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On the use of fictionality for persuasion and pedagogy

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On the use of fictionality for persuasion and pedagogy

by

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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The Graduate College will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa

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ABSTRACT

Fictionality is regularly used for rhetorical purposes but has been rarely studied, except as it has been used in traditional forms of fiction. This dissertation draws upon rhetorical theory and narrative theory to propose an original analytic framework for isolating and examining the dynamics activated by and peculiar to the employment of fictionality for rhetorical purposes, particularly persuasion and pedagogy. The use of fictionality in ethics thought experiments and business communication textbooks is examined in detail to illustrate this analytic framework.

CHAPTER 1

FICTIONALITY AND RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

Introduction

A landscape simulation was designed and tested in Viengkham, a mountainous district in the north of Lao PDR [...] Twelve members of the village land management committees participated in the role play called "PLUP Fiction," which is part of a stepwise process of participatory land use planning (PLUP) [...] The villagers gained an increased understanding of the issues at stake during a zoning process, thus demonstrating the relevance of this learning simulation tool. They were able to explore different zoning options, assess their respective advantages and constraints, and gradually improve their understanding of the consequences of land zoning on the environmental and economic values of the resulting landscape (Bourgoin & Castella, 78).

The "landscape simulation role play" described above is an example of fictionality used for real-world rhetorical purposes. The rhetorical purposes are pedagogical: the imparting of academically-derived knowledge of best practices in land use to villagers in Laos. Although the roleplay is fictional, the principles that participants can learn have real world applications. The role playing activity

Jeremy Bourgoïn and Jean-Christophe Castella describe is a kind of "participatory fiction" in the form of a board game, a form of fictionality that will receive much attention in this dissertation. While all fiction is "participatory" in the sense that audiences must mentally engage with a created situation in order to fully experience it, the term "participatory fiction" emphasizes additional activity required on the part of audiences to such a degree that "audience" is no longer a fully adequate description of their role.

Unlike a normal narrative fiction, a participatory fiction demands that its audience articulate choices as a condition for experiencing it; otherwise, a participatory fiction is incomplete. The term participatory fiction arose out of the world of role-playing games (Jackson; Stoddard). In role-playing games such as the popular and influential game *Dungeons & Dragons*, players not only mentally engage with given fictional situations but take roles as fictional characters. Players make choices within the fictional world of the game and thus become essential to completing the fiction itself.

While the term participatory fiction comes from the world of role-playing games whose popularity derives from their entertainment value, the activity described by the term has long been widely used for persuasive and pedagogical purposes, as in Bourgoïn & Castella's article. Using "role play, based on a game board mimicking a typical landscape of the northern uplands of Laos" (79), village leaders were educated in the principles of land use planning (LUP). As the researchers explain, "usually, training in LUP is only provided to the implementers" of policy (87), so one advantage of this method was its accessibility: "villagers usually had been confined to the role of observers" (86).

Through participatory fiction villagers were able to engage with the issues of land use planning in a way that they could not normally do. Bourgoin and Castella are promoting this method as well as academically describing it, and claim that "PLUP Fiction" also more successfully conveyed planning concepts that land use experts often struggle to publicize and communicate, such as "the impacts of land zoning on local livelihoods and the environment" (87).

The Scope of This Dissertation

As with this example, the kinds of fictionality (of which participatory fictions are a subset) to be discussed in this dissertation function as parts of larger rhetorical projects. All forms of fictionality are used for rhetorical impact, and I will provide an analytic framework for understanding the ways that fictionality works rhetorically. This analytic framework can be applied to the most prominent and often studied forms of fictionality, including narrative fiction, literature, film, drama, and television. Detailed attention will be reserved, however, for the heretofore neglected area of rhetorical participatory fictionality. Two kinds of participatory fiction will receive detailed examination: ethics thought experiments and business communication classroom problems.

Rhetorical participatory fictions come in many other forms as well. Scenarios, simulations, case studies, textbook problems, hypotheticals, board games, video games, war games: all have been used for purposes beyond immediate entertainment. They serve diverse persuasive and pedagogical functions: making political arguments, teaching classroom concepts, influencing

ethical considerations, and training professionals ranging from planners to business people to doctors to soldiers.

What is at stake for participants in these fictions is not only the choices they make within the fictions but real world implications and consequences, such as implied or explicit endorsement of moral, ethical and political policies, or evaluation of their performance in classrooms. While the choices the participants make within the fictions remain fictional – they are not literally acted upon – the choices also become the subject of debate and scrutiny. The stakes are higher than just pretending or playing a game, and in this sense the fictional choices made by participants can become “real” actions within the social setting where the fiction is experienced.

Theoretical and practical questions arise when we try to directly connect the fictional content of these participatory activities to the real world concerns they are based upon, or explain how these connections work. What do we mean when we use the words fiction or fictionality? From a practical standpoint, why use fiction for rhetorical purposes anyway? Could we not more directly instruct and persuade by talking directly about situations, without recourse to made-up things? Given that one of the characteristics of fiction is a suspension of direct reference to the world at large, how does a fiction relevantly comment on the world?

Our first problem to address is that the word fiction is used to mean significantly different things. This ambiguity makes analysis more difficult than it needs to be.

Conflicting Definitions of the Word Fiction

Although working definitions of the word fiction differ so greatly that they produce incompatible treatments of related concepts, academics seldom explicitly differentiate between these definitions. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will discuss the differences between the primary definitions of fiction, specify the definition of fiction that I will stick to, and link this definition to a specific notion of fictionality that has recently emerged in narrative theory.

The Oxford English Dictionary identifies three sets of non-obsolete definitions for the word fiction. While these definitions do not in themselves solve problems of ambiguity in usage, particularly from a rhetorical perspective, they provide a good starting point for discussion. The numeration is mine:

1. Fiction as pretending or lying: "'feigning' or inventing imaginary incidents, existences, states of things, etc., whether for the purpose of deception or otherwise."
2. Fiction as a literary/entertainment genre: "the species of literature which is concerned with the narration of imaginary events and portraiture of imaginary characters."
3. Fiction as a model, as a manageable simulacrum of reality: "a supposition known to be at variance with fact, but conventionally accepted for some reason of practical convenience, conformity with traditional usage, decorum, or the like" ("Fiction" 872).

Practical consequences arise because even though these definitions seem clear enough to differentiate, it is often unclear what is meant by "fiction." For

example, the first definition includes “pretending” and “lying” together. There are some good reasons for grouping pretending and lying together as activities - they both involve some conscious swerve from the real. But they are not rhetorically equivalent activities, as Terry Eagleton demonstrates in this passage on lying:

Lies are not simply false statements. I may announce that Oliver Cromwell was a Zulu because I am genuinely convinced that he was, which does not amount to a lie. Nor does knowing one's statement to be false make the vital difference. It is not a lie to say 'My God, you're early!' when we both know you should have been here three months ago. Nor is it a lie to describe yourself in company as the reincarnation of Alexander the Great, since nobody would believe you intended the comment seriously. Lying is a matter of knowingly uttering a falsehood with the intention to deceive (133-134).

As I understand them, Eagleton’s three examples of “not lying” illustrate a mistake, an irony, and a joke, respectively. But the "Alexander the Great" example (the joke) could represent pretending, too. It is no lie for an actor in a movie to pretend to be someone else, nor is it a lie for a student in a business communication class to pretend to be a manager in order to practice writing a memo – in fact, to complete the assignment the student is required to pretend. The difference between these examples and lying is shown by the differences in reception even more than by the differences in intention. Consider the difference between the reception of a book labeled as a novel that tells of unreal events and the reception of a book labeled as a memoir that (is later discovered to) tell of

unreal events. The novelist is praised for invention. The false memoirist is pilloried. "The intention to deceive," as Eagleton puts it, makes all the difference if it is discovered.

The designation of fiction might be a simple description, but it is often a pejorative; this is another common cause of difficulty. One of the most common uses of the word fiction does not comfortably meet any of the three OED definitions precisely: the use of the word fiction to mean "a mistaken idea." Here is a recent example of such usage, from an article by Trudy Lieberman in the July 2015 issue of *Harper's Magazine* on the inadequacies of American health care:

Yet the fiction that people can control their own health-care destiny, and the narrative of the rational shopper, continue to delay the day when the United States will have to make real decisions about our high-priced, unequal, and insanely inefficient system (38).

Lieberman introduces this claim after presenting several examples meant to demonstrate her point that patients cannot really "control their own health-care destiny" because of the arcane and unpredictable complexity of insurance policies.

Lieberman uses the word *fiction* here to mean a mistaken notion. While her usage bears family resemblance, it does not precisely match any of the OED definitions listed above. The second definition of fiction as a genre of art, literature, or entertainment obviously does not apply. Her usage does not fit the third definition of fiction as a model known to be at variance with fact, because

there is no suggestion that the notion of “control of health-care destiny” is an imperfect model *also known to be so* by everybody.

Her usage might be closest to the first definition, which focuses on a stable falsehood that issues from an identifiable source (whether regarded as a pretending or lying source). But this is not a good definitional match either. Lieberman is alluding to a free-floating mistaken notion. Even if this notion possibly originated from some particular source, in her formulation the fiction has a life of its own, and not everyone necessarily agrees that this notion *is* a fiction.

Lieberman, like many writers and speakers, is here using the word *fiction* as a pejorative to describe something as false. This is a rhetorical use of the word fiction. Calling it fiction amounts to a *claim*. Not everyone would agree that people cannot in any way “control their own health-care destiny,” nor would they all agree on what this phrase “health-care destiny” means, even if they were sympathetic to the direction of Lieberman’s argument. So to call this notion a *fiction* is to make an argumentative claim. This kind of rhetorical use of the word fiction is widespread, and is obviously useful as an attention-getting and argumentative device.

Practical differences among the meanings of the word “fiction” are sufficient to create reader uncertainty when particular nuances of definition go unspecified. Take an example well known in our field, Walter Ong’s famous essay “The Writer’s Audience is Always a Fiction.” Only by reading carefully will readers discover, on the third page of the essay (11), what Ong probably means when he uses the word fiction:

If the writer succeeds in writing, it is generally because he can fictionalize in his imagination an audience he has learned to know not from daily life but from earlier writers who were fictionalizing in their imagination audiences they had learned to know in still earlier writers, and so on back to the dawn of written narrative. (11)

Emphasizing the writer's reliance on longstanding literary convention, Ong's meaning seems closest to the third OED definition listed above—"a supposition known to be at variance with fact, but conventionally accepted for some reason of practical convenience" (872). Ong probably does not intend the first definition: "inventing imaginary incidents [etc.]," nor does he probably intend the "mistaken notion" definition I have outlined above.

However, Ong soon complicates matters. On the next page of the essay he writes:

the audience must correspondingly fictionalize itself. A reader has to play the role in which the author has cast him, which seldom coincides with his role in actual life. [...] Readers over the ages have had to learn this game of literacy, how to conform themselves to the projections of the writers they read, or at least how to operate in terms of these projections. They have to know how to play the game of being a member of an audience that "really" doesn't exist. (12)

Here Ong emphasizes the activity of *pretending* on the part of readers, corresponding more closely to the first OED definition than to the third. To fully

grasp Ong's use of the word *fiction* (or the verb form "fictionalize") in this essay, we must take into account more than one standard definition of fiction and catch nuances of meaning revealed only through careful reading. Slippage between these definitions is common when the word *fiction* is used, even by a distinguished theorist such as Ong.

The function of the word fiction in the term "participatory fiction" also falls between the cracks in these definitional areas. Given the ambiguities already outlined, the term itself is bound to cause some confusion. Participatory fictions fit into the first two categories of definition of the word fiction. They involve pretending, and so align with the first definition in some ways. They use narration, imaginary incidents and characters, so they bear resemblance to the conventional fictions covered by the second definition.

Where participatory fictions differ from these two definitions might be worth noting as well. The first definition of fiction includes the idea of deception as well as pretending, but if the participants in a fiction are not aware that they are participating in a fiction, then they are just being tricked. Marks in con games and targets of sting operations are fooled with elaborate lies and therefore have an involuntary relationship to the fiction. Deception cannot be part of a truly participatory fiction, so only part of the first definition of fiction is applicable, with another part of the definition proving inappropriate.

The second definition of fiction is clearly meant to indicate fully formed fictional narratives such as novels and movies. With its inherent notion of a stable genre, this definition could perhaps be expanded to include incomplete narrative texts that require participatory input or the participatory fictions that

result from these beginnings. As of now, participatory fictions are not recognized relations to the normal classes of generic fictions, but I propose that participatory fictions are common enough to constitute a particular genre of fiction that as of yet hasn't been thoroughly defined.

The recent rise of fictionality studies in the academic field of narrative potentially provides a path out of this troublesome thicket of meanings for the word fiction, at least for certain scholarly purposes. A primary tenet of this scholarly movement is to use the word "fictionality" solely to refer to the qualities of communicative activities that have been *signaled* as fictions (Zetterberg Gjerlevsen). This development is very useful, because to have a word that refers solely to signaled fiction usefully allows us to stop having to always remind readers not to infer possible meanings of the word fiction that, if presumed, would render the discussion more confusing than it needs to be.

Going forward in this dissertation, whenever the words *fiction* or *fictionality* appear to label a communicative act, readers can assume that I mean the fictionality has been intended by the communicator and signaled to receivers. The fictions to be discussed in this dissertation should therefore never be confused with those covered by the other widespread definitions of the word fiction I have discussed here: lies, mistaken ideas, deceptions, or imperfect models of reality accepted mainly for the sake of decorum or convenience.

