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# Accommodating Reality: The Generic Justification of Fiction and Nonfiction in a Postmodern Paradigm

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Accommodating Reality:  
The Generic Justification of Fiction and Nonfiction  
in a Postmodern Paradigm

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with  
**Departmental Honors**

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November, 2013

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the recent dissolution of generic boundaries that has destabilized the distinctive qualities of fiction and nonfiction in the postmodern age. I undertook this project in an attempt to address a paradox found within contemporary literature—the paradox that exists when a work presents itself as both fiction and nonfiction or as an entity outside of this duality. I approach the conflict represented by this paradox by first addressing the formative processes and critical environment that shaped it as an issue in contemporary culture. Within this contemporary critical environment—characterized by the destabilization of traditional generic boundaries—there is a tension that exists between two fundamental theoretical positions. One side wants the certainty and simplicity of fiction and nonfiction’s past distinguishability, while the other side wants, or decried as necessary, a problematized view of fiction and nonfiction that allows for a greater diversity of expression in a work’s relationship with reality. This thesis seeks to engage with this problem by proposing a model of generic justification that allows for multiple ways of understanding generic identity. The model distinguishes between a conventional understanding (fiction and nonfiction), a rhetorical understanding (fictionality and nonfictionality), and a referential understanding (fictivity and reality). In doing so this model both retains and resolves the newfound indeterminacy of fiction and nonfiction. My hope is that with this model of generic justification a wide variety of theoretical and practical positions will be able to find expression in contemporary narratives by providing a terminology capable of categorizing a given work unequivocally as either fiction or nonfiction, as well as providing a continuum of fictionality and nonfictionality capable of expressing the generic indeterminacy

valued by postmodernism. I conclude this thesis with a set of original narratives designed to explicate and test the theoretical program I put forth.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*It is perfectly okay to write garbage—as long as you edit brilliantly.*  
- C. J. Cherryh

More often than not I feel my writing lacks a fundamental coherence and cogency. If my paper is of any success I assure any audience that it is only by the editorial and advisorial lengths to which Annjeanette Wiese has gone. She has supported me even when I have been far from an ideal student. I have struggled and flailed and run up against many a wall, but ultimately I have learned in this process, and borne witness to great kindness and understanding. Thank you for your ‘brilliant’ editing, and thank you for giving me room enough to stumble so that I might find my way back up. Thanks as well to my family and friends, and to Adrien.

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## Introduction

*Has a pure fiction ever existed? And a pure nonfiction? The answer in both cases is obviously negative...Nonetheless, the two pure types can be conceived of.*—Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, 15

*The possibility of [generic] hybridization does not necessarily mean that two categories are inherently indeterminate: the many shades of gray on the spectrum from black to white do not turn black and white into the same color. On the contrary, grays result from different proportions of two well-defined ingredients blended into homogenous color, or from various patterns of discrete black and white elements.*—Marie-Laure Ryan, “Postmodernism and the Doctrine of Panfictionality,” 166

Whether in discourse or in life, there is something paradoxically discriminatory and familial in the process of identifying something as belonging to one group and not another. As much as we are drawn to the simplicity of categorization, we are also encouraged to lament the loss of individuality. Fiction and nonfiction are labels that speak to this duality more than most. They are pervasive throughout our society, with a reach far beyond the textual terrain that is ostensibly the scope of their purview.

Of late some feel these labels of fiction and nonfiction are inadequate, or anachronistic—that our contemporary literary and discursive environment defies the erstwhile and reductive practice of generic categorization. I, however, believe that fiction and nonfiction hold an important place within our society, and an important capacity to speak to the relationship a given work holds with reality.<sup>1</sup> These categorical terms are not only useful programmatically and pragmatically,<sup>2</sup> but are also of use in that they allow us

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<sup>1</sup> My use of the term ‘reality’ throughout this paper, unless otherwise stated, will always imply a conception of reality as arrived at by the adoption of a given conceptual framework (e.g. positivism, subjectivism, objectivism, etc.; or based on a theoretical stance toward mediation and/or reality: e.g. correspondence, consensus, etc.).

<sup>2</sup> They aid in such innocuous concerns as on which shelf to place a book to such societal concerns as establishing school reading lists to such normative concerns as deciding what you should/want to dedicate time to reading. The practical concerns are seen especially in school reading lists, such as seen in the article “Teachers Differ over Meeting Nonfiction Rule,” in the January 30<sup>th</sup> issue of *Education Week*, which

insight into something fundamental about the nature of a work. Narrative kinds (genres) allow us the ability to name a collection of works by their similarities, but they also allow us to better understand an individual work as belonging to a particular identity.

Fiction and nonfiction have been destabilized as categories of late, in favor of views that suggest a more complicated picture of reality and its mediation. New historiographical, novelistic, and biographical practices have arisen that draw attention to their resistance of categorization, flouting past methodology. Historians are acknowledging the artificial meaning that arises when they conform events to narrative, and novelists are finding that incorporating factual events in their writing lends a sense of respectability.

*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, A National Book Critics Circle award winner by Sherman Alexie, is a good example of a work that draws upon some tenuous claim to nonfiction when it notes on the back cover that the story was inspired by the author's life. Knowing that it has this nebulous connection to reality is enough to hold every sadness and every joy, chronicled in the novel, as possible fact of the author's life. When the artifice of fiction is questioned a text's ability to draw out an emotional response from the reader becomes that much easier.

Postmodernism has played a large part in having made suspect the erstwhile veracity of these genres. Nietzsche is known to have said "There are no truths, only interpretations" (Scruton 5-6). This statement points to a central theme in the postmodernist project: a preoccupation with the problematic nature of truth and falsity.

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discusses the state mandate in Arkansas to increase the number of 'information texts' in their school curriculum. Jonathan Hunt, a librarian for the Modesto County School District, writes in his May/June 2013 article for *The Horn Book Magazine* that by fourth grade school standards require teachers to assign students to read fifty percent fiction and fifty percent nonfiction.

David Hawkes in his work, *Ideology*, positions Nietzsche as “the major nineteenth-century source for the ideas which characterize today’s postmodern condition” (155). Viewing Nietzsche in this light allows us to view his quote as revealing of much of the postmodern attitude that grips our contemporary conceptual framework, and allows us to see some of the motivation behind many of the recent literary works that destabilize the border of fiction and nonfiction. We can also view this quote, when seen in the context of the liar paradox (‘this sentence is false’)<sup>3</sup>, as suggesting some underlying thematic paradox in the postmodern treatment of truth and falsity, and by extension the genres of fiction and nonfiction.<sup>4</sup>

This paradoxical nature has worked its way into contemporary texts through the vehicle of blurring the lines between fiction and nonfiction, and in so doing it has created a tension inherent in postmodern writing. Discursive vehicles that create tension in writing are important to the project of captivating an audience, and as such are coveted by authors. Captivating writing is almost always characterized by exploring a fundamental tension within subject matter—the verity that conflict (or agon)<sup>5</sup> is essential to good writing. Postmodern writing often positions the work itself, and its generic indeterminacy, as the cause of this tension. As such it is no surprise that so many authors

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<sup>3</sup> The philosopher Roger Scruton points out the impact of the liar paradox on Nietzsche’s famous adage in his section “On Postmodernism,” in *Modern Philosophy: An Introduction and Survey*, pages 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Of course this sentence can be viewed as only paradoxical if the author, or speaker, positions it as a truth. Should one state it not as a truth but as an interpretation of reality, in an attempt to resolve the paradox, they would be validating their claim by virtue of their claim—a circular form of reasoning. One must either account for disregarding logic or embrace the nature of this statement as paradoxical.

<sup>5</sup> Agon is an ancient Greek term (as seen in protagonist and antagonist) that H. Porter Abbott discusses in chapter 5 of *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (55-7). He writes that “in almost every narrative of any interest, there is a conflict in which power is at stake. You might say that conflict structures narrative” (55).

have explored and exploited this indeterminate generic terrain. It is an appealing new avenue in the continual quest for originality.

This style of writing is appealing because there is nothing so perfect as a paradox: something that is, but cannot be, and thus perpetuates itself without the imperfection of possible existence; and yet reconciling things possessed of contradictory natures has long been an irresistibly tantalizing project of human thought and endeavor. Paradoxes spur us into action to resolve them, so that we might populate the world with nothing but possible things—which is sadly to the detriment of impossible things. In line with this project that aims to resolve paradoxes, we can come to view postmodernism as both problematizing past generic understandings with one hand, and simultaneously asking (although probably rhetorically) for resolution to this generic problem with the other.

With this thesis I have set out to establish a theoretical perspective concerning a reader's ability to distinguish between the narrative kinds (genres) of fiction and nonfiction. I propose that there exists a framework in which to analyze fiction and nonfiction as both clearly distinguishable from one another and, as well, as necessarily indistinguishable.

### ***Outline of Paper***

Section I of this thesis intends to provide the reader with an awareness of the critical environment that has informed our understanding of fiction and nonfiction in recent years. This section shows the various ways and reasons by which fiction and

nonfiction have been problematized. It seeks, as well, to isolate a problem characterizing this new critical environment, and concludes with the claim that resolution to this problem can be found in a conception of generic justification that allows for fiction and nonfiction to have both absolute and scalar characteristics.

Section II takes a largely narratological approach to put forth the central theoretical claim of this thesis. In this section I argue for clear distinctions between three generic levels of analysis. The first contains fiction, nonfiction, and hybrid; the second contains fictionality and nonfictionality; and the third contains fictivity and reality. The first level has the capacity for absolute generic characterization, the second and third levels have a joint capacity for scalar generic characterization.

Section III is a collection of original narratives demonstrative of fictional, nonfictional, and hybrid situations. These narratives will be used to illustrate and test the program of generic justification that is proposed in section II.

Section IV will offer a concluding analysis of the implications of these views on contemporary literary practices.

## SECTION I: A New Discursive Territory

### ***A Contemporary Movement***

The literary vanguard of late is increasingly characterized not only by its perennial desire to explore new narrative possibilities, but also by a growing fascination with postmodernism's proclivity for tearing down generic boundaries—especially concerning those boundaries demarcating the two genres of greatest consequence to objective reality: fiction and nonfiction. This postmodern trend, or literary movement, can be seen in such works as Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, which situates itself both within the genre of high literature and the traditionally 'pulp' genre of detective fiction; as well as in Adam Mansbach and Ricardo Cortes's comical picture book *Go the F\_ck to Sleep*, which also speaks to this recent literary bent for conflating or combining genres, in this case the genres of adult and children's literature. It is in the blurring of the lines between fiction and nonfiction where the controversy within this movement of generic hybridization lies.<sup>6</sup> Postmodernism's preoccupation with truth and falsity positions these two eminent genres, of fiction and nonfiction, as central to the identity of the postmodern movement. This hybrid movement, while not postmodernism in its entirety, is largely found within postmodernist writings. As described by David Shields, it is a literary and cultural movement defined by "a blurring (to the point of invisibility) of any distinction between fiction and nonfiction" (5). And while Shields, writing in 2010, describes this movement as presently "forming," I see it contrastingly as having solidified extensively

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<sup>6</sup> Works representative of this postmodernist problematization of fiction and nonfiction include *Ragtime* by E.L. Doctorow; *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote; *Maus* Vol. I and II by Art Spiegelman; *The Right Stuff* by Tom Wolfe; and many of the works of Lauren Slater and Joan Didion.

from the loose set of sensibilities that characterized its nascence in the 1960s.<sup>7</sup> This movement has shaped a new category of generic classification, defined by the hybridization of fictional and nonfictional works.

