and is it also true *simpliciter*? And sometimes, when we have plenty of unappreciated evidence, to ask the question is to know the answer.

Gendler (*op. cit.*, 76) calls this second inferential process “*narrative as factory*: I export things from the story whose truth becomes apparent as a result of thinking about the story itself. These I add to my stock the way I add knowledge gained by modeling”. Green (2010, 2016, 2017a) has nicely developed a model which I take to be an elaboration of these ideas. On this model, we can acquire knowledge from fiction along the lines that we do when we make valid inferences based on suppositions.

I have previously illustrated this with what appear to be thematic claims made in fictions about the very philosophical matter we have been discussing – the possibility of acquiring knowledge from fiction. Being professionally interested in the topic, we should expect fictions to convey views about it. And of course, there are many examples of this kind. The already mentioned short story by Julio Cortázar, “A Continuity of Parks”, is a good example. A claim we can take it to be putting for our consideration is modal: there might be fictions whose contents are entirely true. This would be a philosophical claim, contradicting some

views on fiction (cp. Deutsch 2000). Drawing on recent work on the epistemology of modality, Stokes (2006) elaborates on how fictions support such modal claims.<sup>19</sup> The basic idea is that they make situations conceivable; under certain assumptions, developed in different ways by different philosophers, this supports a claim that what is thus conceivable is thereby also possible. Lewis (1978, 278) also envisaged this: “Fiction might serve as a means for discovery of modal truth ... Here the fiction serves the same purpose as an example in philosophy ... the philosophical example is just a concise bit of fiction.”

The two sorts of case I have discussed for assertions (and other assertoric acts) to be indirectly made in fictions are instances of indirection of the *additive* kind, typically inferred via derivations based on a Relation maxim specific to conversations whose aims are those constitutive of fiction-making, and involving genre considerations. We can also think of examples of *substitution* indirection involving purported fictions. Consider, for instance, an obvious roman-à-clef “novel” which, being terribly boring, narratively pedestrian, lacking any interesting dialogue or ideas, and so on and so forth, falls manifestly short of fulfilling the specific goals of fictions; while, on the other hand, it contains interesting and reliable information, and its having being published as fiction can be easily explained – censorship in a dictatorial state, potential expensive lawsuits in a liberal one. In such a case, the alleged fiction-making is sheer pretense; only the assertoric acts are really made.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper I have discussed two disagreements I have with Mitch Green’s work, if I understand it correctly: that fictions result from specific illocutionary acts; and that they make assertions and other constative acts through a process of speech act indirection. I have

summed up reasons developed elsewhere that there are indirect, merely hinted or insinuated assertoric acts. I have also rehearsed a normative account of fiction-making as a specific type of illocutionary act. Finally, I have elaborated on such basis on a way to understand how fictions make assertions, as a form of indirect speech acts.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In a paper I couldn't read until this one was already submitted, Green's (2018a, §3) views appear to have evolved farther away from the ones I am questioning here; he appears to allow there that the implicature in Grice's recommendation letter case is an assertion.

<sup>2</sup> Bach (2006, 24) provides another example to the same effect, but it might be taken as a case of asserting both a content and another logically entailed by it.

<sup>3</sup> Pepp (forthcoming) makes similar points.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Bach & Harnish (1979), 10-12. As it will transpire, Currie appears to mean by 'literal' what I do by 'direct'. If so, as I explain below, in fact I agree with him that fiction-making is "literal", thus understood, even when done with verbal means.

<sup>5</sup> Green would agree; cf. his (2018b) for a nice recent formulation.

<sup>6</sup> Walton (1990, 85-9) offers reasons against the specific speech-act view that Currie (1990, 35-42) provides good replies to. Ohmann (1971), Grant (2001), Sutrop (2002), and Stock (2017b) also support the speech-act view; Gale (1971), Searle (1974/5), Alward (2009, 2010a) and Friend (2012) object to it.

<sup>7</sup> Gale (1971, 335-7) takes acts of fiction-making to be “a special kind of illocutionary act”, but, like Searle, takes this to consist in “illocutionary disengagement”, i.e., in the pretense that the ordinary speech acts indicated by the moods are performed, when in fact they are not.