Fictionality in Rhetorical Discourse

To focus on the persuasive and pedagogical functioning of fictionality, it would be useful to have some well-formed theory on the ways that fictions function as what Stefan Iversen distinguishes as "rhetorical discourse." As Iversen defines it, rhetorical discourse consists of "texts aimed at specific audiences for specific reasons in specific situations" (para 1). Iversen, focusing on narrative as rhetoric, argues that "narrative discourses that primarily serve argumentative functions" (para 1) qualify as rhetorical discourse.

Surprisingly, as Iversen's 2014 article "Narratives in Rhetorical Discourse" makes clear, the "systematic study of narratives in rhetorical discourse is a fairly recent enterprise" that yet has "lain rather dormant in recent years" (para 8). He also notes that "the study of narratives in rhetorical discourse seems lacking when it comes to definitions and delineations of the objects of study" (para 33). As for the question of the rhetorical functioning of fictional as opposed to non-fictional narratives in particular, Iversen classifies this as a "topic for further investigation" (para 33).

One might expect that the most ready source of theory explaining how fictions work as rhetorical discourse would come from the field of rhetorical theory. However, because rhetorical theory has not noted much of a distinction between fiction and non-fiction when covering the rhetorical functions of narrative, rhetorical theory alone would provide little basis for a sustained discussion. The differences that the use of fiction or fictionality might make to rhetorical discourse are not discussed much at all by rhetoricians. While absence

is always harder to prove than presence, the contents and indexes of various major anthologies and reference works devoted to rhetoric demonstrate the general lack of attention paid to questions of the relevance of fiction or non-fiction as topics of discussion.

Some major examples make this clear. Wayne Booth's classic *The Rhetoric of Fiction* has an index entry for "rhetoric" but none for "fiction" (521-541). The indexes of widely distributed anthologies of rhetoric such as Lucaites et al's *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory* (622), Burgchardt's *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism* (289-290) and Jasinski's *The Sourcebook on Rhetoric* (389-405) all include "narrative" as a searchable term or section topic, as well as articles focused on narrative. But none of these books list in their tables of contents or their indexes topics "fiction," "fictionality," "factual," or "non-fiction" - not even as sub-headings under "narrative."

To be clear, I am not claiming that there is no discussion of works of fiction in these rhetorical studies. Works of fiction are discussed, but fiction (or fictionality) is not distinguished as a special type of communication. In the articles themselves, works of fiction are sometimes discussed interchangeably with other kinds of narrative rhetoric, as in the case of Jasinski's valuable overview on narrative, or in Walter Fisher's often anthologized and influential essay "Narration as Human Communication Paradigm."

The ways that questions around fictionality are avoided are especially noteworthy when fictional narratives are mixed in with non-fictional narratives as objects of rhetorical analysis. When Jasinski defines the three kinds of form in which "narratives appear in public discourse" (400), he comes interestingly close

to differentiating fictions from other types of narratives, but other criteria are given precedence. When discussing narratives that are "self-contained or autonomous," only fictions (including *Emma*, *The Big Chill*, and *Death of a Salesman*) are discussed: "they exist independently or set apart from other texts or discursive practices" (400), he writes. Jasinski does not identify their shared fictionality as the source of their "autonomy," instead using the following criterion: "Autonomy means only that a narrative's external appearance is not dependent on another text" (401). This criterion intersects with many and perhaps most fictions, but it does not succeed in specifying the kinds of differences that belong to fiction. Some fictions undeniably are "dependent on another text" for part of their meaning: sequels to earlier fictions, reversals and parodies of earlier stories, and fictions based on real-life events. Meanwhile, many non-fictional texts such as observer accounts of events rely upon no other texts: their "external appearance is not dependent on another text" as Jasinski puts it.

Indifference to questions of fictionality is also evident in Walter Fisher's work. Fisher has often been called the most influential rhetorical theorist to concentrate on narrative in recent decades (Lucaites et al 248; Jasinski 389; Iversen). Fisher's theoretical program highlights the "narrative paradigm" as an alternative to what he labels the "rational world paradigm" (266-268). Fisher's goal is to claim a place for "stories" as a valid rhetorical form even though they are not explicitly argumentative. Instead of arguments that clash with one another, Fisher writes of "stories competing with other stories" (266) and claims

that stories are “rational when they satisfy the demands of narrative probability and narrative fidelity, and as inevitably moral inducements.” (266).

Fisher draws freely from non-fictional and fictional narratives as examples of the narrative paradigm in action, finding a quality he calls “narrative rationality” in many famous novels and plays, as well as in public narrative rhetoric such as that offered by Adlai Stevenson and Winston Churchill (280-281). Fisher finds narrative rationality in the ancient *Epic of Gilgamesh* (a work he summarizes at length) but not in Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (280-282).

Significantly, supernatural incidents such as those described in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* are not at odds with narrative rationality in Fisher's estimation, whereas the lack of “fidelity to the truths humanity shares in regard to reason, justice, veracity and peaceful ways to resolve social-political differences” (280) that Fisher understandably discerns in Hitler's book condemn it to a condition of narrative irrationality. Thus Fisher's criteria, built around his refined judgments of the ultimate human messages to be found in narratives, avoids any consideration of the practical and formal differences fictionality or non-fictionality might make to the achievement of (or failure to achieve) narrative rationality.

Perhaps most surprisingly, Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, an important title for more than a half-century and easily the most prominent work in the field of rhetoric with the word “fiction” in the title (as well as in narrative theory, where it holds a foundational status), is not focused on the ways that fiction differs from non-fiction. Booth's book is really more about narrative in general. In the Afterword to the 2nd Edition of his book, Booth reveals that he

had considered a title that would accurately reflect that he was really focused on describing narrative more than fiction:

Perhaps the largest omission of what properly belongs to my true subject is the whole range of narratives that are not epics, novels, or short stories but histories, myths, journalism, reports of dreams, gossip, lies, hoaxes. All of them can employ every resource my book describes, and I cannot imagine why I did not say so. I had in fact often been tempted to make the book into what in one draft was called “The Rhetoric of Narration.” (407)

Booth’s book contains useful insights into fictionality, some of which will be referenced herein, but this statement that non-fictional narrative “can employ every resource [his] book describes” guarantees that the essential differences between fiction and non-fiction were not explored.

It is worth pointing out, nevertheless, that Booth did not mean that he thought fiction was basically the same thing as narrative, or that all narratives are essentially fictions (a view that first became widespread in the 1970s embrace of post-structuralist literary theory). Writing an afterword to the volume in the 1980s, Booth declined to join “some recent critics, quite properly pursuing interesting similarities among all narratives [who] have lumped them all together as fictional” (425). But Booth did not go further than this disavowal, making no explicit argument against them (on the grounds that space did not permit it). It seems fair to conclude that Booth’s seminal study of narrative as it appears in one kind of fictional form neither focuses on fictionality nor denies the possible significance of fictionality.

Finally, an illuminatingly outright denial that fictional narrative should be considered to qualify as rhetorical discourse occurs in John Louis Lucaites & Celeste Condit's influential 1985 article "Re-constructing Narrative Theory: A Functional Perspective." Lucaites and Condit contrast "poetic narratives," a category including not only poems or literature but fictional television programs such as the canonical *Mr. Ed* (92), and "rhetorical narratives," which are narratives inserted directly into rhetorical discourse for immediate persuasive purposes. They argue that, because of lack of accountability to "external validity" (92), poetic narratives are not a part of rhetorical discourse. Lucaites and Condit contrast "the act-centered quality" of a rhetorical narrative leading to "the audience's active participation" with the "simple, textual construction" (100) of a poetic narrative. By "simple, textual construction" they imply that the textual self-sufficiency of fiction leads to audience passivity, thereby removing it from the sphere of rhetorical discourse.

The attempt by Lucaites and Condit to claim sharp distinctions between rhetorical and poetic narrative fits with a longstanding approach in rhetorical scholarship dating back at least to Herbert Wichelns. In banishing fiction from the sphere of rhetorical narrative, Lucaites and Condit remove from consideration all instances of pointed, demonstrably influential poetic narrative. Perhaps their approach simply reinforces existing disciplinary norms regarding appropriate objects of study, but surely many fictions have been intended to influence readers rhetorically, and have succeeded.

Despite the general lack of attention accorded it by current rhetorical scholarship as a separately considered object of study, the existence of

rhetorically influential fiction has been recognized from the beginning of the study of rhetoric, with Aristotle's advice in his *Rhetoric* that orators should sometimes use fictions —fables, specifically—as support for their appeals (1393a). Chapter 2 of this dissertation will be devoted to a full account of Aristotle's position on fiction and non-fiction in rhetoric, which I argue can only be fully attempted by drawing upon both his *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*.

Contributions of Narrative Theory to the Rhetorical Study of Fiction

The discipline of narrative theory (sometimes called narratology or narrative studies) provides essential grounding to this dissertation. The distinction at the heart of this inquiry, that between fictional and non-fictional discourse, is a matter actively discussed among scholars of narrative. Without pretending to thereby relate the entire history of the discussion, I would start by pointing out that debates over the existence and/or nature of this distinction have continued long enough to merit a survey chapter of their own, “Fictional vs. Factual Narration” by Jean-Marie Schaeffer (98-114), in the preeminent reference work in that field, *Handbook of Narratology* (Huhn et al 2009). Further recent developments in the field have explicitly engaged with the rhetorical implications of this distinction, and merit extensive attention here.

In 2012 the study of fictionality emerged as a full-fledged sub-discipline of narrative, with the establishment of the Fictionality Group at the University of York in England and the Centre for Fictionality at Aarhus University in Denmark. Some sentences from the Aarhus Centre's "About" page on the program website

demonstrate the rhetorical orientation of their scholarly aims, as well as their interest in discussing widespread instances of fictionality in communication:

In the Centre of Fictionality Studies we investigate fictionality as a quality, not as a genre. Political speeches, conversations, advertisements, Facebook updates, court proceedings, and news shows employ fictionality. Rhetorically, a sender can signal fictionality by a range of different techniques. A receiver, in turn, can assume from textual signals that something is fictionalized. Treated as a quality rather than as a genre, fictionalization invites the receiver to conceive of something as invented instead of as reported and referential. Examining why and how persons and media use fictionality as a means to achieve specific ends is crucial to understand our contemporary, medialized society. (Centre for Fictionality Studies)

By focusing on fictionality "as a quality, not as a genre," by emphasizing the signaling of fictionality as a rhetorical choice, and by including types of communication traditionally not studied by scholars of narrative, fictionality studies potentially could be as relevant to rhetorical scholarship as it is to the narrative scholarship from which it has sprung.

Early work in this field has, nevertheless, mostly focused on works that belong to traditional genres of fiction. Richard Walsh's 2007 book *The Rhetoric of Fictionality* is often cited as the theoretical work that directly inspired this movement, but after his influential treatment of the concept of fictionality and its rhetorical use in the first chapter, Walsh solely uses examples drawn from

canonical literary fiction, such as novels by Charles Dickens and Henry James, to illustrate his theories. Walsh's treatment of fictionality opened the possibility of study of fictionality to nonliterary source material, but it did not actually commence that study.

This scholarly movement reached the manifesto stage, and slightly beyond, in 2015 when Walsh, James Phelan, and Henrik Skov Nielsen published “Ten Theses about Fictionality” in the journal *Narrative*. The article appeared in the January 2015 issue along with a dissenting article (“Ten Theses against Fictionality” by narrative scholar Paul Dawson) and a response by the three to Dawson’s dissent. Much of the language in Nielsen, Phelan & Walsh’s two articles is an announcement of work to be done to reverse the previous neglect of the subject of fictionality:

Apart from the work by literary critics on generic fiction, fictionality is almost completely unstudied and often unacknowledged. Even the widely-heralded “narrative turn” toward the importance of storytelling in different disciplines has not led to a focus on the pervasiveness and significance of fictionality. (“Ten Theses About Fictionality” 62)

Noting that “the project’s ultimate goal is to develop a unified theory of fictionality” (71), they argue that fictionality “is extremely pervasive yet understudied” (110).

Putting this call for a wider study of fictionality into practice, the authors include examples of fictionality as it appears not just in traditional fiction but in what we in rhetoric have always understood to be rhetorical discourse. For example, the authors include analysis of a joke made by Barack Obama at the

expense of Mitt Romney during a speech he gave during his 2008 presidential re-election campaign; the authors argue that this is an example of a political figure resorting to fictionality for rhetorical purposes. Nielsen, Phelan and Walsh have arrived at a position similar to mine: that it will be worthwhile to study fictionality as it is deployed rhetorically, outside and inside the boundaries of traditional generic fiction.

At the same time, they have arrived at this position from the vantage point of the academic field of narrative rather than the academic field of rhetoric. A longstanding concern of narrative theory has been its use of fictional narratives as the normative basis for all narratives, and many important studies of how narrative works (or aspects of those studies) have already been *de facto* studies of fictionality. The essence of the dissenting argument made by narrative scholar Paul Dawson in reply is that studying fictionality itself won't add much to narrative theory because so much narrative theory has already been built around the study of fiction anyway (91-93). The troublesome possibilities of theoretical overlap are less of a concern for a rhetorical studies emphasis because fiction of any kind has been a minor focus at best in our field. Having arrived from a different angle, I see my work in this dissertation as aligned with the goals of their project.