At present this postmodern movement characterized by hybridized works has experienced two levels of literary evolution; on the one hand, the movement is viewed as still (and maybe essentially) of an indeterminate ontological, metaphysical, and epistemological stance; yet, on the other hand, as an increasingly consolidated literary genre that exists parallel to fiction and nonfiction. This later point is evidenced by people's increased awareness and acceptance of a unique discursive space created by this movement. This is a space that, although contained within undefined borders, now exists as a definitive category of generic hybridization—akin to, and framed within, the genres of fiction and nonfiction.

A multitude of generic hybrids have resulted from this literary space. This has been to the ultimate effect of creating a host of new narrative subgenres, each with its own tenuous allegiance to one generic parent or the other: from creative nonfiction, to literary/new journalism, to the nonfiction novel, to documentary fiction, to redefining the essay. Works created in this space are often given the attribution of 'hybrid.'<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The 1960s was a time period that was colored by such burgeoning practices as New Journalism: epitomized in the eponymous anthology edited by Tom Wolfe and E.W. Johnson as well as the essay by Tom Wolfe of the same name ("The New Journalism"). Wallace Martin also uses the 1960s as a fulcrum in narrative history, suggesting that it marked fundamental changes in narrative theory, chiefly a shift from emphasizing the genre of novel to the mode of narrative (8). This shift, by providing a mode that encompassed both fiction and nonfiction, allowed a forum for critiquing and understanding both genres with one set of theoretical tools.

<sup>8</sup> This generic attribution has been adopted by various theorists, Marie-Laure Ryan and Dorrit Cohn, as well as others, while Margot Singer and Nicole Walker have titled Part I of their anthology, *Bending Genre*, 'Hybrids.' It is a term that appears to have been adopted by authors, critics, and academics, but not by publishing houses and library catalogs as an official designation.

Postmodernism's generation of this new discursive space has precipitated novelists, historians, journalists, biographers, memoirists, and others to regularly, and intentionally, problematize aspects of form and subject in their writing in such a way as to position their works between genres rather than within one. Works problematized in this way have made these new discursive creations resistant to the longstanding tradition of definitive generic classifications.

Postmodern authors problematize their narratives in such a metaleptical<sup>9</sup> way as to force the reader and critic alike to address the text in the same fashion that it (the postmodern text) addresses itself: as exploring its own ability to mediate a given conception of reality. This is in contrast to texts prior to postmodernism that relied on the generic labels of fiction and nonfiction to ascribe their relationship to reality.<sup>10</sup> As such, we live in an age where it is increasingly difficult to say with authority that a work is definitively something, and not something else; because for every Art Spiegelman claiming their work is nonfiction, there is a New York Times editor claiming it is not.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This narratological consideration of metalepsis (a "violation of narrative levels") occurs in postmodernist writing by virtue, as Hayden White notes, of the "objectivity" in postmodernism (Abbot 237; White 312). "Postmodernist 'objectivity,'" writes White, "is aware of its own constructed nature and makes this work of construction the subject of its discourse" (312). White's application of the term 'objectivity' in this instance is an explicit departure from traditional understandings (Gertrude Himmelfarb's conception of objectivity), such that it is characterized by its prioritization of reality over "truth as an end in itself" (312).

<sup>10</sup> Even a work like *The Journal of a Disappointed Man*, written in 1911 (clearly before postmodernism) chronicling the life of W.N.P Barbellion was subject to the labels of fiction and nonfiction given the public outcry that occurred when Barbellion's purported date of death was shown to have been intentionally erroneous. There was, at that time, not an accepted alternative category of categorization, and no sizable niche within society accepting of an alternative category. For further information on Barbellion reference Abbott (31 and 145).

<sup>11</sup> This is in reference to an event recounted by Art Spiegelman in his supplementary text to *Maus*, *MetaMaus*. He recounts how he wrote a letter to the *New York Times* after Vol. II of *Maus* was released in a successful effort to have his book moved from the fiction ledger of bestsellers to the nonfiction ledger. The event is quite memorable for one editor's quip in rebuttal that it would unlikely be a six-foot-tall mouse, the chief animal of the book's metaphor, that would respond should Spiegelman's doorbell ring (150).

## ***Motivations for Generic Conflation***

There seem to be two fundamental motivating factors for why authors create hybrid works: the discursive prowess (formal, stylistic, and otherwise) of infusing fictional and nonfictional techniques in their respective generic opposite, and an individual's commitment to a certain philosophical/theoretical program. This latter point is also why critics of a particular mindset will redefine many works, *ex post facto*, as generically hybrid.<sup>12</sup>

To this first point, the encroachment of one genre upon the other is regularly a function of an authorial desire to mitigate the perceived rigidity of nonfiction and the ostensible triviality of fiction. There is a freedom and expressive capacity that comes with writing in this postmodern niche of hybridization, such that it opens doors to authors that were previously closed. Historiographic works are freed from their stereotyped portrayal as tomes that can only contain facts by drawing upon the emotive, formal, and symbolic conventions found in fiction; while novels may now acquire an air of respectability by their inclusion of factual elements, the least of which could make jealous even the most hubristic of realist techniques.

For many writers and critics, however, the decision to blur the lines between fiction and nonfiction is not a choice but a condition of writing. This points to the second motivating factor, that there exist philosophical/theoretical paradigms which demand certain ways of understanding language and the process of mediation. Chiefly, within this

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<sup>12</sup> This points to an important methodological distinction to be made in the process of generic justification, between giving priority to the reader, writer, text, or critical community.

movement, is the view that there is something inherent in narrative, or writing in general, that disallows definitive categorization. Modernity in general and postmodernism specifically have established new conceptual paradigms which conceive of language as incapable of mediating reality without problems.<sup>13</sup> The philosophies of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, Gerard Genette, Hayden White and others have severed our naïve and unproblematic understanding of the relationship of sign and referent, and thus revealed facets of language and conceptions of reality that unravel our belief that there is a naïve correspondence between a given text and a view of reality external to its mediation.<sup>14</sup>

The implication of these philosophical views has largely been to the detriment of nonfiction's stature in critical communities. Marie-Laure Ryan points out the subsuming quality by which many now characterize fiction, incorporating into its folds works that were previously understood as nonfiction (165). Ryan even affords this new stance a term, "panfictionality": "the expansion of fiction at the expense of nonfiction" (165). Historically the bias, as Ryan notes, was in favor of nonfiction, "regarding fiction as the problematic category" (166). Raymond Williams notes that it was probably the understanding of these genres as a divide between 'pure imagination' and fact that contributed "to the confidence of this discrimination" against fiction (134).<sup>15</sup> This bias,

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<sup>13</sup> Views of this nature are in response to naïve realism. This is a concept occasionally referred to in the disciplines of psychology and philosophy as 'direct realism.' How it is understood with regard to the process of mediation is that there is an uncomplicated correspondence between the words, sentences, and pictures (referential elements) of media and the 'real' thing which these mediate.

<sup>14</sup> Chiefly of note among these philosophies are Saussure's exploration of the relationship of sign and referent (and subsequent implications of this relationship as largely arbitrary, onomatopoeia being the notable exception), White's emphasis on the constructed nature of historical narratives, and Wittgenstein's conception of linguistic acts as "language games" (reliant heavily on the understanding of linguistic rules, a continually evolving nature, and conventionality).

<sup>15</sup> This was noted in his "vocabulary of culture and society," *Keywords*. Williams also notes how libraries, in 1976, "will reserve or pay postage on any non-fiction but refuse these facilities for fiction" (134).

however, has of late been overturned in favor of problematizing nonfiction instead of fiction, to the effect of creating a discursive landscape that is increasingly characterized by fictional understanding.

Bruce Ballenger, in *Crafting Truth: Short Studies in Creative Nonfiction*, writes offhandedly that “nonfiction obviously has a different relationship to reality” than fiction does. The obviousness of this claim, however, is less ubiquitous than Ballenger suggests. Barbara Foley ascribes the motivation behind problematizing nonfiction to the “reality-as-fiction thesis,” which rejects the notion that there is an ‘obvious’ difference in nonfiction’s relationship to reality (13). Adherents of this thesis believe that the mediation of reality is, and always has been, a construction. Robert Scholes sums up the general reasoning behind this view when he says: “We do not imitate the world, we construct versions of it. There is no mimesis only poesis. No recording. Only constructing” (quoted by Foley 13). The author E.L. Doctorow ascribes to an iteration of this view and has written that “there is no fiction or nonfiction as we commonly understand the distinction; there is only narrative” (quoted by Foley 9).

Contrary to this view are Marie-Laure Ryan and Dorrit Cohn, who hold that “hybridization does not necessarily mean that [the categories of fiction and nonfiction] are inherently indeterminate” (Ryan 165). They believe that there are distinguishing qualities of form that can be made which allow for differentiation between fiction and nonfiction, even in light of contemporary philosophical/theoretical persuasions that others (those noted above) have claimed suggest otherwise.

## ***The Problem***

Given this newfound critical environment, and the plethora of hybrid creations it produces, there has arisen a diverse collection of objections, fears, and concerns over what the labels of nonfiction and fiction now mean. There are fears that the tacit agreement of the past—between author, publisher, and reader—based on a covenant of trust in the traditional implications of generic labels, has now been discarded in favor of the broad applicability of a single genre possessed of only vague limitations. The capacity of the paratextual labels of fiction and nonfiction to denote convincingly a text’s specific relationship to reality is increasingly being replaced by an understanding of these labels as no longer a means to denote, but instead only a means to suggest or connote a vague generic identity.

In light of these concerns there appears a need to maintain the definitive characterizations that these genres held in the past, to do contrary would be to open the doors to skepticism of a work’s relationship to reality without end. So the question is, how can we reconcile our practical desire (and need) to reclaim erstwhile uncomplicated definitions of fiction and nonfiction, with our present theoretical understandings, academic sensibilities, and artistic wants that desire the ability to distinguish among narrative kinds in a highly specific (accurate) way?

The extreme at one end of this question is the theorist Benedetto Croce, who had what Paul Hernadi called a “resolute aversion toward genre” (11). Croce conceived of knowledge as of two possible kinds: intuitive (based on impressions) and conceptual (based on philosophical and scientific inquiry). Croce believed that the mere act, even in the slightest, of acquiring conceptual knowledge of a given work limits one’s ability to

acquire intuitive knowledge; and thus, when one prioritizes the facts of a work, they are unable to discern the ‘esthetic fact’ of that work (Hernadi 10). Croce saw the individualism of a work as tarnished by its categorization, or as he put it: “he who begins to think scientifically has already ceased to contemplate esthetically” (Hernadi 11).

At the other extreme of this question is the view that the generic classification of fiction and nonfiction provides a function in our society that impacts it to such an extent as to require a rigid and uncompromised taxonomic structure of generic identities. That *The New York Times* does not have a bestseller ledger for hybrids suggests this cultural persuasion. In many ways this is a persuasion in-line with the belief that too many choices generates anxiety within the individual and has a negative impact on our ability to make quality decisions.<sup>16</sup> We see people of this persuasion who are both fiction and nonfiction authors: whether it is Virginia Woolf opining “let it be fact, one feels, or let it be fiction. The imagination will not serve under two masters simultaneously,” or children’s nonfiction author Tanya Lee Stone saying “give me fact or give me fiction... call me a purist but there are lines to be drawn” (quoted by Michael A. Flower 60; Stone 84).