<sup>8</sup> Green (2017b, 1595, fn) offers what is in fact a different delineation of speech acts, although I assume he takes it to be a mere variation on the official one: “I use ‘speech act’ to refer to an act that can be performed by speaker-meaning that one is doing so”. Although I don’t take speaker-meaning to be constitutive of meaning, neither in Grice’s nor Green’s understanding, my objections to the performative definition don’t extend to this. For, as Camp (2018) points out, people who hint a bribe or a threat speaker-mean it. The same obviously applies to depiction. Green (2018b, 101-2) also offers the speaker-meaning definition; he counts threats as speech acts, not acts of speech.

<sup>9</sup> Green (1999, 2000) appeals to a general normative notion of commitment in his deservedly influential work on general features of different speech acts.

<sup>10</sup> Alward (2010a) provides a nice metaphor for the fiction-making speech acts from which I take fictions to result: they would be the deployment of “word-sculptures” – it would be better to generalize this to “representation-sculptures”, so as to encompass films and pictures. He provides a “weakly institutionalist” account of fictionality, which is consistent with my favored (García-Carpintero 2013, 2016, 2019) normative speech-act account. Alward himself, however, takes his account to be an alternative to speech-act views, which he rejects. His criticisms, however (*op. cit.*, 395) only take into consideration Gricean descriptive proposals such as Currie’s or Stock’s; they are easily dealt with by normative views like the one I favor – see García-Carpintero 2019, and the discussion of “onstage illocution” below.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Wood (1998), 198.

<sup>12</sup> Green (1999, 2017b) elaborates on how the Cooperative Principle is just a general one, to be further specified relative to the specific conversational aims, record and acts comprising particular conversations. He (2017a, 54-5; 2017b, 1601-2) makes a good case for fictions as conversations (cf. Carroll 1992); Dixon & Bortolussi (2001) object to this, but Gerrig & Horton (2001) have a good rejoinder. The view of engagement with fictions as conversations also fits better with their being results of specific speech acts rather than mere acts of speech.

<sup>13</sup> Against Dinges (2015), I believe that the derivation for all implicatures, both additive and substitutional, takes as a premise the violation of a maxim at the level of what is said – usually Relation in the substitutional cases that Dinges focusses on. On a similar vein, Bach & Harnish (1979, 70) distinguish *nonliteral* direct acts (*substitutional* implicatures) from *indirect* ones (*additive* implicatures); cf. also Bach (1994, 144). From the present perspective, the distinction is spurious – Bach & Harnish themselves rightly worry about the case of understatement, which should be indirect but literal for them (*op. cit.* 292).

<sup>14</sup> Cp. Hoffman 2004, 519-20, which I don't think succeeds in recovering Searle's argument by appeal to Searle's "Principle of Expressibility" (see also Alward 2009, 324): as suggested above in the main text, the proposals or invitations that I take acts of fiction-making to be are, indeed, explicitly expressible, by means of the performative formula.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Bach & Harnish (1979, 64), Martinich (1980, 219-20), Vanderveken 1991, 376-380, and Green (1999, 2017b, 1598-9) for compelling ways, based on such standard accounts, to dispose of Alward's (2010b, 356; 2009, 324-5) worry that an extension of Grice's maxims to the act of fiction-making would be *ad hoc*; see Kania (2007, 406) for a similar reply.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Friend (2017) for discussion and an alternative, which she calls *Reality Assumption*: everything that is (really) true is fictionally the case, unless excluded by the work.

<sup>17</sup> For an account of genres that I like, and fits nicely the present normative framework, cf. Abell (2014, 32). Genre membership is a function of (common knowledge of) the purposes defining a given category (the historical novel) plus the producer's intention that the work performs those purposes.

<sup>18</sup> This just presents as a case of indirection Stock's (2017, 29, 31-2) take on the example.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. also Ichikawa & Jarvis (2009) and Elgin (2014) on assimilating fictions on this score to thought-experiments.