Fiction for Persuasive & Pedagogical Purposes: Some Dynamics

Considering the gap Iversen identifies in the study of fiction as rhetorical discourse and that fictionality studies still is in its foundational stages, an

accounting of some important ways that fiction functions in rhetorical discourse would be useful now. In this section of this chapter, I will outline a set of three dynamics that emerge whenever fiction is used in rhetorical discourse. My emphasis differentiates my approach from more traditional literary criticism of fiction based on texts. A focus on dynamics highlights the interactions of texts, people, discourse and events that create rhetorical situations. Rhetorical situations have been defined as *event-driven communicative responses* by Bitzer and *rhetor-devised media events* by Vatz. Both definitions are relevant here.

The most straightforward way to rhetorically use fiction is to create a fiction to rhetorically influence a situation by exemplifying whatever point the rhetor wishes to make. But this is not the only major way that fiction is used rhetorically—it might not even be the most common way. Fictions that have already been created by others are regularly employed for persuasive and pedagogical purposes. Orators reference well-known fables or examples from popular movies. Teachers use fictional textbook problems to teach communicative principles. Pundits invoke the well-known ticking bomb scenario to justify arguments for legalizing torture.

My point is not to attempt to describe all or even necessarily the most important kinds of ways that fiction works as a real-world influence. As Booth demonstrates, many of the most important ways that fiction works rhetorically apply to non-fictional narratives just as well. Instead, my goal is to identify *only* dynamics that are peculiar to rhetorical fictionality, so that the differences specifically made by the choice of fiction can be more easily isolated for analytic and critical purposes.

1 - Extratextual Dynamic

Free Referentiality \leftrightarrow Situational Relevance

rhetorical concerns: impact & influence

2 - Intercommunicative Dynamic

Authorial Control \leftrightarrow Audience Expectations

rhetorical concerns: authorial responsibility & generic constraints

3 - Intratextual Dynamic

Givens \leftrightarrow Gaps

rhetorical concerns: interpretive boundaries & destinations

The linked terms under the name of each dynamic oppose one another, although not in predictably mechanical ways. In the Extratextual and Intercommunicative pairs, the term on the left represents a special condition granted by fictionality; in the Intratextual dynamic, both terms do. Free referentiality, total authorial control of content, and fictional “givens and gaps” come with the designation of fictionality, providing special rhetorical privileges.

The terms on the right sides of the first two dynamics stand for a major constraint or qualification that inevitably accompanies the privileges of fictionality. The difficulties of establishing situational relevance and the altered audience expectations that come with the designation of fiction are inextricable from the special privileges granted by the designation of fictionality. To some extent, rhetorical advantages and disadvantages are in balance. Attention to all

three sets of dynamics can provide a practical framework for analysis of the peculiar ways that fiction works as rhetorical discourse.

The Extratextual Dynamic

For a fiction to have rhetorical impact on real-world attitudes, it must be perceived as relevant in some way to a particular situation. What makes the rhetorical effect of fictional texts inherently problematic is that the designation of fictionality licenses free referentiality: while fictional texts often reference real world details, they are not answerable to these details in the way that a non-fictional text is. The labeling of a text as fiction gives it an internal self-sufficiency that frees it from specific duties of referentiality, putting it beyond criticism on the basis of any particular lack of correspondence to real-world conditions. However, the freedom from referentiality allowed in the fictional text automatically works against its relevance to specific real-world concerns. I have named this relationship the Extratextual Dynamic because it concerns the rhetorical connection between fictional texts and the world.

This special license of fiction, giving it freedom from the demands of specific referentiality, was first and most famously articulated by the English poet Sir Philip Sidney. Answering objections of Platonists and neo-Platonists to imaginative art in his *Defence of Poesie* of 1595, Sidney wrote that "the poet, he nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth." His supporting argument: since normal standards of reference are inapplicable to fiction, neither affirmations nor prevarications are possible -

For, as I take it, to lie is to affirm that to be true which is false; so as the other artists, and especially the historian, affirming many things, can, in the cloudy knowledge of mankind, hardly escape from many lies. But the poet, as I said before, never affirmeth. The poet never maketh any circles about your imagination, to conjure you to believe for true what he writeth. He citeth not authorities of other histories. (para 63)

Sidney identifies some practical advantages for the writer of fiction, who is freed from certain responsibilities. He also anticipates the "pragmatic" approach to distinguishing fiction from non-fiction. Narrative theorist Jean-Marie Schaeffer explains the position taken by this approach:

What distinguishes fictional narrative from factual narrative is not that the former is referentially void and the latter referentially full. What distinguishes them is the fact that in the case of fictional narrative the question of referentiality is irrelevant, whereas in non-fictional narrative contexts it is important to know whether the narrative propositions are referentially void or not. (109-110)

Schaeffer and Sidney explain the essential independence of fictional texts. But if "affirmations" in Sidney's sense are impossible and, as Schaeffer puts it, "the question of referentiality is irrelevant," then how could fiction have real-world rhetorical impact? The Extratextual Dynamic concerns the primary objection raised when fiction is intended to make (or interpreted as making) real-world rhetorical points: namely, who cares what happens in a made-up

story? Some variation of this objection is always raised when – and this happens quite often - a fictional story becomes a general topic of discussion focused on the real-world implications of the story. *It's just a movie. It is only a TV show. It's a novel, not a true story. It isn't real.* In the face of such objections, a fiction must achieve a non-referential resemblance and/or plausibility to have a rhetorical impact on real-world attitudes.

If the relevance of some or all aspects of the fictional situation to a real-world situation can be communicated or is perceived, real-world influence is possible. The internal self-sufficiency of fictional texts is then a tremendous rhetorical advantage. To return to the PLUP Fiction example that began this chapter, the role play that villagers engage in to learn land management principles is organized around a fictional representation of a landscape. Researchers created a simulation board divided precisely into 100 square cells, with each cell representing a specific land cover or land use, resulting in a proportionately spatially distributed grid “so as to recreate a ‘typical’ landscape in the northern uplands of Lao” (Bourgoin & Castella 80). They added “a road and a river” to “make the landscape look more realistic while ensuring that the configuration did not exactly match any of the 6 villages of our study site” (80).

The creators of the game-like simulation sum up their reasoning for doing so as follows:

Such an abstract landscape representation aims to prevent participants from considering the situation of their own village and ensures that the participants remain focused on the simulation rules and principles instead of being distracted by any pragmatic local concerns (81).

Viewed in light of the Extratextual Dynamic, this rhetorical approach potentially makes the most of a fiction-based appeal by maximizing the advantages of non-referentiality and still attending to issues of relevance. The simulation specifically avoids precise referentiality: by avoiding resemblance to any particular village, the simulation encourages villagers to attend to general principles. “Success” in the terms of the simulation is based on the application of general and inclusive principles of land management rather than local biases. However, the danger of textual insularity—that the simulation means nothing outside of itself—is (arguably) overcome by the efforts of the researchers to make the game board accurately reflect the typical land usage in the area and give players realistic zoning and planning responsibilities (within the bounds of the simulation, of course).

The Intercommunicative Dynamic

The label of fiction provides an author an absolute license to invent persons, places and actions. This authorial power has often been described as godlike; for example, Jacqueline Hamrit refers to “the conventional idea of an Author-God who creates worlds and characters as if he were God” (54). The powers of free invention and suspension of referentiality that come with fiction provide this power. By contrast, authors who write non-fiction assume obvious responsibilities: faithfulness to “the facts” and the outside world, however that is conceived. At the very least the audience expects the author of non-fiction to be truthful where facts are concerned; the social penalties accompanying the discovery of authorial lies by the audience are severe.

On the surface, the total control enjoyed by fictional authors provides an opportunity for unchecked rhetorical impact. The author can make anything whatsoever happen in a fiction and therefore could illustrate any “lesson” desired. This is one of the reasons that Lucaites & Condit object to such discourse as properly “rhetorical”, writing that “the author can rely upon a textual *deus ex machina* to resolve the conflict of a plot” (100). Supposedly this authorial power leads to a passive audience, unlike the “active” audience they insist upon as a necessary sign of truly rhetorical discourse.

Actually, the audience for a fiction does not just give this power away to the author for nothing, and they should not automatically be presumed to be passive. With total authorial control comes the audience awareness of the author’s responsibility for everything in the text. Freed from the restraints of referentiality, the fictional author is confronted with other kinds of demands. What particularly differentiates fictional from non-fictional texts is the authorial invention of plot and characters as contrasted to real-world events and persons. Complicated generic expectations have built up around the duties of fictional authors, which is why the relationship of Author and Audience deserves its own dynamic in this schema. Authorial control and its attendant responsibility is heightened with fiction even as the specific responsibilities attendant upon referentiality disappear.

The relationship of authors and audiences is often revealed through examination of genre. Genres emerge as a set of conventions tacitly agreed to between author and audience, built around mutual expectations created by recurrent communicative situations (Miller). Genres must be adhered to or

successfully challenged in order to change - if genres were truly static then it would not make sense that various entertainment genres do not simply remain unchanged. As with this dynamic, the social model of genre theorized by Carolyn Miller emphasizes the relationships between people even when textual clues drawn from communicative documents might be the only means of discovering relationships.

Of the three dynamics, the Author-Audience dynamic is the most obscured in participatory fiction, compared to its importance in normal fiction. The Extratextual Dynamic operates in the same manner and is equally important to any kind of fictional rhetoric; the Intratextual (Givens & Gaps) Dynamic takes on a different yet very active role in participatory fiction. The Author-Audience Dynamic is harder to observe in participatory fiction for several reasons. The identities of the authors of participatory fictions are often unknown to those who engage with them. Even where creators of (for example) thought experiments or textbook problems are indicated, authorial persona is de-emphasized. Because the audience participates in the completion of the fiction by making fictional choices, the audience assumes an immersive relationship with the fiction that obscures the traditional sender-receiver model of communication found in a normal author-audience relationship. Thrust upon them is a position of limited and subordinate authorship in which they make collaborative choices with the fiction.

The Intratextual Dynamic: Givens and Gaps

The announcement of fiction allows for absolute and unchallengeable statements and conditions within the fiction. No appeal can be found outside of the text for the givens in a fiction. Wayne Booth provides a succinct example and explanation of this feature in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, albeit by using a text not everyone regards as fictional:

"There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, one that feared God, and eschewed evil." With one stroke the unknown author has given us a kind of information never obtained about real people, even about our most intimate friends. Yet it is information that we must accept without question if we are to grasp the story that is to follow. In life if a friend confided his view that his friend was "perfect and upright," we would accept the information with qualifications imposed by our knowledge of the speaker's character or of the general fallibility of mankind. We could never trust even the most reliable of witnesses as completely as we trust the author of the opening statement about Job. (3-4)

Whether a reader regards *The Book of Job* as a revelation from a divine, all-knowing deity or as a particularly resonant work of fiction, Booth's example illustrates both the third, textually oriented dynamic and the second, author/audience oriented dynamic. In a fiction, an author has the power to make absolutes of what would in non-fiction be statements open to doubt. An all-

knowing and presumably trustworthy deity-author would enjoy the same privileges in a work of non-fiction!

Booth differentiates what "we must accept without question if we are to grasp the story" from what would in a non-fiction remain subjective character judgments, however supportable. Fiction allows the presence of absolutes that do not require verification. One of the most essential privileges is the reporting of the thoughts of fictional characters, a powerful technique for developing reader engagement and empathy.

In a non-fiction, acquisition of additional information could confirm, deny, or modify all referential statements. A non-fictional assessment is always potentially open to challenge because it references directly the real world. This is not to suggest that all non-fictions are constantly being tested, questioned and doubted. Readers do grant, often with ease, the status of fact to many non-fictional statements. The crucial difference is that while the status of fact is supported by its referentiality to the rest of the world, a fictional absolute enjoys its status just by being designated as such within a fiction.

Just as the nature of the givens in a fiction differs from those in a non-fiction, so the gaps in a fiction are different from gaps in non-fiction. As with fictional absolutes, there is no appeal available to outside investigation to fill in a fictional gap. Gaps in a non-fiction might be filled in with the help of additional sources and research. Even unobtainable information such as the precise thoughts of a person described in a non-fictional text is only unobtainable for practical reasons. We can't read minds. As a result, we are more likely to accept that an answer is "out there" in the world whether we will be able to know it or

not. In contrast, the unobtainable information in a fiction is not there because it was not included in the fiction. Period. There is no place else to locate it.

Gaps are unavoidable and in a sense uncountable in non-fictional and fictional texts; there is no way to include everything in a text, and no end to an accounting of what has not been included. Gaps present more serious interpretive problems (and interpretive opportunities) in fiction, and certain gaps are the focus of audience interest while most are not. Let's return to the example of the story of Job. Although Booth doesn't mention it (at least in his short discussion quoted from above), the gaps in the story that have invited centuries of interpretation—Who is the supernatural being that nearly kills Job? Why does Job suffer such injustice?—cannot be filled through some appeal to outside information, as in a conventional non-fictional text. These kinds of gaps, unique to fiction, are potentially a source of rhetorical power every bit as much as the unquestionable givens are. Meanwhile, few if any readers have ever wondered what color Job's footwear was, or what the name of his favorite meal was. These gaps, and an unlimited number of others, are not filled in, yet are too trivial to provoke interpretive speculation.