While the avoidance of extreme positions is not a logically sound practice, it is a reasonable one. That two sides can feel so strongly about a point of view suggests that there might be truth to be glimpsed in both positions.

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<sup>16</sup> The psychologist Barry Shwartz argues that too many choices fosters anxiety, and actively restricting choices is of positive benefit to society. He argues this in his 2004 book *The Paradox of Choice—Why More is Less*. New York : ECCO, 2004.

## ***Critical Objective***

There is a myriad of questions and problems that one can discern from this overview of fiction and nonfiction's shift toward indeterminacy in contemporary society. How are we to understand the relationship of these two terms? By what criteria or criterion should a given work qualify/disqualify as belonging to either the genre of fiction or nonfiction—or be seen, alternatively, as a hybrid creation? Can a given work really be just one thing and not the other, or can it be both, or neither? And will the world turn any different should our understanding solidify as one view and not another?

Rattling around within this motley assortment of questions is a general concern that this paper seeks to address—a concern that is equal parts inquisitive and wary as it seeks both the diversity of individualized understanding and freedom from indeterminacy. So the question is (to reiterate its presentation on page 12), is there a conception of fiction and nonfiction that allows us to reclaim these genres' erstwhile unequivocal nature, yet maintain the high degree of academic scrutiny that conceives of a vast diversity of relationships through which narrative works can correspond to reality?

In response to this question my objective with this thesis is to put forth a method of generic justification, as accomplished by the clarification of terminology, that allows one to maintain three separate views of a work's correspondence to reality: a trifold understanding of any given work as, either, unequivocally defined by either fiction, nonfiction or hybrid, as subject to a highly specific placement on a continuum of fictionality and nonfictionality, and as depicting a world that is referentially fictive or referentially real.



## SECTION II: A Model for Generic Justification

### *Introduction*

Is a work fiction or nonfiction? How does a work present itself with regard to a conception of reality? What is the relationship a work's storyworld has with a conception of reality? These are all questions that ostensibly seem to find resolution by implication should someone point to the genre of a work as fiction or nonfiction. I, however, will affirm that these are three different questions with three fundamentally different answers. Where the first question inquires what the genre of a work is (its classification as fiction or nonfiction), the second inquires about the rhetorical nature of a work (its communication of fictionality or nonfictionality),<sup>17</sup> and the third wonders at the referential correspondence of a work (its storyworld's fictivity or reality).<sup>18</sup>

I believe the current disagreements over fiction and nonfiction, which stem largely from postmodernist attitudes, are perpetuated primarily because of the equivocal nature with which people (theorists, critics, and average Janes alike) treat these questions. Our ability to distinguish between distinct levels of generic understanding (as compared to distinguishing simply between the genres of fiction and nonfiction) sidesteps many of the problems generated by postmodernism's destabilization of generic borderlines.

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<sup>17</sup> I chose to use the term 'nonfictionality' over the term factuality, because the latter connotes a sense of referential accuracy that I thought was best reserved for the distinction between fictive and real. In other words, nonfictionality is very often just the sense of nonfiction as expressed by form or content and not necessarily an expression of verified (factual) occurrence.

<sup>18</sup> My use of 'reality' here is based upon Wolf Schmid's contrasting of the term 'fictive' with the term 'real' (22).

The framework I propose that accomplishes this is established by effectively distinguishing between three levels of generic understanding. Each of the levels is characterized by the concepts of *fiction*, *fictionality* or *fictivity*, in addition to the nonfictional equivalents of these terms. The category of *hybrid* is also distinguished as equivalent to the genres of fiction and nonfiction in that it operates on the same level of generic understanding.

A condensed understanding of my program is as follows: I contend that the terms ‘fiction,’ ‘nonfiction,’ and ‘hybrid’ are representative of conventional generic categories and exist on a level of generic understanding that is distinct from the two other levels referenced in this thesis. The level of generic understanding that they operate on is one of a given community’s acceptance or denial of certain discursive practices, as well as a given community’s tolerance for a lack of referential correspondence in nonfiction. Generic understanding at this level categorizes a text as an operative whole and possesses an absolute expressive quality. By contrast the terms ‘fictionality’ and ‘nonfictionality,’ constitute a second level of generic understanding that speaks to the ability of a text to communicate itself to a reader as fiction or nonfiction. These categories, unlike fiction and nonfiction, are representative of a singular scalar system in which they act in the capacity of idealized forms that demarcate the theoretical poles of a continuum. Existing as such, they speak to an expressive quality in narrative that is characterized by graduation, degree, and/or measure. The qualities of fictivity and reality constitute the third level of generic understanding. Fictivity and reality have the extratextual capacity to give a name to the actual referential correspondence of a work. By this feature fictivity and reality speak to the most fundamental aspect of fiction and nonfiction: is a text real or

is it imaginative; do events and existents temporally preexist the narrative that references them or are they created “by and with the text” (Cohn 15)? The normative benefits of distinguishing effectively among these terms allow us the practical advantage of being able to categorize something unequivocally as either fiction or nonfiction, as well as the benefits of having a continuum capable of expressing the generic indeterminacy so valued by postmodernism.

## ***Big Picture***

This thesis takes a largely narratological approach to offer a contemporary model of generic justification. I envision this as a framework by which an individual or community can analyze, label, and discuss a work’s relationship to a given conception of reality. The past, or traditional structure of generic justification is a single tiered structure comprised of fiction and nonfiction that emphasizes the ‘either/or’<sup>19</sup> method of categorization, where a given work is either one genre ‘or’ the other. Postmodernist writings have reacted to the simplistic bivalent nature<sup>20</sup> of this model, but only so much as to tear it down or declare a single term sufficient for both categories (often ‘fiction’ or ‘narrative’).<sup>21</sup> I seek to offer a replacement model of generic justification, one that accommodates postmodern attitudes as well as traditional distinctions.

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<sup>19</sup> This is in reference to the exclusive rather than inclusive sense of the disjunctive.

<sup>20</sup> The use of ‘bivalent’ in this sentence is in reference to logical bivalence: the philosophical concept where something is viewed as either true or false, with no other alternatives.

<sup>21</sup> Ryan mentions that “if culture were made by its theorists, it would be headed toward a single huge category that subsumes every utterance” (165).

## ***Understanding Generic Understanding***

One of the key distinctions that needs to be understood for this model of generic justification to be successful, is that there exists such a concept as *generic understanding* as it is distinct from the concept of *understanding a genre*. Understanding a genre is to understand the identity of a genre (what distinguishes it from other genres). This process paints the term genre as a very black or white term (e.g. a work is either fiction or nonfiction). Generic understanding, by contrast, suggests that there are a breadth of ways to apply the sentiment that characterizes a genre. My use of the phrase generic understanding is intended to denote the capacity of genre to characterize a narrative in multiple ways. My three-tier model of generic justification is intended to account for these multiple ways.

As this project focuses on suggesting a model of *generic justification* it will serve to also explicate this expression. Justifying a given work, a collection of works, or the constituent part of a work, as belonging to a specific generic identity is an action that I am treating as the reasonable assessment of a work, collection of works, or constituent part of a work as having expressive qualities of a genre in sufficient number or measure as to qualify it (them) as belonging to that genre.

## ***The Thesis's Scope***

I have chosen to limit my exploration of fiction and nonfiction to those works that are characterized as narratives. This is, however, to the elimination of the most nonfictional of the nonfiction texts. Richard Walsh, in “Fictionality and Mimesis: Between Narrativity and Fictional Worlds,” makes the accusation that narrativity and fictionality have regularly been conflated in recent years, such that when a work is characterized by narrativity it is also necessarily characterized by fictionality (110). If this is true it suggests that the works of the greatest nonfiction are those works that are most completely divorced from the characteristics of narrative.<sup>22</sup> Narrative, however, has acquired a discursive breadth of late, taking over a lot of discursive territory outside of fiction. We can see this in Doctorow’s contention that both fiction and nonfiction should not only hold the distinction of narrative, but also be replaced by it (as noted in section I).

Hayden White remarks that “so natural is the impulse to narrate, so inevitable is the form of narrative for any report on the way things really happened, that narrativity could appear problematical only in a culture in which it was absent” (1). Understanding narrative in this way positions it as a discursive mode that is regularly, if not almost always, used when one is writing history. White, however, contrastingly, establishes that narrative is not always used in historiography. He points out that non-narrative modes of historiography also exist in the form of the meditation, the anatomy, the annals, the chronicle, and the epitome (2). Nonfiction is not alone in its possession of non-narrative forms. There are certain poetic elements that fall outside of narrative (such as some lyric and conceptual poetry).

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<sup>22</sup> Hayden white seems to suggest a view along these lines in “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality.”

As a point of note, it is important to avoid confusing narratives that belong to the genre of nonfiction with the hybrid subgenre termed ‘narrative nonfiction’ (used often synonymously with creative nonfiction). ‘Narrative nonfiction’ is a subgenre of the hybrid genre, such that it combines fictional and nonfictional elements. Contrastingly, narratives that belong to the genre of nonfiction can, when very purely constructed, possess only as much fictionality and fictivity as the narrative mode affords it. *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* by Doris Kearns Goodwin is a classic example of a work firmly situated in the genre of nonfiction, yet also clearly a narrative. In other words Goodwin’s book would not be categorized as belonging to the subgenre ‘narrative nonfiction,’ even though it is both narrative and nonfiction.

## ***Terminology***

The terms I am using have been applied to various literary effects and discursive associations over the years. My application of them in this thesis is as follows:

*Fictionality* and *nonfictionality* can be characterized as communicative qualities of a work that always act toward the classification of a work as fiction or nonfiction respectively.<sup>23</sup> *Fictivity* and *reality* are the characterizations of an event or existent (object or character of the storyworld)<sup>24</sup> as either referentially imaginative (‘created by

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<sup>23</sup> My understanding of fictionality as possessing a rhetorical function is derived from Walsh’s characterization of it as a ‘rhetorical resource’ (110).

<sup>24</sup> Events and existents are the elements of the story. This is a reference to ‘story’ as it is used as a level of narrative analysis as distinct from the discourse level, roughly a distinction between what happens in a

and with the text') or existing in fact (temporally preexisting the text, usually in a non-mediated form). *Fiction* and *nonfiction* are labels that speak to a given work's mediation of real or fictive material as established by conventions (acceptable discursive practices) of the culture, society, or community that they are situated in. Much of what has shaped my understanding of this terminology is Wolf Schmid's explication of Gerard Genette's understanding of related terminology (Schmid 21-22). While this terminology has been applied in the past it is regularly not presented as having the capacity for generic understanding (such that any of these terms could categorize a selection of works), save fiction and nonfiction which have always been presented in that capacity.

### ***A Model for Generic Justification***

This model comprises three levels. The levels correspond to justification by convention (fiction, nonfiction, and hybrid), justification by rhetorical effect (fictonality, and nonfictionality), and justification by referential correspondence (fictivity and reality).

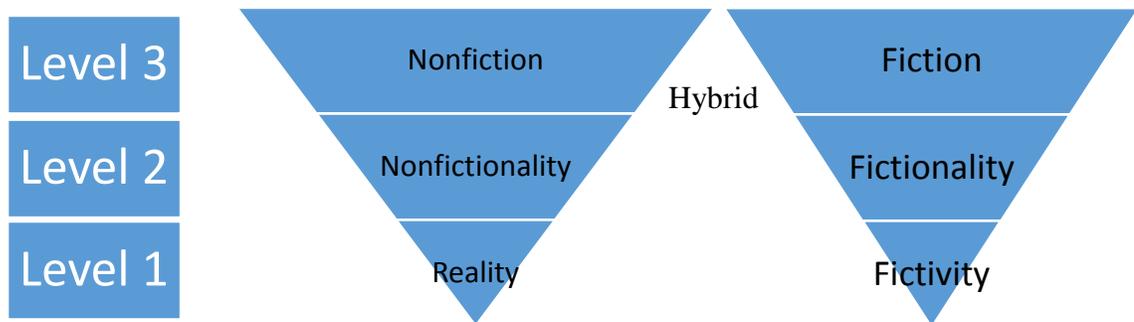
To briefly illustrate these terms: E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* is a work that I, by virtue of my conceptual framework, view as having a high degree of fictionality. I justify this claim by the various ways it presents itself to the reader in the text, such as its use of heterodiegesis (though blurred by an implied homodiegesis) and narratorial omniscience. I also see it as having a high degree of fictivity by the lack of paratextual claims and

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story and how the story is told. Consult Genette, chapter 3 in *Narrative Discourse Revisited* for further elaboration.

contextual evidence denoting the reality of the novel’s storyworld (the novel’s official name on Amazon.com is *Ragtime: a Novel*, the word ‘novel’ being suggestive of its fictivity).<sup>25</sup> By virtue of the work’s high degree of fictionality and fictivity I apply the label of fiction to it. The work, however, by the auspices of including so many characters and events that belong to the ‘real’ world, has a measure of reality to its storyworld. The presentation of this storyworld also speaks to its nonfictionality (the presentation of not just real people within the story, but famous real people that the reader can easily identify as having existed). Ultimately I conclude the story can be labeled as fiction, but I also recognize that it communicates to the reader nonfictionality as well as fictionality.

Diagrammatically I have represented this three tier model as follows:



My reason for stacking these generic understandings as I have is my envisioning of them as relating to one another through a system of dependence, whereby the higher levels are justified by appeal to the lower levels. A work is distinguished as nonfiction by appeal to the nonfictionality of that work’s communicative nature. Likewise nonfictionality communicates nonfictional understanding by an appeal to the reality of that work’s storyworld. The same goes for fiction, but to a lesser extent.

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<sup>25</sup> This is as the novel appeared on Amazon.com on 10/20/2013.

With regards to this ‘lesser extent,’ Wolf Schmid’s explication of some of the views of Dorrit Cohn holds that “in fiction, there is no historical happening, no ‘referential level’ on which the historian builds his story” (27). This seems to be contrary, however, to Cohn’s qualification of her definition of fiction as ‘non-referential narrative’: “If the adjective *nonreferential* is to be meaningful, it must not be understood to signify that fiction never refers to the real world outside the text” (14). In other words, a fictional narrative can still make reference to New York or Abraham Lincoln in a factual way without deviating from its nature as non-referential narrative. I agree with the latter of Cohn’s claims, which says that the fictivity of a storyworld can be replaced in favor of reality, yet, at the same time, not lose its ability to support a claim of fiction. The question then is where is the dividing line? How much fictivity can be lost before a text loses its potential to be categorized as fiction? This depends on the theoretical framework one brings to bear on this question.

There seem to be leniency in fiction’s co-opting of reality. This leniency does not, however, appear to extend to nonfiction in the same way. Consider when a work, like James Frey’s *A Million Little Pieces*, is revealed to have misrepresented its claim to the reality of its storyworld. Frey, it was revealed, took some fictional liberties with the telling of his tale. When the reality of a work is replaced by fictivity the bottom pillar of this system falls out, and the whole thing comes crashing down. Or does the whole thing come crashing down? James Frey did not ‘lie’ about everything in his work. On Wikipedia James Frey’s work is now listed as ‘semi-fictional,’ a denotation that positions

the work within the new category of hybrid.<sup>26</sup> Thus there seems to be various ways one can view the degree of dependence that the higher levels have on the lower levels of this model of generic justification.

The inverted triangular design of this diagram is supposed to be evocative of the interpretive scope of each of these levels of understanding. Fiction and nonfiction provide the most general way of interpreting a work, fictionality and nonfictionality are less interpretively inclined, and fictivity and reality provide little room for interpretation in that it can be argued logically (rather than simply reasonably) that something is fictive or real. To restate this another way for the purposes of clarity, fictivity and reality have very strong ‘vertical’<sup>27</sup> ties to an objective extratextual world as well as a synchronic nature. As one moves up in the levels the ‘vertical’ ties shift toward ‘horizontal’ ties that reference more and more a text’s relationship to other texts, cultures, and historical specificity as well as the text’s diachronic nature.

## ***Genre and Structural Components***

To the affirmation of my structuralist disposition, which inclines me to a systematized understanding of text and discourse, I have sought to isolate the fundamental textual components that genre acts upon in a work. My use of ‘work,’ as distinguished from ‘text,’ denotes the term’s recognition of both textual and extratextual

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<sup>26</sup> Accessed Wikipedia article “A Million Little Pieces” on 10/18/2013. Wikipedia is a fairly populous method of generic categorization, and so this designation of ‘semi-fictional’ does not speak necessarily to a peer-reviewed critique, so much as it speaks to popular opinion.

<sup>27</sup> The quotes here are just supposed to denote the idiosyncratic (non-literal) use of the word.

factors.<sup>28</sup> Limiting myself to the most fundamental of concerns I've settled on two components. The terms I employ for these components are *operative whole* and *constituent part*. Understanding the role of these components is essential to understanding how the different levels of generic understanding impact a work. We should acknowledge, however, that by looking at a genre's impact on the components of a text we are only considering how genre impacts a work, and not the inverse of how a work impacts a genre. This is roughly a divide in understanding a genre as existing in isolation of the formative concerns that shaped its present use versus an evolving and historically specific understanding of a genre—a synchronic understanding versus a diachronic understanding.

The divide between operative wholes and constituent parts points to discussions in genre theory that focus on the paradox of the 'hermeneutic circle.'<sup>29</sup> Quite simply the hermeneutic circle, as applied to genre theory, is the understanding that there is an irresolvable conflict between part and whole. One cannot know the part (the genre of a given text) if one does not know the whole (the genre as applied to the breadth of its application). This is what George Aichele calls “a mutual dependence for understanding of the part and the whole” (78).

With the hermeneutic circle the division of the part and the whole is usually treated as a division between a given work and a collection of many works. This distinction between part and whole, however, can also be limited to a single work, where the whole accounts for the work in its entirety, and the part accounts for the constituent

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<sup>28</sup> Extratextual factors are concerns such as paratextual factors and contextual factors.

<sup>29</sup> Karl Vietor, working off of theories established by Gunther Muller, related the part and whole quandary in genre theory to the “dilemma of hermeneutics” (Hernadi 2).

elements of the work. My preferred nomenclature for this latter understanding of part and whole is distinguishing the whole as the operative whole and a part as a constituent part. The addition of ‘operative’ and ‘constituent’ respectively aid in the understanding of the ‘whole’ as having a functional and purposeful capacity and the ‘part’ as denoting something that works in conjunction with other parts.

I define a constituent part as follows:

*Any singular element or factor (textual or extratextual) within a given piece of writing that affects meaning in or of a narrative whole (an operative whole): chiefly occurring as either linguistic, thematic, formal, or conventional instances (e.g. as a phoneme, word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, heterodiegesis, homodiegesis, metafictional element, unreliable narration, embedded frame, extradiegesis, intradiegesis, citation, pagination, motif, leitmotif, cohesion, cogency, subgeneric categorization, discursive style/technique—such as realism or minimalism—etc.)*

Operative wholes I define as:

*The sum of a set of constituent parts: the entirety of a narrative as accounted for by all the elements and factors that comprise it.*

Although I propose no resolution to the paradox created by the hermeneutic circle, it is an important consideration to bear in mind when one is employing categorical distinctions between parts and wholes (such as constituent parts and operative wholes).

It is my contention that every narrative is made up of constituent parts, each of which can be categorized as an instance of fictionality, nonfictionality, or neutrality.

These constituent parts can further be in possession of a quality of fictivity or reality. A

signpost within a work that demarcates fictivity is necessarily a signpost of fictionality. There is an embedded nature to the relationship of these two generic understandings. The example of fictionality to be explored shortly is the representation of another character's thoughts or feelings in a heterodiegetic (3<sup>rd</sup> person) narration. This is not only an instance of fictionality such that it communicates to the reader a sense that the work belongs to the genre of fiction, but it is also an instance of fictivity in that it demands a lack of referential correspondence (it is impossible for an author to have direct access to another's thoughts, unless that other is imagined). The above example is unusual. Most signposts of fictivity are not present in a text when that text is viewed in isolation of all other factors. Paratextual information, such as front-page material that designates a work of a work as fiction or nonfiction, is suggestive of a storyworld's referential correspondence (its fictivity or reality). Other instances of fictionality can exist without also being characterized as an instance of fictivity. For instance, utilizing a heterodiegetic omniscient narration (3<sup>rd</sup> person) as compared to a homodiegetic narration (1<sup>st</sup> person).

### ***A Structural Picture of the Levels of Generic Understanding***

There are two heuristic structural pictures that one can form of these generic understandings so as to better illustrate their capacity for expression. The first is a structural picture of fiction and nonfiction as separate categories that position themselves in relation to one another, but do not intermingle with one another. The category of hybrid acts as a buffer between the two, but also does not interact with either of the other

categories. This picture corresponds to level three of my model of generic justification and addresses the concerns of a traditional view of fiction and nonfiction that allows for clear boundaries between genres (boundaries that are established by conventions and not correspondence, or lack of correspondence, with reality). The terms of level three, as such, always classify something absolutely without the potential for equivocation—there is no gradient or scalar quality within this structural picture.

The second structural picture has fictionality and nonfictionality intermingling along a continuum. The abstract ideals of fictionality and nonfictionality demarcate the poles of this continuum, where one ideal bleeds seamlessly into the other. The reason that there is no area designated as hybrid in this structure is that there is no area that is not hybridized along this continuum. This structural understanding of fictionality and nonfictionality addresses the postmodernist need for diversity in the expression of a work's relationship to a given conception of reality. Works, in this structure, are judged in relation to one another: J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* has a higher degree of fictionality than Doctorow's *Ragtime*, which has a lower degree of nonfictionality than *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* by Gertrude Himmelfarb.

Given its nature as a continuum it can be seen as superfluous to have two descriptive terms, fictionality and nonfictionality. Fictionality is the term most often used (nonfictionality I have never seen used before). A work having a low degree of fictionality is equivalent to having a high degree of nonfictionality. My reason for not employing this simpler nomenclature is that it implies fiction has purview over the entire spectrum of narrative possibility—a position held by many who affirm postmodernist ideals. I wish to retain the distinction that even when understood as a continuum there

exist ideal representations of fiction and nonfiction that are fundamentally distinct from one another.

With these heuristic structural pictures in mind we can better understand how the terminology of the levels of generic understanding interacts with operative wholes and constituent parts. Each level of this model has different scopes with regard to these two components. Fiction, nonfiction, and hybrid operate as absolute categorical terms and can only qualify operative wholes. Fictionality and nonfictionality operate along a continuum, and can qualify constituent parts or operative wholes. Fictivity and reality, like fictionality and nonfictionality before them, operate along a continuum and can qualify both constituent parts and operative wholes. Himmelfarb's biography of Darwin can be classified as having a high degree of nonfictionality, but a constituent part within her book, such as her naming of chapter titles, could be viewed as a moderate instance of fictionality.<sup>30</sup> Contrary to this dual role (which can also be ascribed to fictivity and reality), fiction and nonfiction can only classify an operative whole and not a constituent part.