No fiction can spell out everything with perfect precision even if total completeness of depiction and background information were a necessity, leading to a theoretical problem of explaining how fictional situations (or fictional worlds in some terminology) can even be communicated to readers. Marie Laure-Ryan,

pondering the question of how readers respond to gaps in a fiction, invented "the principle of minimum departure" to explain how readers negotiate the gaps:

the principle states that when readers construct fictional worlds, they fill in the gaps in the text by assuming the similarity of the fictional world to their own experiential reality. This model can only be overruled by the text itself; thus, if a text mentions a blue deer, the reader will imagine an animal that resembles her idea of real deer in all respects other than the colour. The statement 'deer have four legs' will be true of this fictional world, but the statement 'deer have a single horn, and it is made of pearl' will be false, unless specified by the text. (124)

Laure-Ryan developed this principle to explain reader understanding of narrative fiction. Because of the flexibility it allows in reader negotiation of fictional situations, the principle of minimum departure is also especially useful for considering reader handling of givens and gaps in participatory fictions. It does not insist upon an idealized picture of one kind of reader, instead allowing that readers bring their previous ideas about the world to their subjective experience of texts, their construction of "fictional worlds" (124). In participatory fictions, the audience takes on a role that is author-like to a degree, because they must "complete" the fictional situation that has been given to them. Yet they do not have the full privileges of authors because the fictional givens have already been established. Participants contribute by filling in the fictional gaps that they are invited to alter, either explicitly or implicitly.

Overview of this Dissertation

As my dissertation will rely equally on rhetorical theory and narrative theory, it would be useful to bring these fields more into discussion with one another than is currently the case. The work of Aristotle provides this opportunity. Both rhetoric and narrative were first systematically theorized by Aristotle, and both fields continue to reference his work as a touchstone and a source of insight and controversy. However, each field begins with a different book: rhetoric with *On Rhetoric* and narrative with *Poetics*. In Chapter 2, I attempt a synthetic reading of Aristotle's concepts of history and fiction (and related issues such as mimesis and referentiality) in these two foundational works.

In Chapters 3 & 4, I analyze two kinds of participatory fictions used for the explicitly rhetorical purposes of persuasion and pedagogy. In Chapter 3 - "Ethics Thought Experiments as Participatory Fictions," I discuss ethics thought experiments as rhetorical fictions, focusing in particular upon two widely-discussed examples of this genre: the "trolley problem" and the "ticking time bomb scenario". Hypothetical situations are often presented as persuasive devices for moral, ethical and political purposes. Ethics thought experiments are often pointed lessons that nevertheless only work with a level of audience participation not found in more straightforward rhetorical communications. Despite their origins, they qualify as examples of rhetorical participatory fictions and have long been employed in persuasive efforts aimed at the general public.

My goal in Chapter 3 is to discuss this material in connection with the question of the rhetorical functioning of fictions and of participatory fictions in particular. While much academic and public discussion of these scenarios has taken place, I believe my approach emphasizing the differences made by the use of fictionality will add a vital dimension not currently in evidence.

In Chapter 4, "Participatory Fictions in Professional Communication Pedagogy," I discuss student exercises for composing and communicating in professional communication. Classroom exercises, especially in business genres, are primarily built around participatory fictions. These exercises come in the forms of case studies, problems, fictional business proposals, role playing, short situational exercises and more. Many exercises invite students to analyze and criticize the choices made by fictional characters who are engaging in business communications. Many of these exercises can be classified as participatory fictions because students must engage with them as active characters within the fictions, creating business communication *as* these characters, rather than as outside commentators.

A practical advantage of using participatory fictions is that students can practice producing work in genres such as memos, business letters, recommendation reports, conferences and presentations. These genres depend upon business situations for the production of meaningful content. Students have not generally had the kinds of experience necessary to draw upon in order to provide content, nor is it always possible to create real-world situations to provide content. (Even when real-world situations are used, some fictionalization is usually necessary). Participatory fictions provide a controlled

space for evaluating student efforts and understanding of principles of business communication. Requirements for the evaluation of multiple students encourage teachers toward the use of participatory fictions because they contain a precise quantity of shared background information. Teachers can then not only judge whether students have made wise use of background information shared by all but also more clearly explain their evaluations.

Despite the widespread use of participatory fictions in business communication pedagogy, the practice of pretending – of fictionalizing - itself is little explained or commented upon in the instructions in the business communication textbooks themselves. Using the analytic framework I have presented in the first chapter, a practical means of critiquing and evaluating the effectiveness of these problems will be outlined.

In the conclusion, Chapter 5, I assess the effectiveness of considering these disparate examples of discourse as examples of fictional rhetoric (and participatory fictional rhetoric). I try to assess whether the practical considerations about fictional rhetoric I laid out in the first chapter have proven sufficiently useful in explaining the power and appeal of these approaches. I also suggest some areas for further research.

CHAPTER 2

ARISTOTLE ON FICTION, NON-FICTION, AND RHETORICAL EXAMPLES

In this chapter I contend that despite the general neglect of fictionality by rhetoricians, inclusion of the persuasive and pedagogic functioning of fictions as essential subject matter for study is compatible with rhetorical theory dating back to Aristotle. However, Aristotle's coverage of this topic in the *Rhetoric* is too brief to be fully adequate. So is his explanation of the rhetorical functioning of any kind of examples (*paradigms*, in Aristotle's terminology), whether fictional or non-fictional. By including and comparing some of Aristotle's remarks on fiction and non-fiction in his *Poetics* as well as his *On Rhetoric*, we can arrive at a fuller sense of an Aristotelian and therefore usefully foundational basis for this study.

Richard McKeon writes that "of all the works of Aristotle, the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* have been most directly and most persistently influential on modern thought" ("Rhetoric and Poetic," 201). It is appropriate that McKeon should link these two books: despite differing emphases, both treatises come from a consistent, lastingly relevant perspective transcending the differences built into studies of poetics and rhetoric. Narrative theory and rhetorical theory were each given their first systematic treatment by Aristotle: narrative theory by his *Poetics*, and rhetoric by *On Rhetoric*. Each academic field tends, however, to

ignore the other text when defining Aristotelian positions on matters pertinent to both fields.

This is true in some surprising cases. Walter R. Fisher, whose “Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm” is regularly anthologized by rhetoricians but thoroughly ignored by narrative theorists, cites only Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric*. Meanwhile, Wayne Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, which has high stature in rhetorical studies and foundational status in narrative theory, cites only Aristotle’s *Poetics*, never *On Rhetoric*.

In a revealing passage, Booth notes that Aristotle explicitly refers readers of the *Poetics* interested in how “thought” (*dianoia*) functions in poetry to his remarks on the subject in *On Rhetoric* (92), but Booth himself does not follow this up with an explanation of the relevant material from the *Rhetoric*. Instead Booth explains why Aristotle’s studies of poetics and rhetoric should be considered separately:

despite this close relation to the study of rhetoric, poetics is not the study of effects designed to suit the characteristics of particular audiences. The audience to be worked upon is kept constant; only in studying rhetoric proper must we trouble about the peculiarities of audiences and the adaptation of our case to fit those peculiarities. (92-93)

Booth’s emphasis on “the characteristics of particular audiences” is consistent with the self-conception the field of rhetoric had held at least since Herbert Wichelns’ “The Literary Criticism of Oratory,” a much-anthologized 1925 essay considered a foundational text, one that defined a primary difference

between literature and oratory as the permanence of the one vs. the transience of the other (6-8). The self-conception of the field drawn from Wichelns is still influential and perhaps dominant, but much has changed in both aesthetic and rhetorical criticism. Not all art seems to have been designed for an eternal audience (nor could it practically be, given the needs of the living.) Art often seems to be a commentary on the times, and as a result, aesthetic critics often decide they too must “trouble about the peculiarities of audiences.”

The idea that rhetoric must be specific to situation and therefore transient is of limited use. Not all oratory is, once spoken, forgotten except by its immediate audience; some of it lasts, as Edwin Black argued in *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* – the book that has often been credited with bringing down the “neo-Aristotelianism” inaugurated by Wichelns. In the United States the best-known rhetoric created in response to the American Revolution, the Civil War, the Great Depression, World War II and the Civil Rights era is never really dead and gone; old rhetoric is regularly re-invoked for new rhetorical purposes.

Nevertheless, it is probably true that rhetorical criticism remains more focused on immediate effects on particular audiences than does aesthetic criticism. In practice, this dissertation will not challenge this notion. The participatory fictions that will be examined here are so utilitarian that they have received no attention from aesthetic critics, and they seem to be designed and deployed for immediate persuasive and pedagogic effect on the audience/participants, fitting fully into this traditional sense of what qualifies as

rhetoric. In any case, the fraught-not-settled battle between eternal and situational is not the most important reason why these two works by Aristotle should be studied together.

While obviously recognizing the differing functions of the arts covered enough to have written different treatises on them, Aristotle did not treat his two works of theory and practical advice as closed off from one another. The instance of cross-referencing mentioned above by Booth is not alone. In *Poetics* Aristotle refers his readers to *On Rhetoric* at least twice; in *On Rhetoric* he references *Poetics* six times (Whalley 122). Generally, Aristotle suggests in these instances that readers wishing to learn more about a particular topic should consult the other work (see, for examples, *Rhetoric* 1372a, 1404b, and 1419b). George Kennedy argues that some of these cross-references are "late additions" to the *Rhetoric* (248), suggesting that Aristotle continued to see his works as relevantly interlinked as he added to and revised them.

Aristotle uses sufficiently similar criteria for judging quality, despite the differing aims of tragic poetry and oratory, that some of his remarks in *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* should be considered in comparison and complement to one another, not permanently separated. McKeon argues that the main distinctions between Aristotle's works relating to the use of language is not their subject matter but their emphasis:

such distinctions do not depend, however, on classifying statements in fixed genera, as if they had natural forms, definitions and species. A work which is essentially poetic may be practical in its effects on the characters of men and scientific in its statement of incidental arguments; and it may

therefore be considered, so long as attention is directed either to practical consequences or to theoretic precision, in terms of other criteria than those of poetry. ("Aristotle's Conception of Language" 214)

Thus McKeon concludes that "poetry is treated as such in the *Poetics*" but "the statements and arguments of poets and of characters in poetry are analyzed in the *Rhetoric*" (214). Consideration of both treatises leads to a fuller view of not only poetic statements, but other kinds of statements as well, whether they are being specifically discussed or not.

Aristotle on Examples (*Paradigms*)

As examples—*paradigms* in Aristotle's terminology—fictions or non-fictions can function as support for arguments or as inductive arguments, and Aristotle includes some explanation of how in his *Rhetoric*, spending a small amount of space explaining how orators might use fictional or non-fictional examples to support their arguments. Aristotle doesn't spend a lot of time on "persuasion by example" - he devotes about four times as much space to enthymemes.

Furthermore, most of the examples of paradigms in action show them dependent upon enthymemes to make their rhetorical points. The rhetorical tradition has followed this pattern: as Gerard Hauser writes of rhetorical scholars, "their inquiries have virtually ignored example, while pursuing enthymeme with great energy" (78).

Nevertheless, Aristotle at the classificatory level in Book 1 of the *Rhetoric* gives paradigms and enthymemes their separate places as the sole sources of any logical persuasion that can belong to rhetoric:

I call a rhetorical syllogism an enthymeme, a rhetorical induction a paradigm. And all [speakers] produce logical persuasion by means of paradigms or enthymemes and by nothing other than these (1356b)

Aristotle's definition of a paradigm as a "rhetorical induction" is clarified shortly thereafter:

It has been explained that a paradigm is an induction and with what kinds of things it is concerned. It is reasoning neither from part to whole nor from whole to part but from part to part, like to like, when two things fall under the same genus but one is better known than the other (1357b)

As Scott Consigny explains,

Aristotle claims further that one mode of logical proof is argument by example, a reasoning from 'part to part' without the intervention of or reliance on a 'whole.' I construe what Aristotle calls a 'whole' to be functionally equivalent to our notion of 'rule' as that which justifies and provides a ground for a step in a logical argument (123-124).

What Aristotle presents immediately after his explanation is the one example of a paradigm in the *Rhetoric* that genuinely functions as a standalone means of proof:

For example, [when someone claims] that Dionysius is plotting tyranny because he is seeking a bodyguard; for Peisistratus also, when plotting earlier, sought a bodyguard and after receiving it made himself tyrant, and Theagenes [did the same] in Megara, and others, whom the audience knows of, all become examples for Dionysius, of whom they do not yet know whether he makes his demand for this reason (1358a).

This illustrates reasoning from “part to part” because two instances of a past leader who acquired a bodyguard while plotting tyranny are provided to support a claim about a current leader. Kennedy notes that what Aristotle is illustrating with this example is that “the paradigm moves from the particular premises to a particular conclusion, with the universal link not expressed” (44). For Consigny, this capability of the example is what differentiates it most significantly :

“because we do not perceive the ‘whole’ until after we have been able to make sense of the new situation in the terms of the example, we have no way of ‘going by’ rules or wholes” (125).

Aristotle also notes in Book 1 that some orators are more prone to the use of paradigms while some orators are more likely to use enthymemes:

It is also apparent that either species of rhetoric has merit; for some rhetorical utterances are paradigmatic, some enthymematic; and similarly, some orators are paradigmatic, some enthymematic. (1356b)

Aristotle suggests some optimal use of either form of logical proof by type of rhetoric, however:

Paradigms are best in deliberative speeches; for we judge future things by predicting them from past ones; and enthymemes are best in judicial speeches, for what has happened in some unclear way is best given a cause and demonstration [by enthymematic argument]. (1368a)

However, when Aristotle returns to discuss the use of example in Book 2, at the level of providing detail on the actual practices of logical persuasion in oratory that is the focus of much of Book 2, his discussion of examples is far shorter than the discussion of enthymemes. Aristotle devotes one chapter (Book 2, Ch. 20) to paradigms, and four chapters (Book 2, Ch. 22-25) to enthymemes.