### ***Breaking Point***

Ultimately it seems like there is still a goal inherent in this model: a desire to classify a given work as either fiction or nonfiction in accordance with the third level of

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<sup>30</sup> The naming of a chapter acts much like a genre, it labels a body of text under a single identity, which directs the reader toward a certain meaning. I view this act of directing a reader toward a particular meaning as an instance of fictionality, although I see an argument to be had against this.

this model proposed in this thesis. There seems almost a teleological motivation to move upward from one level to the next until you can finally declare fiction or nonfiction the winner. If fiction and nonfiction arise by appeals to the lower categories, and if the lower categories operate along continuums with no definitive placement, then where is the breaking point, the place along the continuum that pushes a work into fiction or into nonfiction? Depending on one's point-of-view (the conceptual framework one adopts) they will place their breaking point at different places along the continuum.

### ***Aggregate versus Gestalt***

An operative whole as described by its fictionality can be distinguished from an operative whole as described by categorization as fiction, nonfiction, or hybrid by distinguishing between the concepts of aggregate and gestalt.<sup>31</sup> The aggregate is a distinction applied to the second level of generic understanding. The *aggregate* of a work I define as: the sum of an operative whole's constituent parts.

This quantification of constituent parts takes into account not only the number of instances of fictionality, nonfictionality, and neutrality present in a work, but also the efficacy of any given instance. For example E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* features many characters/people that had temporal existence prior to his writing of them (e.g. Harry Houdini, Evelyn Nesbit, and Sigmund Freud). The insertion of each of these particular characters/people into the text is representative of a constituent part that is expressive of

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<sup>31</sup> The term Gestalt is derived from the psychological school that is based on the theories of Wolfgang Kohler. The term aggregate is of my own atypical application.

nonfictionality. These constituent parts that are expressive of nonfictionality are counter-balanced by constituent parts that are expressive of fictionality. This fictionality can be seen in the access that we as readers are granted to the minds of these ‘real’ people. These constituent parts expressive of fictionality are not just more numerous, they are more effective in communicating an understanding of the work as fiction. The efficacy of the constituent part that expresses fictionality in this instance outweighs, by my estimation, the nonfictionality evidenced by the mere presence of characters/people that had prior temporal existence to the text.

The above is a good example of an attempt to explore the breaking point of a work. Another reading of *Ragtime* by a critic of a different point-of-view might be of the opinion that instead of breaking toward fiction, as I suggest, this work breaks toward nonfiction. Should it have been the case that the author’s representation of Houdini’s inner-world was “referentially annotated for verification,” such as Cohn notes of the meticulous biographer Barbara Tuchmann, then possibly the text, for me, would break otherwise (118).

*Gestalts*, by comparison, belong to the third level of generic understanding. Going directly to Merriam-Webster I believe proves beneficial in separating a gestalt from an aggregate:

*A structure, configuration, or pattern of physical, biological, or psychological phenomena so integrated as to constitute a functional unit with properties not derivable by summation of its parts (Merriam-Webster Online, Gestalt)*

This definition explicitly contrasts gestalts from units ‘derivable by summation of [their] parts.’ It is in this potential to understand operative wholes as greater than the collection of their parts that distinguishes gestalts from aggregates. This view positions gestalts as of a disposition toward qualification of a whole over the quantification of a whole.

*Savage Inequalities* by Jonathan Kozol provides a scathing critique of the American education system.<sup>32</sup> It does so through a collection of loosely unified narratives on the subject, unified by the presence of their author, Jonathan Kozol. This work is comprised by a set of constituent parts. The number of constituent parts comprising *Savage Inequalities* will vary based on the point of view adopted by the person justifying her generic claim. Within some of the narratives Kozol seems to take, as is not uncommon, some liberties in his recreation of dialogue. This dialogue often took place outside of the controlled environment of an interview, and thus the accuracy of wording seems suspicious, especially given the lack of citation in evidence of the dialogue’s fictivity or reality. When this occurs it lends a sense of fictionality to these constituent parts. Should one take into account the aggregate of all parts within the operative whole that is *Savage Inequalities*, they might find that it breaks toward the side of fictionality. This is not to say that it would break this way, only that it could given the adoption of a point of view that inclined one to this assessment. Consider, however, taking this aggregate and instead of tallying a score that places it on the continuum of fictionality and nonfictionality, apply a process of synthesis to the aggregate that creates a gestalt of the work. Where an aggregate might favor having a work break one way, a gestalt view of the same work might favor having it break another.

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<sup>32</sup> Kozol, Jonathan. *Savage Inequalities*. New York: Crown Publishing Group, 1991. Print.

An alternative, more in-line with gestalt psychology, is that one sees the forest before they see the trees, in other words the gestalt is an idea that shapes your view of a work without the need for an aggregate understanding of a work to bridge that process. I admit the gestalt is a somewhat fuzzy device. The idea that there is a generic existence ‘greater’ than the sum of a work’s parts is definitionally true, but as to how exactly that quality presents itself within a work is undefined (this is possibly intentionally so, so as to be in contrast with the mathematical nature of aggregates). My envisioning of how gestalts work to generate meaning is that they place emphasis on an understanding of how parts work together—changing and altering each other—to generate meaning, as compared to an accumulation of parts that generated meaning in isolation.

### ***Point of View***

*Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth—Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex**

Important to understand upon reflection of this discussion is the understanding that any individual attempting to justify a generic claim does so from a particular point-of-view—even if that view accounts for numerous views. Hernandi notes that a simplified view of the process of endorsing a generic claim (the process of generic justification) is asserting that “we have discerned some similarity between certain works” and thus apply a name to this similarity (4). Karl Popper, qualifying this sentiment and affirming the importance of acknowledging differences in points of view, writes that “any

two things which are from one point of view similar may be dissimilar from another point of view” (quoted by Hernandi 4). ‘Point of view’ is a phrase that I take to mean conceptual framework: an acceptance, prioritization, or denial of various beliefs and principles to the effect of establishing a metaphysical, epistemological, linguistic and/or ontological understanding of the way the world is.<sup>33</sup>

This project of viewing generic classification as an identification of similarities, while acknowledging the multiplicity of ways in which similarities can be arrived at, is itself a point of view in that it affirms an understanding of generic classification as a relationship between works, and not an internal property of a work. These two perspectives can be understood as a divide between horizontal and vertical ways of justifying a generic identity, that is, a divide in generic justification, between genre as something established by a coalition of works and genre as established by a single work’s expression of meaning as it corresponds to a facet of culture or reality. This points to the role of the “hermeneutic circle” in generic justification, which was explored earlier in the paper.

Rather than accounting for the great vastness of conceptual frameworks that one can draw upon to account for similarity, theorists have proposed that there are a limited pool of elements available for these conceptual derivations. Wallace Martin diagrammatically illustrates the various factors that people take into account when forming theories about narratives (29). This diagram isolates seven categories of consideration:

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<sup>33</sup> The lists referenced here are not exhaustive in that they do not account for all points of view that can be adopted.

- (1) History
- (2) Social Contexts, cultural conventions
- (3) Authors
- (4) Narrator—narrative
- (5) Reader
- (6) Literary tradition
- (7) Formal analytic frameworks (literary, linguistic, interdisciplinary)

Martin notes that various schools of thought have aligned themselves differently in their approach to each of these categories: for example the French Structuralists prioritize (4) and (7); Semiologists and Marxists prefer (4) and (2); Russian formalists lean toward the trifecta of (4), (6), and (7); point-of-view theorists favor (3) and (4); and reader response theorists (4) and (5) (Martin 29).

Accounting for all these factors provides one with an impression of the breadth of conceptual frameworks available to them, but Hernandi offers an even more reductive approach. He distinguishes between “four main types of similarity” that one can arrive at: the similarity of authorial mental attitudes; the similar effects different works have on readers minds; the similarity of works when considered as verbal constructs; and the “similarity between the imaginative worlds different verbal constructs evoke” (6).

Although not entirely reflective of this model I find that there is a heuristic benefit in viewing these “four main types of similarity” as, respectively: prioritizing the role of The Author, The Reader, The Text, or The Diégèse.<sup>34</sup> Also I believe that (1), (2), and (6) of

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<sup>34</sup> Diégèse, as described by Genette, is “not the story but the universe in which the story takes place” (17).

Martin's diagram suggest the importance of context, and thus I feel the role of The Context could be added as a fifth area that a critic could prioritize when establishing a conceptual framework in which to justify similarity between works.

The demonstrative vehicle I use in evidence of my theoretical claims, following this subsection, is the debate that unfolds between the language philosopher John Searle and the theorist Dorrit Cohn. The polemic established by these two is over the capacity of a given text, by virtue of its language alone, to point to itself as fiction or nonfiction. In this debate we can primarily see a divide between the pragmatism of Searle in his prioritization of an author's intent for his work to be read in a certain way (a prioritizing of The Author), and Cohn's reassertion of an inherent ontological state that some organization of language captures (a prioritizing of The Text). This debate between Cohn and Searle questions the fictionality of representing other people's inner-worlds (their thoughts and feelings), and does so from perspectives that prioritize the roles of The Text and The Author respectively. Debates that have raged over the fictionality of other discursive concerns have prioritized other roles (i.e. The Reader, The Diégése, or The Context).

### ***Cohn and Searle***

In chapter seven of her work, *The Distinction of Fiction*, Cohn establishes a polemic against the views put forth by John Searle in his paper "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse." The debate between this cultural and literary theorist and this philosopher of language is over the capacity of language—as seen in isolation of

extratextual concerns—to point to itself as fiction. Searle takes the pragmatic stance that “There is no textual property, syntactic or semantic, that will identify a text as a work of fiction” (325). Cohn, in chapter seven of her book *The Distinction of Fiction* takes the opposite view pointing to a particular—and by my estimation, uniquely effective—instance of fictionality: the representation of another character or person’s inner-world (his or her thoughts and/or feelings). She argues that instances within a narrative that accomplish this act of fictionality show a character who is “known to his narrator in a manner no real person can be known to a real speaker” (117). Not only is this an instance of fictionality, but it is an instance of fictivity (by virtue of the necessarily impossibly verifiable referential nature of this instance).<sup>35</sup>

The example employed by both Cohn and Searle to berate this issue is as follows:

*Ten more glorious days without horses! So thought Second Lieutenant Andrew Chase-Smith recently commissioned in the regiment of King Edwards Horse, as he pottered contentedly in a garden on the outskirts of Dublin on a sunny Sunday after-noon in April nineteen-sixteen.* (Passage chosen by Searle “at random” from Iris Murdoch’s *The Red and the Green*)

The chief moment in question is the moment when the narration attributes an explicit thought to Second Lieutenant Andrew Chase-Smith. That this excerpt is being narrated at the heterodiegetic<sup>36</sup> level positions the narrator’s knowledge of the Lieutenant’s thoughts as beyond referential possibility. If this narrative was told at the homodiegetic<sup>37</sup> level

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<sup>35</sup> The Gettier Counterexamples, posed by Edmund Gettier in his 1963 article, “Is justified True Belief Knowledge?” inform the epistemological dimensions of our ability to know the fictivity or reality of a text, and raise interesting questions that potentially render these terms moot.

<sup>36</sup> Generally speaking heterodiegesis is 3<sup>rd</sup> person narration.

<sup>37</sup> Generally speaking homodiegesis is 1<sup>st</sup> person narration.

(such as most memoirs or autobiographies) where the narrator is a character or has existence within the diegetic environment, then the narrator would be fully capable of describing a character's inner-world with a claim to referential validity. To point, if the homodiegetic narrator is describing her own inner-world then there is (excluding the concern of unreliable narration) a direct referential correspondence. If the homodiegetic narrator is describing another character's inner-world, then there is a referential correspondence to her belief, vocalizing, or subjective interpretation of that other character's inner-world. The instance of fictionality is thus one exclusive to heterodiegetic narration.

What is interesting to me about this discussion is not the ability of a text to show its own fictionality (well, not exclusively) but the various ways these two theorists/philosophers employ the terms fiction and fictionality.

I ultimately agree with Searle's sentiment, I doubt our reasoning is the same though. Searle employs the term 'fiction' to the effect that it means something that does not referentially correspond to reality. By this definition I agree with Cohn's refutation, there are textual properties that point to fictionality, or more accurately fictivity. Fiction, however, when treated as a genre that is derived through a community's conventions, is permitted to characterize a work as fiction or nonfiction no matter its referential correspondence. That being said, conventions around fiction and nonfiction are largely derived by appeals to the lower levels of generic understanding that I have discussed in this thesis. These lower levels house generic understandings that do speak to referential correspondence—fictionality and nonfictionality speak to the *sense* of referential correspondence, fictivity and reality speak to actual referential correspondence. In this

argument Cohn is expressing the view that fictivity can be present by an exclusively textual examination of a work. However, as long as one believes, or the conventions of a community establish, that proof of fictivity or reality is essential to classification as fiction or nonfiction, it stands that fiction and nonfiction are not labels that can be applied to a work by textual analysis alone. In sum there are no textual properties within a text that show a text to be fiction or nonfiction, but there are textual properties within a text that show it to possess fictionality and nonfictionality, and fictivity and nonfictivity.

## SECTION III: Demonstratives

### ***Why Original Narratives?***

The number of existing narratives that I could have drawn upon for analysis in this paper are too numerous to count. So why then have I chosen to test my theoretical program against narratives of my own creation? Largely it is because I enjoy writing stories, but of more critical distinction is my belief that available to the narrative theorist, for analysis and/or critique, are both narrative realities and narrative possibilities. I distinguish between these two as such: narrative realities are the various ways authors have manipulated and applied narrative forms and techniques; narrative possibilities are how authors potentially could manipulate and apply narrative forms and techniques. By creating original narratives it is my desire to explore this realm of narrative possibilities. This, however, is not to suggest that I am exploring wholly new ways of creating narrative.

To that end, with this thesis I am less concerned with how narrative *has* been applied to various texts as I am with how it *can* be applied. I intend to make the narrative decisions of my demonstrative works with attention to the impact these decisions have on the fictionality of the work, and the resulting designation of the work as either fiction, nonfiction, or hybrid.

The other advantage to this approach is that, with it, a theorist is granted unique insight into the authorial intent behind the narratives, an important factor in generic

justification.<sup>38</sup> The omnipotence that authorship affords one allows for the creation of seemingly ideal narrative examples, as well as ideally flawed examples. The author has singular insight into their work, which comes from their inimitable closeness to the text and its genesis. They are aware of not only how the text came about, but why and to what purpose the narrative was created, thus allowing them to anticipate how their text will be received.

Authorial insight into the intentionality behind a text is a central extra-textual concern that some (Searle) contend must be accounted for when one is seeking to understand the generic leanings of a narrative. By analyzing the narrative creations of others one often has access to brilliant and unique narrative examples, but she also is limited in her ability to know the intent behind the narrative—how the author intended it to be read (i.e. as fiction or nonfiction). Just as one can only know the mind of another by mediation, so too is one limited in her ability to fully grasp the intentions of an author.

It should be acknowledged, however, that this approach might position me, as a theorist, closer to the text, and thus precipitate the negative effect of making me less capable of acting in the role of The Reader. My closeness to the text might—almost certainly will—make me less capable of having genuine expectations of a work because of the prior knowledge I bring to it from acting in the role of The Author. My capability as The Reader will be compromised because my ability to experience the traditional expectations of a reader will be fettered by having access to knowledge that is exclusive to The Author (ambiguities, contextual uncertainties, and intentionality are all clear to the

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<sup>38</sup> The role of authorial intent, specifically with regard to the author's intent to create fiction or nonfiction, was, as noted earlier, very important to Searle.

author of a work in ways impossible for any reader). Despite this I find that the positives outweigh the negatives. I have thus chosen to create the narratives by which this thesis will demonstrate its theoretical assertions –rather than pulling examples from already extant works, as is the more common practice.

## **Nonfiction**

*Most writers regard the truth as their most valuable possession, and therefore are most economical in its use.*  
- Mark Twain

### **Intro**

My understanding of the genre nonfiction is largely a reaction to Dorrit Cohn’s convincing argument for a definition of fiction as “literary non-referential narrative text” (1). This definition for ‘fiction’ can be adapted to accommodate for a definition of ‘nonfiction,’ positioning the latter as being defined as *referential text*. These definitions, however, address fictionality and fictivity more than they address fiction and nonfiction. Isolating actual instances of non-referentiality in a text is to isolate instances of fictivity. Isolating instances that point to, or are evocative of the sense of, non-referentiality in a text is to isolate fictionality. So referential text, as a definition for nonfiction is, by my model, a definition of nonfiction as it trickles up from the lower levels of generic justification.

Looking at the definition ‘referential narrative,’ however, is to bring up certain concerns over the accuracy of this definition. The dropping of the term ‘literary’ seems relatively uncontroversial—literature may be understood in multiple ways, but it is

largely associated with imaginative writing despite the recent acquisition of the term in nonfiction circles.<sup>39</sup> And dropping narrative seems necessary given the non-narrative forms of nonfiction mentioned earlier.

Gerard Genette, as explicated by Wolf Schmid, positions the term ‘factual’ as the opposite of ‘fictional.’ Is ‘factual,’ then, equivalent to ‘referential’? Would ‘factual text’ suffice in place of ‘referential text’ as a definition for nonfiction? Factual, however, as contrasted to fictional, seems to carry with it the understanding that it denotes a work which contains facts. It is a fact that I am male. It is a fact that the sky is blue. It is a fact that Albus Dumbledore enjoys chamber music (according to J.K. Rowling’s young adult series on Harry Potter), or is it enjoyed chamber music? Albus Dumbledore is a fictional character, which is to say a character that exists in a fictive storyworld. But Dumbledore dies in that storyworld, and yet when we speak of fictional worlds we speak of characters, objects, and events as temporally independent, divorced from the chronology of their storyworld. Discourse can be reread, the story reality can be reset, and this complicates the choosing a tense to discuss the facts of a discourse. Facts, although potentially looked at in a myriad of ways, seem to necessitate that they lack meaningful contradiction. Whether it is a fact that Albus Dumbledore enjoys chamber music or a fact that he enjoyed it, it can be said that there is referential existence of his enjoyment of chamber music.

Another consideration is the consideration of me, Wade Johnson. Am I a fact? Or is something only a fact if action is applied to it? My existence is a fact; my name being

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<sup>39</sup> The term ‘literature’ was first associated with imaginative writing by the French baroness and author Madame de Stael (1766-1817) in her work *On Literature Considered in Relation to Social Institutions*, as noted by Jonathan Culler (30).

Wade is fact; but am I alone, divorced of any context or action, a fact? I contend that I am not (unless the concept of fact is irrevocably tied to existence, such that I cannot be considered outside of my existence, and thus the very idea of me is a me that is existing, and thus a me that is a fact). Going on the assumption that I can be considered outside of my existence, I can be viewed as not a fact. In spite of this I can be referenced. For this reason I prefer a definition of nonfiction that positions it as referential text and not factual text.

Section three has two primary subsections: the first, the section this intro addresses, deals exclusively with examples of relatively idealized forms of fiction and nonfiction. Particular attention in this section should be placed on the roles of paratexts, that is to say my pointing out to you, the reader, that what you are reading is fiction or nonfiction. Giving attention to paratexts places an emphasis on the most foundational of the three levels of generic understanding: fictivity and reality.

*The Journal of a Disappointed Man* by W.N.P. Barbellion (A pseudonym for Bruce Frederick Cummings) illustrates how the labeling of a work as one generic identity (nonfiction) becomes controversial in the light of the work's reevaluation as not referentially sound. In his case this had to do with a deliberate mischaracterization of the date of his own death. This is made somewhat ironic, given that some considered it a fictional work because of the preface provided by H.G. Wells (some also believed H.G. Wells was the author) (Jackson, Foreword). Paratextual information is the bread and butter of many who seek to understand the generic nature of a work as fiction or nonfiction. Most readers need simply look at the title page, or the spine, or any information that is supplementary to a narrative to come to a decision about a books

generic alignment. The act of someone or something telling you that a work is of a particular nature is a powerful thing, which can shape how you read a work and what it ultimately means to you. Such as the titling of this section—nonfiction. It carries a weight and responsibility, which speaks to a trust between she who labels and he who reads.

### **Demonstrative Nonfiction Narrative**

A Historical Account of the Life of Notre Al  
By Wade Johnson

*“Death is real, life: but a fiction”*

*“Death, life: none of it is real”*

*“Life is real, death: but a fiction”*

—All are reported to be the last words of  
Statesman, poet, and outlaw: Notre Al,  
uttered by him on the steps of the Darvil  
County Courthouse before his execution  
on November 8, 1848

(Dorian Hist, *Hero or Villain: The Notre Al Story*)

November 4, 1818: Notre Al is born in the town of Abye on the outskirts of Normandy,  
France.

November 8, 1841: Notre Al’s father, Francois Al, dies on the same day he was born  
sixty-two years earlier. The cause is unknown but correspondence many years  
later between Notre Al and the Darvil town crier, Fay Kerr, recovered from the

estate of Frank Kerr in 1884, suggests syphilis was the cause.<sup>40</sup> The letters also suggest that this event had a profound emotional impact on the young Notre Al.<sup>41</sup>

November 18, 1841: Notre Al emigrates to the United States. His means of transportation to the United States is unknown, as is his reason for emigration.<sup>42</sup>

1844: the first record of Notre Al within the United States surfaces (a precise date is unknown). His name (anglicized to ‘Notter Ale’) appears on a list of alderman for Darvil County, Virginia.<sup>43</sup>

January 4, 1848: Abraham A’gon, a prominent landowner in the area of Darvil, officially refutes Notre Al’s historical account of the bellicose relations between the Puktaw Native American tribe of South Carolina, and the little known community of Pagan settlers living in Massachusetts.<sup>44</sup> The bellicose relations in question are said to have largely occurred in events that transpired between 1811-1814.<sup>45</sup>

October 8, 1848: Notre Al is wounded in the leg, shot in a duel with A’gon. A’gon is wounded in the arm, shot by Notre Al. Both men surprisingly survive their wounds. Both men acquiesce to the recommendations of their physician, Doctor Samuel Johnson, and have their wounded limbs amputated, which, surprisingly, they both survive as well.<sup>46</sup>

November 1, 1848: Notre Al, during a mediation to settle his ongoing dispute with A’gon—conducted by Darvil’s mayor (whose name has been lost to history)—is recorded to have famously declared “there is no right of history, only what we, only what I, write.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Dorian Hist makes this assertion in his biography of the life of Notre Al, where he writes “no explicit mention of Syphilis is made in the letters but the symptoms described leave few other options” (XVIII). *Hero or Villain: The Notre Al Story*. Ithaca, New York: True press, 1981. Print.