But actually, the three examples that are provided in Ch. 20 do not show paradigms functioning as standalone rhetorical inductions as the example in Book 1 had, but instead only as providers of evidence for the enthymemes that are supplied with the examples. Aristotle provides one example drawn from history, and two examples drawn from fables (1393b – 1394a). With all three examples (which I will examine in more detail later), Aristotle ends each example with an enthymeme that explicitly states the intended rhetorical point. As Aristotle writes at the end of the section, this gives only “the appearance of induction,” and he recommends usually downplaying the role of example even further by using them after enthymemes as “witnesses” to the truth of the enthymeme (1394a).

As Hauser writes of the disparity in presentation of the functioning of examples between Book 1 and Book 2,

Book 1 presents example as an independent mode of proof, as co-ordinate with enthymeme, as moving from part to part. At swords' points with this

is Book 2, which presents example as merely a source of materials for proof, as subordinate to enthymeme, as moving from part to whole. Further, the *Rhetoric* provides insufficient grounds for explaining this seeming disparity in doctrine, for resolving it, or for choosing one doctrine over the other. (79)

Hauser ultimately suggests that the disparity does not suggest a contradiction in Aristotle's text but that Aristotle's theory of the paradigm is still a "single, albeit, bifurcated, doctrine (...) [the example] may function as an independent method of proof or it may function as a support in enthymematic proof" (88). William Benoit disagrees, suggesting that Hauser's argument "rests on the false premise that Aristotle's doctrines cannot be inconsistent" (183). Instead Benoit concludes by essentially accepting the treatment suggested by Book 2 rather than Book 1, defining the term "rhetorical induction" to *necessarily* include an enthymeme, denying the example the capability of functioning as a true induction (192).

Consigny's more expansive, independent role for the rhetorical example, as a device that "allows the rhetor to function in those situations in which rules and rule-governed reasoning do not readily apply" (132) is not given much practical support by Aristotle's presentation of such possible use in *On Rhetoric*. Aristotle provides little modeling for the use of the paradigm as anything other than a kind of support for an enthymeme.

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* also doesn't tell us how rhetors can use more complicated examples than either previously agreed-upon and widely known

historical anecdotes or didactic fables; nor does he present a complete account of the rhetorical differences between historical and fabulous examples. This lack of practical explanation of how the example is to work makes it all the more necessary and fruitful to examine the *Poetics* in light of *On Rhetoric*, and vice versa, for a notion of rhetorical effects of fiction strongly based on a dynamic that includes plausibility and relatability as developments within the Aristotelian tradition.

Aristotle on Fiction and Non-Fiction

In both treatises, Aristotle makes a point of differentiating fiction and non-fiction. It is not something he spends much time on in either treatise, but the reasons why he differentiates fiction and non-fiction relate closely to the appropriate argumentative goals of the passages. It must be noted that Aristotle conveys the difference without using the terms fiction or non-fiction. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle compares tragic drama and history; in the *Rhetoric* Aristotle compares the use of fictional and non-fictional examples (*paradigms*) through a comparison of fables and historical examples.

Scholars of both works agree that Aristotle is referring to relative fictionality or non-fictionality as the defining difference. George A. Kennedy, commenting on his translation of *On Rhetoric*, writes of Aristotle's definition of paradigms that "the species are 'historical' and 'fictional'" (162). Anthony Kenny (xxxviii-xxix) and Kathy Eden (48-49) freely substitute the word "fiction" for "poetry" when discussing Aristotle's argument in the *Poetics*.

The ways that Aristotle defines the differences in genre in each treatise are built around their relative fictionality. Here is Aristotle on the defining difference between poetry and history in the *Poetics*:

it is clear that the poet's job is not relating what actually happened, but rather the kind of thing that would happen - that is to say, what is possible in terms of probability and necessity. The difference between a historian and a poet is not a matter of using verse or prose: you might put the works of Herodotus into verse and it would be a history in verse no less than in prose. The difference is that the one relates what actually happened, and the other the kinds of events that would happen (1451b)

A number of ideas are packed into this passage that will be explored in a bit, but for now it's enough to note that Aristotle's definition of history as "what actually happened" is a definition of history built around its non-fictionality.

In *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle addresses the difference between fiction and non-fiction when discussing the kinds of examples orators might use to support their arguments: "There are two species of paradigms; for to speak of things that have happened before is one species of paradigm and to make up [an illustration] is another" (1393a). This is the section of *On Rhetoric* that Kennedy glossed with his statement "thus the species are 'historical' and 'fictional'" (162). Aristotle defines history in a similar way as he did in *Poetics*, as "things that have happened." He differentiates other kinds of examples as "made up" and therefore fictional.

So history is the genre that in both treatises represents non-fiction, and Aristotle's definition of history is similar in each treatise. Because of this, it is all the more significant that Aristotle's remarks on history in the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric* seem to conflict.

Theorizing differences between the meanings of fiction and history, Aristotle's statements about fiction and history in the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* are, at least on a surface level, contradictory. In the *Poetics* Aristotle suggests that fiction is more meaningful than history because of an order and probability shared by the events in a well-ordered fiction, in contrast to the happenstance sequence that a history would present. However, in *On Rhetoric* Aristotle makes nearly the opposite point, suggesting that orators trying to make convincing cases should prefer to offer relevant historical examples rather than fictional examples because the past is a reliable guide to future probabilities; here, for the purposes of persuasion, history is found to be more meaningful than fiction.

The section of the *Poetics* in which Aristotle makes this argument immediately follows some text I've quoted above. It is one of the most often cited sections of the treatise, and I will begin this quotation with the last sentence of the above cited section:

The difference is that the one [history] relates what actually happened, and the other [poetry] relates the kinds of events that would happen. For this reason poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history; poetry utters universal truths, history particular statements. The universal truths concern what befits a person of a certain kind to say or do in accordance with probability and necessity. (*Poetics* 1451b)

The most famous sentence in the passage is Aristotle's statement that "poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history; poetry utters universal truths, history particular statements." Isolated, the statement is susceptible to implying overly favorable or negative assessments. Aristotle has often been taken as denigrating history here: "Aristotle infamously contrasts history and poetry in a fashion which offends modern readers - perhaps especially modern historians" (Lockwood). Aristotle's formulation was taken to elevate poets to a position of importance above not only historians but philosophers most influentially by Sir Philip Sidney. Sidney quoted Aristotle's arguments and took them to a radical conclusion:

I conclude, therefore, that [the poet] excelleth history, not only in furnishing the mind with knowledge, but in setting it forward to that which deserveth to be called and accounted good; which setting forward, and moving to well-doing, indeed setteth the laurel crown upon the poet as victorious, not only the historian, but over the philosopher, howsoever in teaching it may be questionable. (para 35)

Sidney goes on to explain that although the wisdom of the philosopher might be greater than the poet, "moving is of a higher degree than teaching" (para 35) - and in moving the reader, Sidney argues, the poet has the advantage.

So far as accurate understanding of Aristotle is concerned, there are good reasons to modify these readings. Some of Aristotle's translators have noted that readings of the terms translated as "philosophical" and "universal" carry misleading associations, particularly if Platonian, Idealistic notions of such terms

are incorrectly presumed. As George Whalley notes, “‘Philosophical’ could mean to Aristotle as to Coleridge ‘the affectionate pursuit of wisdom’ as much as it could mean the exercise of logical and abstractive technique” (80). With this distinction in mind, Whalley adds that “it is clear that not all poems are ‘more philosophical and more serious’ than all histories” (80). Gerald Else makes the case that “in saying that poetry is ‘more philosophical,’ Aristotle does not say that it is philosophy” (304). Most importantly, Else argues that “Aristotle’s defense [of poetry] does not take the crude form of identifying poetry with philosophy, and his ‘universals’ are not Plato’s Ideas (305). What Aristotle says he means by universals - “what befits a person of a certain kind to say or do in accordance with probability” - belong (as Else argues) to the “realm to which they belong” (305): the practical sciences, which include rhetoric:

In so far as ‘poetic’ deals with universals at all it must be correlated with ethics and politics, or with rhetoric, which is an ‘offshoot’ of politics. But ‘poetic’ is not a science, even at this level. What it can offer us is a view of the typology of human nature, freed from the accidents that encumber our vision in real life. It can show us “what kind of thing such and such a kind of man will naturally say or do” under given circumstances. (305)

From a rhetorical perspective, Aristotle suggests universals can be found in situations - a crucial meeting point between his two treatises.

Now let's look at what Aristotle writes of history in *On Rhetoric*, noting that it has been far less commented upon than his remarks in *Poetics*.

After defining the two kinds of paradigms, Aristotle in recommending what kinds of examples orators should use to make their case writes that "examples from history are more useful than fables in deliberation, for future events will generally be like those of the past" (1394a). However, Aristotle also says that "it is difficult to find similar historical incidents that have happened, but it is rather easy with fables" (1394a).

This is curious. If future events are generally like the past, then there should always be plenty of usable past to draw upon to make rhetorical points. There should *never* be a shortage of historical events to compare present situations to. Yet Aristotle says that fables "suitable for deliberative oratory" are easier to find than historical examples.

Why would historical examples be harder to come by for orators? Aristotle presents two historical examples in the *Rhetoric*. The example of previous tyrants who took bodyguards was covered earlier. In Book 2 Aristotle presents an (apparently hypothetical) example built around previous invasions of Egypt:

An instance of speaking of [historical] facts is if someone were to say that it is necessary to make preparations against the king [of Persia] and not allow Egypt to be subdued; for in the past Darius did not invade [Greece] until he had taken Egypt, but after taking it, he invaded; and again, Xerxes did not attack until he took [Egypt]. But having taken it, he invaded; thus if he [the present king] takes [Egypt], he will invade [Greece]; as a result it must not be allowed (1393b)

In terms of the rhetorical points being made and how, the two examples are remarkably similar: in both cases, the case for the existence of threat and the necessity of action is made by comparing the outcomes of previous situations.

As the orator does not take the time in these examples to argue for interpretations of the previous historical situations as well as an interpretation of the present situation, it can only be concluded that the historical examples are well known by the audience. Furthermore, listeners could safely be presumed to share certain interpretations of the meanings of these events.

These conditions explain why Aristotle would say historical examples are in short supply, even though no society runs out of history. It makes sense that Aristotle would recommend that orators use only historical examples that are instantly graspable, that don't require explanation, and are understood to carry stable, uncontroversial points. Basically, much history telling and repetition of interpretation has to be done in order to create instantly graspable historical examples.

To put it another way, meaningful *plot* in history has to be created at some point. Aristotle's reasoning in the *Rhetoric* as to why one of these appropriate but rare historical examples will be best - "because future events will generally be like those of the past" (1394a) - turns out not to be all that different from something Aristotle notes in the *Poetics* about tragedies based on historic events:

what is possible is credible. If something has not happened we are inclined to disbelieve that it is possible; but it is obvious that what has happened is possible, since if it were not it would never have happened (1451b)

This statement threatens to completely contradict the statements Aristotle has only sentences ago in the *Poetics*, not only that poetry is more serious than history but that

The poet's job is not relating what actually happened, but rather the kind of thing that would happen - that is to say, what is possible in terms of probability and necessity (1451b)

and that the works of Herotodus, the historian, could be put into verse and it would not be poetry but history because "the one relates what actually happened, and the other the kinds of events that would happen" (1451b). Aristotle rescues the discussion from hopeless contradiction with this summation:

It is clear from all this that the poet must be a maker of stories rather than verses, in so far as it is representation that makes him a poet, and representation is of actions. Even if it turns out that he is writing about historical events he is no less a poet for that, since nothing prevents such events being the kind of thing that would happen. (1451b)

As Else explains, "the paradox inherent in Aristotle's concept of 'imitation' rises to a climax in the last sentence" (321). The kind of thing that we *would* think would be expected to happen *could* be something that really happened! The word Kenny translates as "representation" in this passage is variously translated as "imitation" or *mimesis*. Else's explanation is very helpful in explaining the significance of the "paradox" he has noted:

These events are already there, they have happened, and yet the poet 'makes' them just as much as if he had invented them himself. What the poet 'makes,' then is not the actuality of events but their logical structure, their meaning (...) Hence, although 'historical' subjects are not to be clung to at all costs, neither are they to be eschewed at all costs. Their actuality will not contaminate the poet's work if he knows what he is doing. (321)

What the poet makes is a meaningful plot. And rhetorically useful historical examples share the benefit of a meaningful plot too. While there is no shortage of history, there may be a shortage of meaningful plots (or at least a shortage of well-known and agreed upon meaningful plots). It is the "plot" that is lifted by the rhetor from the historical examples Aristotle shares in the *Rhetoric* and imposed upon the structure of current events to make a persuasive case. "Logical structure and meaning," as Else puts it, are crucial to Aristotle's notion of what makes a good plot, that as Aristotle says events in a story "come about, with necessity or probability, from the preceding events" (1452a).