<sup>41</sup> Wright, Tory B. *Fictional Revelations: Historical Upsets of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*. London, England: Truman and Co., 1948. Print. (41)

<sup>42</sup> Hist, Dorian. *Hero or Villain: The Notre Al Story*. Ithaca, New York: True Press, 1981. Print. (4)

<sup>43</sup> *Documents and Letters of Notable American Iconoclasts*. Ed. Mark Wright. New York, New York: Dacious Men Press, 1984 (11)

<sup>44</sup> This refutation by A’gon appears in print. However, it is not published with the Darvil County Register (the most prominent paper available to A’gon), but instead in the “less reputable” Darvil Gazette. *Documents and Letters of Notable American Iconoclasts*. Ed. Mark Wright. New York, New York: Dacious Men Press, 1984 (14-8)

<sup>45</sup> Hist, Dorian. *Hero or Villain: The Notre Al Story*. Ithaca, New York: True Press, 1981. Print. (84)

<sup>46</sup> Hist, Dorian. *Hero or Villain: The Notre Al Story*. Ithaca, New York: True Press, 1981. Print. (88)

<sup>47</sup> Hist, Dorian. *Hero or Villain: The Notre Al Story*. Ithaca, New York: True Press, 1981. Print. (41)

November 4, 1848: A'gon is found dead at 52 years of age. He is found in his study by his mother-in-law, Annets Donne. Accounts of his death vary, but largely historians are of the consensus that a pen was forcefully impaled into his neck, puncturing his corroded artery and causing him to bleed out.<sup>48</sup> A letter, purportedly found near to A'gon's body, was said to be addressed to Mannin Sharge, the Governor elect of the state of Virginia at the time. The letter formally remonstrated Notre Al's "liberal interpretation" of historical events concerning the Puktaw tribe, and demanded the governor take action to resolve the "gross injustice [that was being] enacted upon the land."<sup>49</sup>

November 8, 1848: Notre Al is tried for the murder of Abraham A'gon, found guilty, and summarily hanged on the steps of the Darvil County Courthouse.<sup>50</sup>

December 14, 1884: Ruth Betold, the wife of a Californian Baptist minister, writes an account of Notre Al's life, *History's Scibe*, and presents it as a work of fiction.<sup>51</sup> Her work is lauded by critics as "capturing something true of the human condition."<sup>52</sup>

November 1, 1888: Ruth Betold retreats to the seclusion of her family home in Kentucky when it is revealed she misrepresented her text as fictional when it was proven to have roots in factuality. She will never publish another work again.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Dorian Hist writes that while "most historians contend that" A'gon was murdered by a pen thrust into his throat, he departs from this view. Instead of this scenario he suggests A'gon might have been stabbed post mortem, and the true cause of death was poisoning. Hist adduces a report by the local antiquary—who acted in the capacity of amateur undertaker at the time—that noted a lack of blood present at the scene and burst blood vessels in the eyes. Hist says this poisoning was likely by "A'gon's own hand" in an effort to position Notre Al as his killer—a desperate act condemning them both. Hist also notes that the antiquary's notation on the subject was motivated purely by his interest in anatomy. This, Hist points out, is in contrast to Ong Adam's portrayal of this antiquary as a pathologist exposing a murderous conspiracy. Both theorists, however, do agree, in contrast to their peers, that there was a conspiracy at play. Hist, Dorian. *Hero or Villain: The Notre Al Story*. Ithaca, New York: True Press, 1981. Print. (44-8)

<sup>49</sup> *Documents and Letters of Notable American Iconoclasts*. Ed. Mark Wright. New York, New York: Dacious Men Press, 1984 (14)

<sup>50</sup> *Documents and Letters of Notable American Iconoclasts*. Ed. Mark Wright. New York, New York: Dacious Men Press, 1984 (14)

<sup>51</sup> Hist, Dorian. *Hero or Villain: The Notre Al Story*. Ithaca, New York: True Press, 1981. Print. (81)

<sup>52</sup> Wright, Tory B. *Fictional Revelations: Historical Upsets of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*. London, England: Truman and Co., 1948. Print. (44)

<sup>53</sup> Wright, Tory B. *Fictional Revelations: Historical Upsets of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*. London, England: Truman and Co., 1948. Print. (41-4)

November 11, 1888: the last living relative of Notre AI, an uncle who met Notre AI on only two occasions, dies in his bed in Abyrne, France at the age of 84.<sup>54</sup>

[Explication of this piece will be presented at the conclusion of the fictional section.]

## ***Fiction***

### **Intro**

Michael Riffaterre memorably writes at the opening of *Fictional Truth* that “the only reason the phrase ‘fictional truth’ is not an oxymoron, as ‘fictitious truth’ would be, is that fiction is a genre whereas lies are not” (1). While not entirely accurate—the term ‘fiction’ has other applications, or, at least, has been employed to other effects than just denoting a genre—this quote does, however, capture the sense that there are a myriad of significant subtleties attached to the term fiction and its derivatives.<sup>55</sup> The term fiction in our society can be seen to bend and flex in half a dozen different ways.

While I mention above that both ‘fiction’ and ‘nonfiction’ have numerous meanings attached to them, chiefly of concern is the ploysemous nature of ‘fiction.’ The term ‘nonfiction’ is largely treated as the binary opposite of ‘fiction’ and thus the many meanings attached to ‘fiction’ also inform our understanding of the way ‘nonfiction’ has many meanings attached to it (though its breadth, and frequency of use within culture is hardly that of ‘fiction’).

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<sup>54</sup> This Uncle’s name was either Notre AI or Francois AI. If it was the former than he was potentially the namesake of the Notre AI that is featured in this historical account. Hist, Dorian. *Hero or Villain: The Notre AI Story*. Ithaca, New York: True Press, 1981. Print. (48)

<sup>55</sup> Cohn attributes early characterization of this peculiarity of fiction to Hans Vaihinger, who remarked “almost a century ago, ‘The word ‘fiction’ is subject to chaotic and perverse linguistic usage” (1).

Cohn notes in the first chapter of her work, *The Distinction of Fiction*, that the term has been employed to multiple effects: from denoting lies, “deliberate deception[s], faulty memor[ies], or misinformation,” to generic significance. Chiefly she notes four meanings that are used frequently: “fiction as untruth, fiction as conceptual abstraction, fiction as (all) literature, fiction as (all) narrative” (2). I, as well as Cohn, am primarily concerned with fiction’s distinction as a category of genre; and when employed to this effect she defines it as “*literary non-referential narrative text*,” a definition which one can conform to my model of generic justification by, like nonfiction, prioritizing its impact on fictionality and fictivity, which by extension impacts fiction (1).

### **Demonstrative Fiction Narrative**

“You know who the singer Corinne Bailey Rae is?”

“Yeah, the hair? Haha...”

“Haha. I love that hair. That was a large chai right?”

“Yeah with uh... one shot.”

“Oh, that’s right... The hair, you’ve gotten that before?”

“No, I’ve gotten the...”

“But, you knew where I was going right?”

“Yeah. Yeah. No... no haven’t. But I did know. How much was it?”

“It was five forty-nine.”

The Laughing Goat café in the CU Boulder Norlin Library Commons. The coffees, cappuccinos, lattes, Americanos, Chais, espressos, mochas, café breves, and teas, come in white cups marked upon with green ink in the established shorthand of the baristas. The floor is carpeted in a checkered pattern. The carpet is woven of grey gold and blue threads, all of which are dark of tone. There are numerous people in line, and many

conversations can be heard. The glass displays immediately adjacent to the customers in line are lit by bright lights, and fully stocked with cans of coke, Odwalla shakes, hard boiled eggs, and plastic wrapped sandwiches labeled ‘Italian’ and ‘Vegetarian.’

### **Fiction/Nonfiction Conclusion**

If in reading the above narratives you lighted upon something suspicious then I applaud you. For one, while I consider both to be narratives, the first complicates this by its presentation of itself in the form of an annals and the second complicates this by its descriptive and dialogue central nature (this lends a mimetic impression to the piece, which aligns it with many dramatic works—a form some call non-narrative). To the second and more important point, I lied. To be more illustrative of the theoretical point I’m trying to make I should say the paratext lied. The first is not a work of nonfiction, and the second is not a work of fiction. The “nonfiction” text was derived from my imagination, and the fiction text was the transcription of a recording of an arbitrary non-prepared conversation that took place at the Laughing Goat Cafe. In an effort to assert the reality of this later case I documented the scene with photographs and voice recordings. The purpose of this was simply to illustrate the ability of the texts to communicate themselves as having a high degree of fictionality or a high degree of nonfictionality, while at the same time having very little reality or fictivity with regard to their respective storyworlds.

These two pieces work together in conjunction. They demonstrate the divide between formal appearance and actual referential correspondence, and in doing so show the necessity for generic understandings that can express this divide.

In spite of these narratives having greater allegiance with the genre that they were not signified to be, each of them did have signposts that pointed to various allegiances. Thus they both have an expressive capacity of fictionality and nonfictionality.

I will not elaborate on all of their signposts, but of note is the presence of motifs in the “nonfiction” piece, which I view as a signposts of fictionality; and the lack of a title in the “fiction” piece, which I view as a signpost of nonfictionality.

One of the salient motifs present in the first piece was the restriction of numbers throughout the narrative (whether in dates, times, or page numbers) to ‘1,’ ‘4,’ and ‘8’ (with two uses of ‘9’ in the footnotes in order to accommodate the 1900s). Motifs point to thematic trends in narratives, and themes are largely associated with fiction in their capacity to direct meaning. These motifs, however, point (by their recursive design) not toward a theme but toward their nature as motifs. This is in an effort by the author, me, to point to the text as expressive of fictionality.

The second piece lacked a title. The title of a work has a unifying effect, which in essence acts almost generically upon an operative whole by encapsulating the work under one identity. In doing so it moves the work as a whole toward a singular meaning. Thus by not including a title with the work I avoided including the fictionality that a title would communicate to the reader. Of note, however, is that given the ubiquity of titles in works, whether fiction or nonfiction, when one is absent it is very apparent to the reader. This absence, when noted, acts much in the way a title would, including directing the text toward a singular meaning.

## Hybridization

### Intro

Understanding where the breaking point is in a given work is not just important to understanding a work as fiction or nonfiction, but also as a hybrid. The more difficult it is to categorize a work as fiction or nonfiction the more likely it is it belongs to the third category, hybrid. Bruce Ballenger diagrams in his book *Crafting Truth* a “continuum of lies,” which I have recreated below (5).



Although “continuum of lies” is a rather harsh title, this continuum shows the shift that seems to take place, from what is acceptable in moderation in nonfiction, to what is unacceptable for inclusion in nonfiction, even in the slightest. The first two of these boxes seem quite common as acceptable nonfictional practice (in moderation), with the third, however, an author might be seen to have crossed a line. Understanding where one’s breaking point is along the continuum of lies, or along the continuum of fictionality and nonfictionality, is largely the product of one’s point of view. As such, what follows will be the application of my personal views to a demonstrative of the hybrid genre. I believe that the work that follows is a hybrid, but also that each of them has a distinct leaning toward fictionality or nonfictionality, which could enable someone to classify it as fiction or nonfiction, and not hybrid.

## Demonstrative Hybrid Narrative

### The Key Which Opens Nature

I am reminded of *Mythologies*, of the dichotomy of boxing and wrestling. One is sport, one is spectacle. One is real, one is false. I can't recall if Barthes makes mention of bullfights, they seem like such a natural intermediary between the two. Spectacle, yet the danger is real.

*A boxing match is a story... in wrestling... The spectator is not interested in the rise and fall of fortunes; he expects the transient image of certain passions.*

A man, late fifties, makes his way up the aisle. There is something wonderfully un-American in the nature of the aisle's construction. Steep, impractical, and very old. I half expect the man to fall and break his tibia before he finds his seat. He speaks to no one in particular with every step he takes. A loud broken English with Spanish fringed around the edges. He spills his drink on the leg of a man two seats below us—"Disculpe. It just gin, just gin. No bad. I love you. You are a beautiful man. *Disculpe*, alright," and on he moved. He is a happy fellow. Excited to be here. Everyone is happy. Everyone is drunk. The man falls into the seat directly in front of me. The liquid manufacture of his happiness is in no way aberrant from the norm at the festival of San Fermín. I tear my attention from the man only when the first bull is released. The crowd rises to its feet.

*The public spontaneously attunes itself to the spectacular nature of the contest.*

Even from where we are seated the Bull appears massive. It is the second time we've seen the Bull. The lot of them are run through the streets of Pamplona before the biggest and most prized are slated for the *corrida de torros* at the day's end. The crowd is on its

feet. Songs are sung, songs that everyone seems to know. I'm waiting for the verse that decries we 'root, root, root for the home team.'

*The public is completely uninterested in knowing whether the contest is rigged or not.*

Terminology wings by me: *Matadores, Picadores, Banderillos*. Every aspect of the event is highly ritualized. The Matador is a word more frequently used in English than in Spanish. *Torero*, bullfighter, rings across the crowd. It refers to both the Matador and his assistants, but is often the chief means of referencing the Matador as well. The ballet begins and with a flurry of pink and yellow fabric. The Bull is passed off from one *Banderillero* to another. There is a fluid, practiced nature to events, evocative of watching a play. Rehearsed and rehearsed to the death of variability. But then the Bull charges, and it is no longer a dance. It is a race.

*What the public wants is the image of passion not passion itself. There is no more a problem of truth in wrestling than in the theatre.*

The *Banderillero* sprints to the edges of the ring. A fearful reality works its way into the expression rippling through his embroidered fatigues. I squint as he squeezes behind a barrier. Wood and paint chip when the Bull collides. The *Banderillero* does not present his smile to the crowd. He is stoic, manly. Appearance is everything. I do not doubt that he will die for appearance.

*Boxing... a Jansenist sport, based on a demonstration of excellence.*



The Matador's assistants, yell and scream and egg the beast on. Dragging him from one barrier to the next. Pink on one side yellow on the other, only the Matadors waves red. He finally appears, in his *traje de luces*, the gold filigree distinguishing him among the *toreros*.

*Wrestling is not a sport, it is a spectacle.*



He is a peacock on the field. He struts. One leg lingers behind as though slowed by time. The crowd. The Bull. The *Toreros*. He moves as though in a state of constant grace. Immortalized in the rigid posture of his arms and the atavistic strutting of his legs, which demand his toes do nothing other than point. I wish they sold hot-dogs in the stadium. And Raspberry Snapple.

*Wrestling... offers excessive gestures, exploited to the limit of their meaning*

The rituals continue. The *Picadores* ride out on their armored steeds. The horses blinded to the spectacle. The Bull is stabbed from on horseback, the placement particular—a mound of muscle just behind the neck. *Morillo*. The *tercio de banderillas* follows. It is beautiful. Their pokers crossed above their head like a viper. They rise to the very heights of the toes. Pirouette. Arabesque. And then lunge. The Bull is barbed in a cruel game of pin the tail to the donkey.

*It is not true that wrestling is a sadistic spectacle: it is only an intelligible spectacle.*

The barbs are colorful. Draped around its neck. Almost Hawaiian in style. The white ones turn red rather quickly.

*What is thus displayed for the public is the great spectacle of Suffering, Defeat, and Justice.*

There must be something thoroughly awkward in my father's and my appearance because the man turns to us, "it is beautiful. Yes. Beautiful? No,no. It beautiful." I smile back. My father smiles back. The man is not convinced. Maybe he does not see the beauty reflected in our eyes. Or maybe I just don't see the beauty reflected in his. "It is like expression of culture. How you say? How you say?" he appealed to his brother, who, in his cardigan would seem more at home in a yachting club. "My brother says, it is a... communion with the Bull, an expression of love, honor." I smiled again. He put his drink in my hand.

It tasted like cigars, but it made him happy. And even drunk, with his brother silently ashamed, he truly was happy.

*Exhaustion of the content by the form.*

The Matador is in the air, arms and legs in disarray, and so is the thrill of the bullfight. The crowd is on its feet before he hits the ground. His leg twists as he is caught between the horns, the Bull scoops and bucks and into the air he is thrown once more. He hits the ground banged and bloodied. But he snaps his arms into his chest. He's on his stomach. His body straight as an arrow yet tight as a turtle. Practiced. Reflexive. Hooves crashing down. A band of *Bandilleros*, like paramedics running to a scene, pink and yellow *capotes* lash out like whips. The one tool of their trade. The Bull is surrounded.

*A boxing match always implies a science of the future.*



He doesn't put back on his shoes. By the way he steps you can tell it's a matter of honor. Sand and blood cake to his pink tights. And he waves to the crowd and mocks the Bull. Teases him, turns him around, and head-butts the Bulls butt. To the Crowds everlasting pleasure.

*Thus the function of the Wrestler is not to win; it is to go exactly through the motions which are expected of him*

The Bull is dead. It is still standing, but it is dead. A larger than normal olive poker protrudes from out of the Bulls back. It has been run between red and yellow and pink, and now it can't hardly stand. The Matador approaches. He does not touch it, but place his hand right before the Bulls face. They stare at each other for a time. The man in front of me stares back, back toward me. He says something. His brother and his brother's wife are worried he is annoying us. He places a hand on his brother's leg. The stadium is a circle of quiet. The Bull bows, its head upon the ground. The Matador stands.

*Defeat is not a conventional sign, abandoned as soon as it is understood; it is not an outcome, but quite the contrary, it is a duration, a display, it takes up the ancient myths of Suffering and Humiliation.*



The director of the event has the authority to grant pardon to a bull. The bulls who are pardoned graze for the rest of its days, a stud. Alternatively the director may award the ear of bull to a Matador who has distinguished himself in a true display of bravery. From where I sit the ear is small, it's hardly a hairy hotdog in his hand. He walks the arena. Ignores the presents showered upon him. The peculiarity of his strut always in form. The *toreos* follow, throwing back the gifts, the flowers, the chocolates, and the pink fuzzy pillows. The sandman cleans the sand. Pushes yellow sand over brown, brown over red. He readies the arena for the next bout.

*Wrestling partakes of the nature of the great solar spectacles, Greek drama and bullfights: in both, a light without shadow generates an emotion without reserve.*



[All quotes are taken from Roland Barthes *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972. Print]

## Hybrid Conclusion

One part autobiographical travelogue, one part cultural and theoretical inquiry, with the remainder belonging simply to a desire to hold the reader's attention. My impression of this piece is that the constituent parts that comprise its operative whole favor fictionality over nonfictionality. This in itself does not demand the piece be declared fiction, but, by my account, it is a point in that direction.

Factors of consideration (which I will not elaborate on, but simply point out) are as follows:

- I took some liberties with the dialogue of this event. I constructed the dialogue from the central message of what I remember of my conversation with the man. I latched onto a few of the central words of our conversation with the man that sat in front of my father and me, words like 'beautiful' and phrases like "no, no," which the man repeated many times.
- The narration is homodiegetic, which acknowledges the 'I' and thus acknowledges the author, or at least the implied author.
- The present tense in which the narrative is told. Present tense has an inherent quality of fictionality in that it can never be read literally and still be possibly true. The past tense is the most conducive to representing reality.
- The inclusion of photos, and their ability to denote the reality of the storyworld, including the factor of the dates that appear in red in the bottom right corners. These lend an amateurish feel to the genesis of these photographs.
- The pairing of theoretical language that has referential existence outside of this text with the storyworld of my narrative.
- The overt moralizing that takes place throughout the narrative.

- The stylization that subverts directly addressing an issue or event.
- The metonymic and metaphorical treatment of objects and events (e.g. the reference to the Matador's cape simply as 'red')
- The inclusion of foreign terms without explanation.
- Citation at end attributing the quotes to Roland Barthes.

## SECTION IV: Concluding Remarks

When all is said and done I do not think my theoretical program is all that provocative to anyone who does not hold an extreme view of genre (the extreme views being that there are no distinctions to be made between the genres, or that there are only very rigid distinctions to be made). What this theoretical program does do is act toward preventing equivocation in discussions concerning these genres. The alternative is that we turn back time, to the 1950s when ideas of fiction and nonfiction were simpler; or, alternatively, that we accept the generic uncomfortability of postmodernism. Seeing as time travel is yet to be invented that leaves only the latter, and if postmodernism is not something that is simply to be “survived,” but is instead to be “cultivated,” as Hayden White contends, then it seems we had best get comfortable with feeling uncomfortable.<sup>56</sup> I, however, will prefer to compromise between these two perspectives, not because I am accommodating two contentious schools of thought, but because I am accommodating two contentious realities.

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<sup>56</sup> Hayden White argues for this point (in “Postmodernism...”) in response to Stjepan Mestrovic’s piece, “Will Bosnia Survive Postmodernism?”

## Glossary

**Aggregate:** assigning a generic identity to an operative whole and justifying that identity by adding up the constituent parts constituting the whole so as to be in favor of fictionality or nonfictionality

**Constituent part:** any singular element within a given piece of writing that affects meaning in or of an operative whole: chiefly occurring as either linguistic, thematic, formal, or conventional instances (e.g.: as a phoneme, word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, heterodiegesis, homodiegesis, metafictional element, unreliable narration, embedded frame, extradiegesis, intradiegesis, paratextual element, citation, pagination, motif, leitmotif, cohesion, congency, subgeneric categorization, discursive style/technique—such as realism or minimalism—etc.)

**Fiction:** non-referential narrative text (deviates from this as a community's conventions dictate or allow)

**Fictionality:** the communication of a text as fictional

**Fictivity:** the referential status of a text's storyworld as imaginary

**Gestalt:** the operative whole as it is conceived of as having a meaning that is more than the sum of its parts

**Hermeneutic circle:** the paradox between part and whole, where the identity of the whole informs the identity of the part, but one knows the identity of the whole only by virtue of knowing the identity of the part (the mutual dependence of part and whole)

**Nonfictionality:** the communication of a text as nonfictional

**Nonfiction:** referential text (deviates from this as a community's conventions dictate or allow)

**Operative whole:** the sum of the constituent parts of a given work

**Reality:** the referential status of a text's storyworld as real (corresponding to a conception of reality)

## APPENDIX

### ***Supplementary Distinctions***

In anticipation of equivocal phrases I feel the need to distinguish between the act of generic justification and the act of generic classification. Generic justification I understand to be the rationale behind the application of a genre, and classification, or categorization, to be the application of that rationale. The difference between these two is roughly analogous to constructing and arguing for a mathematical function (justifying), and inputting a number into that function (classification).

The 'operative' in the term *operative whole* makes clear that the whole is of a functioning capacity designed to present itself to an audience, and, furthermore, present itself as a cohesive entity: as something that an author is putting forth with an explicit or implicit purpose(s) in mind. The use of 'constituent' to clarify the nature of 'part' is to remind of the process of aggregation that occurs, that is to say that a constituent part always has a more complete whole in its future.

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