Aristotle's comment about the place of fantastical occurrences in stories in the *Poetics* shows consistency in his principles of what qualifies as good mimesis, representation or imitation:

In general, impossibilities should be justified by reference to the needs of poetry, the desire for edification, or the prevalence of an opinion. The needs of poetry make what is plausible though impossible preferable to what is possible but implausible. (1461b)

Perhaps we have taken the notion of mimesis to mean a "realistic" depiction; for Aristotle mimesis is making plausible connections between events. Aristotle's statements about the place of impossibilities helps explain his choice of fictional examples in the *Rhetoric*. The two examples of fables Aristotle gives in the *Rhetoric*, both of which come from actual oratorical usage, are talking animal stories - in one, a horse asks a man for help against a stag, with unfortunate results for the horse; in the other, a wandering hedgehog offers to help a fox resigned to being covered with ticks, who explains why (1393b).

In both of these examples, the orator who uses them explains the point to be taken by the audience, making them more the type of an example supporting an enthymeme than a standalone example. In the first, which Aristotle attributes to Stesichorus, a horse angry at a stag who has damaged his pasture asks a man for help avenging the damage, and allows himself to "submit to a bit" and ultimately finds "himself slave to a man" (1393b). Stesichorus uses this story as a warning to his audience not to submit to "a general with absolute power" (1393b) for short-term ends. In the second fable Aristotle presents as an example, Aesop defends a "demagogue who was on trial for his life in Samos" (1393b) by telling the story of a fox who declines help from a hedgehog on the grounds that the ticks already infesting her fur "are already full of me and draw little blood, but if you remove these, other hungry ones will come and drink what blood I have left" (1393b). Aesop, like Stesichorus, makes the point unmistakable by comparing the demagogue he defends to blood-swollen ticks (!) who will no longer be a problem, unlike the other "poor ones" who "will steal and spend your public funds" (1393b).

Clearly, what Aristotle sees as useful about these fictional examples to orators is the situational plausibility of each of them, rather than what we would call "artistic realism". The presence of such a blatant "impossibility" (as referred to in 1461b of the *Poetics*) as talking, reasoning, bargaining animals does not nullify the points of the fables. Rather, the fables work as rhetorical examples because they present graspable and interesting situations that show internal plausibility from which a clear point can be derived. This would be true whether the point is made explicitly (and enthymematically), or whether the example works in the more independent way described by Consigny characterized by "this very absence of justification through rules" (130):

In those novel and indeterminate rhetorical situations in which rule-governed arguments are either inapplicable or undesirable, the rhetor is able to reason by example without requiring "rules" to justify his arguments. Argument by example thus emerges as an independent mode of proof or rational persuasion which the rhetor performs. And it is the performance which we either accept or reject, independently of rules (...) Establishing order in the situation, the rhetor becomes engaged in an interaction between the example and new situation. (131)

Aristotle makes no claim for fables as a high art such as tragic poetry, but his criteria for a good tragedy resembles the strengths of a useful paradigm in the important respect of a meaningful plot. As Eden writes,

Designed according to probability, the fiction of the *Poetics* is also a construction of events or of disparate details according to how these events

or details generally occur. Representing a probable instance, the completed tragedy constitutes an example or paradigm. (...) Aristotle's paradigm, represented by the poet and frequently used by the orator, embodies the universal in a sequence of events or assembly of details *because* it demonstrates the general rule. (70)

The completed tragedy is, however, considerably more complicated than any rhetorical example we have seen provided by Aristotle. Eden is surely right that "the completed tragedy constitutes an example" but perhaps it would be accurate to add that an effective tragedy would likely provide a source of many possible rhetorical examples. Consigny's resourceful rhetor, "engaged in an interaction between the example and new situation," comes to "see the example itself in a new way" and "becomes familiar with the new situation and is able to order it coherently" (131). A more complicated tragedy would provide a rhetor with more material for the construction of examples.

Conclusion

In the first chapter, in the section on what I called the extratextual dynamic, I argued that one of the key conditions that a fiction must meet to have real-world influence is that the relevance of some or all aspects of the fictional situation to a real-world situation can be communicated or perceived. Aristotle's concept of the rhetorical example, its workings understood more deeply thanks to his analysis in the *Poetics* of meaningful plot, provides a much greater

understanding of what makes such relevance possible, perceivable, and communicable.

The quality of either kind of example that recommends itself to rhetors is a kind of plausibility achieved through what is commonly thought of as “plot.” Applying the word plot to both fictional and non-fictional materials shows their relationship (at least as potential rhetorical examples). Plot turns out to be something of an explanation in the form of a chain of causality. To impose plot upon real events is more of an imposition; with a fictional example, the internal sense making can more easily be imposed. The plausibility of an example comes from an internal sense-making arrangement. Real world relevance is achieved when the internal structure of the fictional example can be seen to be relevant to the real world situation it is being related to.

In the simplest rhetorical examples, the fables of the type Aristotle mentions, the plot perfectly aligns with “the moral of the story.” Such blatant fables have not remained a regular tool in the arsenal of the orator, yet the rhetorical example remains. Aristotle’s theorizing on the subject in his *Rhetoric* did not adequately prepare us for rhetorical examples that did not come pre-packaged with their own explanatory enthymemes, but the *Poetics*, seen in light of a unified approach, helps explain how more complicated narratives can work rhetorically.

Something else happens with examples when they tell more than a simple story such as a fable does. They capture imagination and interest. Fictions become sites for rhetorical action, providing the basis for the invoking of a rhetorical situation. The relevance to a real world situation is discovered and

disclosed by rhetors, in a kind of exploitation of a common topos. In our own society, well-known works of narrative art, particularly those that reach a wide audience such as movies, become the subject of debate that ranges far from usual discussions of aesthetics. In recent years, fictional movies such as *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Million Dollar Baby*, and *Django Unchained* inspired many journalistic “think pieces” discussing the ways in which these movies were (seen by the writers of the pieces as) attempting to influence American opinion on the issues of CIA interrogation, disability rights and slavery respectively. With these more robust and fully-formed fictions, understanding them as rhetorical examples is enhanced by the synthetic view of Aristotle’s theories more than if we had to rely solely upon the simpler examples in the *Rhetoric*. A popular fiction that inspires widespread rhetorical response is something of an instigator of a rhetorical situation in itself.

The persuasive and pedagogical fictions to be examined in the next two chapters function as considerably more direct examples than those provided by classic Greek tragedy or American fictional movies, and the lessons they are meant to impart are more obvious. No one goes to thought experiments or business communication problems for aesthetic or entertainment experiences; they are utilitarian fictions aimed at achieving particular ends. In rhetorical function, they more resemble the short examples in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* than the tragedies he examines in his *Poetics* – yet because they do not outwardly resemble fables, Aristotle’s fictional example of choice for orators, their identity

as rhetorical examples has been obscured. In many cases, the addition of audience participation (in completing them as fictions), gives them yet further distinctions from the classic Aristotelian rhetorical example in ways that will be explored in these chapters.

CHAPTER 3

ETHICS THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS AS PERSUASIVE RHETORIC

In this chapter and the next, I will use the dynamics outlined in my first chapter to describe the rhetorical workings of some examples of two prominent kinds of participatory fictions: ethics thought experiments and fictional scenario-based problems used in business communication classes. Because persuasion and pedagogy are not mutually exclusive endeavors, the persuasive and pedagogical applications of these genres employing fictionality overlap. The rhetorical settings determine my choices of emphasis in these chapters. In Chapter 3 I will primarily study the ethics thought experiments I have selected in the ways they are used for persuasive purposes in public discourse, and in Chapter 4 I will study business communication problems in the ways they are used for pedagogic purposes in the classroom.

Ethics thought experiments use imaginary scenarios to dramatize ethical dilemmas. As David Emmonds writes in his book on the history of the thought experiments known as “the trolley problems”, “thought experiments are designed to test our moral intuitions, to help us develop moral principles and thus to be of some practical use” (xiii). Without losing sight of the original sphere in which such thought experiments came to prominence, I will study how they function as persuasive fictional rhetoric, arguing that they represent altered forms of the Aristotelian example (*paradigm*). Because I emphasize that they are often tools

of persuasion that employ fictionality, my analysis of them necessarily differs from the more standard treatment of them as scholarly explorations of ethical issues.

These thought experiments also qualify as participatory fictions, which share the characteristics of other fictions with one major difference. The “text” of a participatory fiction creates a situation that is incomplete without the fictional contribution of the audience. In this most basic kind of participatory fiction that is represented by these thought experiments, the text concludes on the precipice of requested audience action. The scenarios studied in this chapter present the incipient participation as a perilous choice between unattractive options. The audience is enlisted as a character in the fiction who must make a decision. The completion of the fiction is left for the audience to decide. These scenarios meet the minimum standards for participatory fictions, but no more. (The business communication problems to be discussed in chapter 4 provide more elaborate participatory roles for audiences. While the texts of the problems conclude with the commencement of audience participation just as trolley problems do, the business communication problems differ not only in avoidance of deadly consequences but also in that the student audience participant must produce a more elaborate response, such as a piece of writing produced as if it came from a character in the situation). More elaborate participatory fictions include within the text some mechanism for reaction to varying audience choices.

Within the academic worlds where they have been invented, thought experiments do not seem to be regarded as a kind of persuasive rhetoric, nor are they much studied as examples of fiction. Lawrence Souder noted that “most

definitions of the term are couched in the experiment metaphor” (205). Souder references definitions by two of the most influential theorists of thought experiments, Roy Sorensen and James Robert Brown. Brown located thought experiments in “the laboratory of the mind” in his book of the same title, suggesting that thought experiments qualify as a kind of scientific experiment (1). Sorensen’s book *Thought Experiments* calls them “the philosopher’s instrument of choice” (7) and argues at length that these non-performable experiments qualify as experiments in the scientific sense, that “the points of resemblance are substantial enough to overwhelm the differences” (250) between thought experiments and performable experiments. Sorensen wrote in response to widespread skepticism over the very existence of thought experiments, hoping to “exonerate ‘thought experiment’ from the charge of being a systematically misleading expression” (216).

In contrast, and more relevant to the rhetorical use of some ethics thought experiments, Souder’s 2003 article “What Are We to Think about Thought Experiments” is a rare attempt to understand thought experiments as arguments. Souder notes that the way thought experiments function as arguments has “not received a lot of in depth and exclusive study, especially from the field of rhetoric” (206). Souder would break with Sorensen, claiming that unlike normal empirical experiments, thought experiments make arguments and tend to come pre-loaded with an “intended conclusion,” but that the way they function as arguments cannot be reduced to simply finding “premises and conclusions” (216). Souder emphasizes the importance of narrative details to the argumentative aspects of thought experiments, noting that altered versions proliferate in

response to well-known examples – “narrative aspects of thought experiments have implications for the process whereby one version of a thought experiment can spawn another” (209). Souder’s analysis is thus compatible with the more complicated version of Aristotle’s paradigm suggested by Scott (see Chapter 2) – that is, as more than merely an illustration for an enthymeme, but as implicit arguments in themselves.

Regardless of academic classification, some prominent examples of ethics thought experiments long ago escaped their original intellectual domains and have come to be routinely referred to in the service of persuasive efforts directed toward the general public. In the following sections I will focus on the original “trolley problems” and the “ticking bomb scenario” as examples of fictional rhetoric. These thought experiments have been widely disseminated through public discourse, and what has made them particularly problematic is that while they might have begun their intellectual life as investigations of a kind, they are invoked in public discourse as if obviously correct answers to moral problems had been achieved. They are treated as a form of evidence to support public policy and behavior. In the Aristotelian sense, they become examples.

Origins and Influence

What would come to be known as the original trolley problem was created by Philippa Foot, an English philosopher, in 1967 for an article on the ethical dilemmas around abortion. Foot describes the dilemma of a “driver of a runaway tram whose vehicle will strike and kill five workmen unless he steers it onto

another track where it will kill only one workman” (Rakowski 1). Foot compares this dilemma to another hypothetical situation in which the organs from one healthy person could be harvested to save the lives of several patients – would it be right to kill the one person to save the lives of the others? Foot claimed that our moral intuitions suggest that we would approve of the sudden choice to steer the trolley toward the track with one person to save the five on the other track, but that we would not endorse killing the one healthy person in order to save the others. The ethical difference, Foot suggested, was that redirecting an already existing threat was different in kind than creating a new threat.

Sorensen identified the enduring philosophic question arising from Foot’s fictional dilemma as: “what is the relevant difference between the cases?” (237). Like many others, Sorensen presumes that the answers “most” would give fit the preconceptions (236-237). As we shall see, this is a problematic assumption, although most discussions of the trolley problem seem to assume that most people give the same answers based on notions of moral intuition.

The trolley problem itself did not take academic center stage for some time, but from this straightforward beginning it eventually took on baroque levels of complexity. While Foot thought of the trolley driver as the character in the scenario who must make the difficult decision, most revisions of the problem have shifted the responsible party to someone not riding on the trolley. David Edmonds in 2014’s book-length survey *Would You Kill the Fat Man?* presents ten variants of the problem that have been presented in academic discourse.

Varieties of outlandish death-dealing dilemmas include whether or not to push a fat man to his death in order to stop the trolley, victims tied to rotating

turntables, and tractors coming to the scene for the purpose of running over victims (183-192).

For a particularly horrifying example, here is the “fat man” variant of the trolley problem that gave Edmonds’ book its name:

You’re on a footbridge overlooking the railway track. You see the trolley hurtling along the track and, ahead of it, five people tied to the rails. Can these five be saved? Again, the moral philosopher has cunningly arranged matters so that they can be. There’s a very fat man leaning over the railing watching the trolley. If you were to push him over the footbridge, he would tumble down and smash on to the track below. He’s so obese that his bulk would bring the trolley to a shuddering halt. Sadly, the process would kill the fat man. But it would save the other five. Should you push the fat man?
(37)

Judith Thomson, a philosopher who helped popularize the trolley problem method, argued that whereas it would be acceptable to turn the trolley at the last second in the original scenario to minimize harm, deliberately pushing the man to his death constitutes murder and is therefore unacceptable (107-108). The difference in the (claimed) intuitive moral judgments resulting from the precise circumstances of each situation seems to provide continued philosophic interest. Enough variations of the trolley problem were created, and enough academic studies of the subject were published, that eventually “trolley problem” became a generic term for a type of problem. The term “trolleyology” was created to encompass this academic subgenre (10-11). The pre-eminent figures in this field

are the aforementioned Thomson, and ethics philosopher Frances Kamm, who has invented multiple variations on the problem and employs them regularly in her explorations of ethical questions around war and torture. Most of these works are aimed at specialists, but later in this chapter I will examine the way Kamm rhetorically uses one of her variations in an persuasive article she wrote that was directed at the general public.

What ethical philosophers find useful about trolley problems and the ticking bomb scenario centers on the question of when is it permissible to intentionally inflict harm. The reason they believe trolley problems show something about this is that they believe the participatory judgments we make about the situations reveal our moral intuitions. The debate that has kept the most attention concerns the question of why the “correct answer” to the original trolley problem is to switch the trolley to the track with one victim instead of allowing it to continue on to hit five victims, but the generally accepted “correct answer” to the fat man variation is that it would *not* be acceptable to deliberately kill the fat man in order to stop the trolley from killing five victims. Both cases involve a choice, but are judged differently. Explaining why takes up much of the space devoted to analysis in philosophic writings inspired by these thought experiments.

Perhaps because the world of the prisoner and torturer is shrouded in secrecy, and is a distasteful subject in any case, much of the ethical debate about torture has concentrated upon the ticking bomb scenario instead of actual studies of torture. Brecher notes that “the increasingly modish ‘realism’ which would permit interrogational torture (...) is based on the so-called ticking bomb

scenario” (11). Here, for example, is a version of the ticking bomb scenario that appeared in an academic book on torture:

A bomb has been planted in an elementary school building. There are several such buildings in the city in question. A known member of a terrorist criminal gang has been apprehended. The authorities are as close to 100 percent certain as human beings can be in such circumstances that the man apprehended has specific knowledge of which school contains the deadly bomb, due to go off within the hour. He refuses to divulge the information as to which school, and officials know they cannot evacuate all of the schools, thereby guaranteeing the safety of thousands of school children. It follows that some four hundred children will soon die unless the bomb is disarmed. Are you permitted to torture a suspect in order to gain the information that might spare the lives of so many innocents? (Elshtain 78)

This scenario (and slight variations of this scenario with different targets) was much publicized and received wide consideration in the years after 9/11. (Unlike the trolley problem, the originator of the ticking bomb scenario does not seem to be known, for none of the sources I have consulted make a claim about who precisely invented it). Many thinkers who have considered the scenario have been convinced that it provides a rationale for torture. Edmonds claims that “perhaps the standard view” of people exposed to the scenario is favorable to torture in this circumstance - because of the consequences of a deadly explosion, “the constraint against torture can be overridden” (50).

The ticking bomb scenario seems to have a strong effect on those who consider it, making it a potent rhetorical resource for those who want to create space for the reconsideration of the acceptability of torture. In his book on the ticking bomb scenario and the debate on torture, Bob Brecher notes that some prominent academics who regularly have warned against the normalization and legalization of torture nevertheless support it when considering this hypothetical scenario (17-19). Alan Dershowitz, a well-known attorney and law professor who has appeared on televised political discussions regularly since the 1980s, enthusiastically argued for the permissibility of torture and drew strongly upon the ticking bomb scenario and the trolley problem for his arguments (15-16).

When fictional scenarios are widely shared with the public in connection with the discussions about matters of policy, not just philosophy, they become part of argument and public rhetoric. The ticking bomb scenario has been most prominently playing its part in arguments for the reconsideration of the acceptability of torture. Even the seemingly more fantastic trolley problems, less obviously connected to public decision-making, have been showing up in news discussions in recent years. According to several news stories, the expected emergence of driverless cars and artificial intelligence (AI) will bring trolley problem-based moral reasoning into real-world use because AI (theoretically) will be able to make instant life and death decisions in case of accidents, and could therefore be programmed to take trolley problem-based reasoning into account (Achenbach; Markoff).

When these thought experiments show up in public policy discussions, the supposedly “standard view” (as Edmonds called the qualified acceptance of

torture among those considering the ticking bomb scenario, or as philosophers such as Katz claim for certain choices in the trolley problems) is often included as if it were an obvious choice. This is curious because the “experimental” aspect of the thought experiments has been circumscribed in favor of a supposedly correct conclusion. Another way of looking at this: fictional conclusions to fictional problems are being presented as empirically-derived evidence.

It is appropriate to ask how we are to evaluate the usefulness and persuasiveness of fictional evidence when considering real-world situations. While it is true that these thought experiments can be effectively scrutinized without recourse to a systematic approach to fictional rhetoric – Barbara Fried, a fierce critic of the usefulness of trolley problems in ethical philosophy, called them “an oddball set of cases at the margins of human activity” and “a moral sideshow” (506); Brecher condemns “the fantasy of the ticking bomb scenario” (14) - general principles are lacking about what would make a thought experiment more or less convincing as real-world evidence.

While critics of thought experiments emphasize the fictionality of thought experiments as a detriment, defenders of thought experiments as method emphasize that their narrowly-drawn scenarios assist with thinking. Edmonds goes so far as to claim that lack of realistic depth made possible by fictionality is the greatest value of invented thought experiments: “the point of any thought experiment in ethics is to exclude irrelevant considerations that might cloud our judgment in real cases.” (xiii). The worldview expressed here in condensed form is worth teasing out: pure moral and ethical “judgment” is most directly achieved

through a fictional process that eliminates the “irrelevant considerations” that could “cloud” judgment in “real cases.”

Is this position tenable? Certainly removing “irrelevant considerations” makes for a more manageable case, and fiction provides the means. We have, however, some evidence that this promised exclusion of irrelevant considerations might be problematic for an audience not automatically predisposed to agree to “exclude irrelevant considerations.” The evidence comes in the form of the instructions given to some test subjects who were presented with trolley problems and surveyed on their responses in an empirical test. This study, conducted by Mark Kelman and Tamar Kreps, records and analyzes responses of experimental subjects to some of the trolley problem scenarios. The instructions begin:

you will be presented with a description of a situation and an action that a person in the situation, Hank, might perform in response to that situation. Your task is to tell us whether you think it would be morally permissible for Hank to perform the action (Kelman 225)

The straightforwardness of this task – judging Hank’s actions – is obviously more complicated by the fictionality of the situation, given the caveats that the researchers include with the instructions:

You might well feel the situation as we describe it is unrealistic. For instance, it might say that if Hank does X, then Y will happen, and you might think that this is not what would necessarily happen if Hank does X. If you find yourself having these doubts, please set them aside. Just

assume that this situation really is the way it is described, just as you might, if watching a movie in which some of the action is not very realistic, pretend that the things that happen in the movie might really happen in order to enjoy the movie more (Kelman 225-226).

“Just assume that this situation really is the way it is described.” It is significant that the researchers feel the need to include these extra instructions requesting the subjects to make special mental arrangements for the consideration of the fictional situation. It suggests possibly a reaction to or anticipation of various kinds of objections that could be made by the test subjects, particularly to the conditions of certainty insisted upon in the guidelines (“you might think that this is not what would necessarily happen if Hank does X”). Certain kinds of doubt would wreck the test, because no response option for rejection of premises is included.

Even more significantly, the suggested solution to encourage subjects to concentrate only on the desired details and accept conditions unquestioningly depends upon a different kind of fictional experience, that of watching a movie for pleasure, an experience the test givers presume is more common and relatable. An implicit theory of audience engagement with fiction seems to be behind this instruction, an idea that conscious decisions to “pretend” to believe “in order to enjoy the movie more” are routine maneuvers made by audience members. I believe this is a dubious presumption about audience psychology, because when a moviegoer has to self-consciously excuse implausibility while viewing a movie, it usually indicates a drift of attention from a bad movie.

Whether I am correct about this is not crucial to my point. What is significant is that the researchers feel the need to reference some notion of a “normal response” to fictionality to explain and justify the dismissal of participant doubt. In practice, then, issues of fictionality inevitably arise when trolley problems and other thought experiments are treated seriously outside of their originating milieu, where questions about fictionality are systematically avoided.

Dynamics of Rhetorical Fictionality: Trolley Problems

Applying the dynamics I have outlined shows the rhetorical advantages and disadvantages of fictionality in trolley problems. Beginning at the intratextual level, the combination of fictional givens and gaps in the trolley problem and the ticking bomb scenario seems designed to produce a harried, panic-stricken frame of mind in anyone who engages with the problems, in paradoxical contrast with the length of time devoted to contemplation of these frozen moments in time. Fictional givens are a privilege for the maker that comes with any fiction, as does the specification of interpretive gaps. In the trolley problems and the ticking bomb scenario, these privileges are pushed to the breaking point. Narrowing of interpretive gaps to a single binary choice is guaranteed by highly unlikely combinations of absolute fictional givens. These givens always take the form of absolutely unquestionable conditions leading up to the moment of decision - and absolutely unquestionable consequences following it.

For example, the “fat man” version of the trolley problem includes the following conditions—absolute fictional givens—leading up to the point of

decision, and the conditions are expressed to “you,” as if you were in the situation. In the situation, you are on a footbridge over a trolley track, a fat man is leaning over watching a trolley come, the trolley is going fast, there are five people tied up on the tracks on the other side of the bridge.

Participating fictionally in this problem, “you” have the superhuman ability to take in all these facts and much more, instantaneously. You also *know* that if the fat man fell in front of the trolley, his body would stop the trolley cold, and he would die. You also apparently know that although he is “so obese that his bulk would bring the trolley to a shuddering halt,” (Edmonds 37) you would have no physical difficulty pushing him over!

Apparently the one interpretive gap that matters is whether you should push the fat man to his death to stop the trolley to save the five people tied up. (A rather surprising gap in the generally absolutist moral arithmetic of most trolley problems is whether anyone would be hurt in the trolley from a sudden stop; some versions specify a nearly empty “out of control” trolley with a fainted driver, perhaps to avoid further complications). Some interpretive gaps are not meant to be entertained or filled, such as whether you noticed the people tied up on the tracks before climbing the footbridge, or whether you would be arrested for murder if you push the fat man. The text stops with your dilemma, which is strictly defined in terms of exactly two fates—the fat man is dead before a stopped trolley, or the trolley speeds on and kills the five.

The extratextual dynamic—how the text directly relates to or seems to comment upon some particular feature of the world—seems particularly weak in the case of trolley problems. Of course it is unlikely that anyone will be in any of

the positions of the unlucky trolley drivers, the unlucky trapped victims, the onlookers faced with sudden life-or-death choices. There is nothing inherently illogical about any of these fates. But the trolley problems push the given situations into something that could not be described as narrative rationality.

Such an unlikely assortment of conditions has been made to happen in the problem, particularly in the combinations of split-second awareness, and the world is so ruthlessly shut out of the rest of the situation, that it is hard to see the situation in the problem as relating closely to any real situation. Even the idea of artificially intelligent cars encountering and preparing for such intricate real-life versions of these ethical problems seems unlikely, because the pre-conditions by which these vehicles would be able to precisely calculate a range of variables of possible accidents undermine the very conditions that provide for a surprise accident in the first place.

What is supposed to provide real-world relevance is the insight into moral intuition or moral psychology revealed by the responses people give to the problems, although rejection of them tends to not be among the responses that count. The argument in philosophic circles over whether it is moral intuition or moral psychology that is revealed by these problems (Lanteri et al 790-793) takes for granted that the answers those who consider the problems can be taken as a serious decisions about ethics by those taking part, and that they are able to focus on what the philosophers wish they would focus on. Perhaps the need to make life-or-death decisions, even fictionally, provides an incentive to seriousness. It seems significant that the participatory aspect of trolley problems puts responsibility into the hands of the audience.

The author-audience dynamic tends to work differently in participatory fictions than in conventional fictions. The author is obscured because the audience is forced to enter the world of the fiction. This is particularly obvious with the dire circumstances favored by the ethics thought experiments. The relationship of audience to the fiction becomes one of crisis. An instant decision is demanded; the reader is thrust into the role of a decider of life & death matters. The reader not only must process the fictional situation but the reader's responsibility for the fictional situation is insisted upon as well. Meanwhile, the authors of thought experiments are usually unknown to the audience. To some extent the rhetor who presents a thought experiment could stand in for the author in the relationship. Because the reader is "submerged" in the situation, the direct author-audience transmission may be affected and de-emphasized.

Trolleyology Directly Applied To Public Argument

Because Frances Kamm is one of the most important figures in academic "trolleyology," her application of this method of ethical inquiry to an actual ethical problem playing out on planet Earth and argument directed not at specialists but at the public provides a good example for analysis. Kamm's article "Taking Just War Seriously in Gaza" illustrates especially well the way that trolley problems are employed in the sphere of public argumentation. This article was published in 2014 during the controversial Gaza offensive waged by Israel against Palestinian fighters that resulted in more than a thousand civilian deaths.

Questions of proportionality of response, whether civilians were being used as so-called ‘human shields,’ and whether efforts to avoid civilian casualties were much discussed in the media during these months. Kamm considers the ethical issues raised using her signature method of introducing thought experiments – and in this case they seem to have been invented by her in the course of presenting her arguments.

the more accurate the Israeli claim is that Palestinian civilians are used as actual human shields, the less accurate it is to say that those civilians are not being “deliberately targeted,” and the less the permissibility of attacks can depend on the claim that there is no deliberate targeting of civilians, contrary to what the Ambassador [from Israel] emphasized. Nevertheless, this should not, I think, necessarily imply that the attacks are morally impermissible. Suppose a tank with a human shield attached is headed toward killing people and the only way to stop the tank’s attack is to shoot through the hostage placed there by the person who runs the tank. It may well be permissible to shoot if this will stop the attack on many people. (The rules of war should take account of such cases in refinement of its condition on not targeting civilians.) On the other hand, if many civilians are attached as shields to the tank, and the tank would kill far fewer civilians were it to continue, it may violate proportionality to shoot to achieve the goal of stopping the attack. So again the calculation of expected civilian deaths that would occur on each side, depending on whether a military device is attacked or not, is necessary. (Kamm)

This paragraph provides an excellent text for analysis using all the three dynamics on a non-participatory fiction using the thought experiment method to make public argument. Unusually, the author making the argument is also likely the author of the trolley-problem-like dilemma and is attempting to employ it as a kind of evidence. Signaling the shift to fictionality with the word “suppose,” Kamm places her two thought experiments in the places where illustrating examples would go, as in the pattern suggested for rhetors by Aristotle when using paradigms, whether fictional or non-fictional. With some hedging, she suggests it would be permissible to deliberately shoot through one hostage and would not be permissible to shoot through lots of hostages.

In terms of givens and gaps, these two closely related hypothetical speeding-tanks-with-hostages situations provide the usual set of absolutes: they will come if not shot at, the shots will kill the hostage or hostages, instant decisions will have to be made. Writing for an audience that is not necessarily sympathetic to the hypotheticals argumentation method, and is not being forced to personally choose within the situation as in participatory fiction, Kamm the author of the argument and the hypothetical is in a less protected position for direct author-audience interaction.

Most damaging to the effectiveness of this argument is the question of situational relevance. What is the relationship of the speeding tank with hostage or hostages attached have to do with the situation in Gaza? The only way it makes any sense as an illustrative paradigm is if a connection is made, but Kamm does not do anything to make it relevant. Possibly it would be too ludicrous to

say even metaphorically “Gaza is a speeding tank with hostages attached,” but the implied connection is there. In contrast to the possibilities of exploring complicated circumstances, Kamm chooses to answer an already abstracted question about proportionality by inventing an example. The highly circumscribed set of fictional givens and gaps also work against situational relevance because all other background information has been deliberately removed: no history, no context, just a stark hypothetical whose relevance is not even argued for. Returning to the argument by Edmonds that trolley problems are valuable for focusing attention by removing irrelevant information, the flip side of such thinking is revealed by the inadequacies of Kamm’s argument. It seems mostly that it has been the *relevant* information that has disappeared.

Conclusion

Treating thought experiments as fictional rhetoric does not improve the prestige or impression of the apparent usefulness of thought experiments, although there is no particular reason that it should not. Perhaps a more robust application of fictional-rhetorical criticism would improve the quality of thought experiments. This might, however, remove one major attraction of thought experiments --- that they can be crafted in such a way as to provoke a desired conclusion. But if the point of a thought experiment were merely to create a loaded set of circumstances in which a particular set of premises led to a desired conclusion, then it would not be much of a thought experiment.

To see thought experiments as arguments threatens their status as experiments; to see thought experiments as fiction threatens (for some reason!) their status as serious philosophy.

Makers of thought experiments want all the advantages of fiction with none of the disadvantages. They do not present a basis for what is essential and inessential in a thought experiment. I contend that a basis for such differentiation does not exist. Fictions do not work this way. To use fiction in order to investigate or argue requires the acceptance of the territory of fictionality in toto. To claim that some part of a fiction must be ignored and another part of a fiction is to be attended to is to claim a special privilege for a particular critical approach - that's all!

The trolley problem and the ticking time bomb scenario rely upon the power of fictional givens to restrict the choices of the participant who willingly enters into the conditions of the fiction. But it is beyond their power to restrict analysis of their fictionality, or how it can be related to the real world situations upon which they are supposed to be providing insight.

CHAPTER 4

FICTIONALITY IN

PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION PEDAGOGY

In professional communication classes such as business communication and technical communication, students are taught about how to respond to typified business settings and, in writing exercises, how to compose in a selection of standard genres widely used in professional settings. For various pedagogical reasons, fictionality is regularly employed in business communication exercises. This chapter will analyze how fictionality works in that form of pedagogy.

The purpose of using fictionality in business communication classes is to provide settings for practicing rhetorical situations that replicate the business world. A basic practical problem for teaching professional genres in a classroom is that mastery of them depends on meeting situational requirements that belong to the professional world. Carolyn Miller's influential notion of genre as social action helps clarify the nature of the problem. Genre, as Miller describes it, is "typified rhetorical action" responding to "recurrent situations" (151). Miller's use of the word "situations" draws upon Bitzer's concept of "rhetorical situations." Rhetorical situations that repeatedly occur – say, for example, the rhetorical situation caused when a customer is dissatisfied with a consumer product – tend to encourage the production of a standardized rhetorical response, taking the form of apologetic letters, offers of compensation to encourage continued patronage, etc. To use Miller's words, the recurrent

situation of consumer dissatisfaction produces “typified rhetorical actions” that become a genre. In business communication classes, one of the goals for students is to learn how to compose in genres that have arisen to meet situations that are repeated so often that standard communicative methods have evolved to respond to them.

If a rhetor’s communicative task can be accomplished with a particular genre that also fits the rhetor’s situation, it will be an inherently less problematic task. For business communication students such a neat fit of genre-to-task does not occur. Students writing, say, an analysis of a poem, a description of a chemical process, or an essay on a historical event are able to present their work using genres that belong naturally to the classroom (genres that have indeed become known as “classroom genres”). They do not have to conceive of their positions as communicators as being anything other than what they really are: students communicating their knowledge and insight.

By contrast, a student learning the genre of the “business memo” for a business communication class practices writing that business memo from a position that is not consistent with their actual social position. Business memos belong to the business world, and if students are to gain insight by analyzing the situations in which business communication occurs and practice writing composing in these genres rather than just studying the conventions of the genres in the abstract, some kind of displacement from the situation of being a student to the situation of working in a business setting is needed for the student. The resources of fictionality are regularly called upon to simulate a business setting.

Two kinds of exercises using fictionality are assigned regularly in business communication classes. One kind of exercise involves the presentation of a fictional business situation and examples of the kind of business communication documents that have been created in response to it. The student is expected to closely attend to the fiction in order to analyze and criticize the communicative choices made by fictional characters based on how well these choices correspond to the business communication principles being presented.

Another kind of exercise requires the student to compose business communication as if the student were a participant in a fictional business situation. Student assignments for composing and communicating in business communication often use participatory forms of fictionality because in order to complete them, students must engage with the presented situations as active characters within the fictions, creating business communication as if it were made by a character rather than communicating directly as themselves. A practical advantage of using participatory fictions is that students can practice producing work in genres such as memos, business letters, recommendation reports, conferences and presentations. These genres depend upon business situations for the production of meaningful content.

Students have not generally had the kinds of experience necessary to draw upon in order to provide content, nor is it always possible to create real-world situations to provide content. (Even when real-world situations are used, some fictionalization is usually necessary). Participatory fictions provide a controlled space for evaluating student efforts and understanding of principles of business communication. Requirements for the evaluation of multiple students encourage

teachers toward the use of participatory fictions because they contain a precise quantity of shared background information. Teachers can then not only judge whether students have made wise use of background information shared by all, but can also more clearly explain the rationale behind their evaluations.

Despite the widespread use of participatory fictions in business communication pedagogy, the practice of pretending – of fictionalizing - itself is little explained or commented upon in the instructions in the business communication textbooks themselves. Using the analytic framework I have presented in the first chapter, I will outline a practical means of critiquing and evaluating the effectiveness of these problems.

Fictional Scenarios in Business Communication Examined

In order to find examples of business communication problems I consulted four widely-used business communication textbooks:

Essentials of Business Communication – Guffy & Loewy (Cengage 2013)

Business Communication – Cardon (McGraw Hill 2014)

Business and Administrative Communication – Locker & Kienzler (McGraw Hill 2010)

Business Communication Today – Bovee & Thill (Pearson 2014).

All four of these textbooks use fictionality as part of their pedagogical arsenal, although the amount of fictional exercises varies from textbook to textbook.

Cardon's textbook focuses more on real-world examples than fictional examples; Bovee & Thill's fictional examples are particularly heavily disguised (instead students discover that the company being described in a fictional problem has been invented). The textbooks by Guffy & Loewy and Locker & Kienzler make the most use of fictionality, often with elaborately designed fictional situations that call both for student analysis and participatory student response in the form of written materials.

What unites all four textbooks in their approach to fictionality is a general absence of explicit acknowledgment of any peculiarity of fictionality that students should be aware of. Fictional problems are presented in exactly the same way that problems based on real-life examples are presented. At no point in any of the textbooks is it suggested that it is any different to approach a fictional communication problem than it is to approach a non-fictional communication problem.

It will be worth examining the way that the issue of fictionality is handled in one of the few fictional problems from these textbooks that is actually given a lengthy contextualizing introduction. The most elaborate announced fiction in *Business & Administrative Communication*, the "All-Weather Case Study," is woven throughout the textbook with installments located at the end of the exercises for every single chapter. Each installment presents a narrative (written in third-person omniscient point-of-view) about the human resources department at "All-Weather, Inc." Described as a "mid-western company manufacturing vinyl, wood, aluminum, steel, and fiberglass composite windows and doors" (Locker 18), All-Weather Inc. features a cast of employee-characters

that is introduced on page 18 before the first installment. Readers follow the recurrent characters as they face situations relevant to the business communication-related subject matter of each chapter.

Remarkably, the introduction of the All-Weather case does not include anywhere an explicit statement that the company is fictional. Does this reluctance to use the word fiction mean that this continuing exercise is not an example of pre-announced fictionality? It is a tough call at times. The use of the term “characters” (18) in the very first sentence introducing the case and later descriptions of employee psychology likely serve as clues to students of the fictionality, as we don’t in general tend to call real people “characters” or present scenes of them in private emotional distress. Still, the authors demonstrate much later in the textbook that the status of fictionality might not be apparent to all students. Near the end of the textbook, when students are assigned to find online company report information, an explicit mention is at last made that students will *not* be able to find a company report from “All-Weather, which is fiction.” Finally, an explicit announcement of fictionality --- on page 271!

The scenarios leave room for students to complete exercises creating documents for use by selected characters in the given situations. Certain characters are more often used as the focus point of student activities than others: Doug (a Vice President), Erin (a manager), and Linda (an executive), and we are often told or shown what they are thinking. Meanwhile, one character, Rudy, an executive “reporting to Erin,” plays an unwavering Goofus role: Rudy has a bad attitude, is disheveled, has absentee problems, and makes especially

lousy business documents that students (working through the agency of more Gallant-like characters by pretending to be those characters) have to improve.

In Locker and Kienzler's words, the All-Weather "ongoing case" provides students "with a richer context for problem solving" (18). With fictive case studies and scenarios, a baseline of information is shared between teacher and students: teachers can then judge whether students have made good use of background information shared by all. Students follow textual clues found in the instructional text, the specific instructions for doing the problems, and the fictive situations. The intratextual dynamic comes into play when students try to decide what is and is not explicitly allowed as participatory response. The use of fictionality allows for absolute givens and gaps, and the authors of these problems take advantage of this capability to create situations for student consideration that, were they "real life" cases, would always be open to the possibilities of alternate interpretations and considerably more doubt about certainties. In comparison to trolley problems, characters find themselves in less desperate situations, allowing them a wider range of possible responses: no one is going to die in a business communication problem. But part of the point of business communication problems is to lead students toward the intended lessons of the surrounding textbook advice, so the advisable options are circumscribed in these problems too.

Fictional absolutes abound in the descriptions of characters and the situations they face. Here are three examples from various installments of the "All-Weather Case":

Miguel is contacted by the manufacturing manager at All-Weather's plant at Lincoln, Nebraska. "Son, they gave me your number. I hope I'm talking to the right person because I don't have time to waste," a gruff voice says over the phone. Although not used to being addressed by a familial title despite his young age, Miguel remains his professional self and quickly gathers the details of the problem that the manager is facing (176).

Doug looks for Kioni, whom everyone in the department admires. However, she has accompanied Erin (...) Suddenly, Doug spots Rudy, who is turning the pages of a telephone directory. He snaps to attention as Doug approaches.

"How's it going, Rudy?" Doug asks, noticing Rudy's disheveled hair, "Haven't seen you in a while."

"I've been here Doug, on the job," Rudy says, his voice a little trembly.

Doug remembers Erin talking about Rudy a few days back, something to the effect of his increasing absenteeism and late arrivals. However, Doug decides to let Erin take care of Rudy's behavior (271).

Linda knows that Miguel is a brilliant HR strategist; however, she also knows (and sometimes tells her boss) that he is not the best communicator. He often comes across as high-handed and abrupt, both in

his oral and written communications, when Linda knows full well there isn't an arrogant bone in his body. (432).

If these were descriptions of actual situations (and it would probably be unusual to see them written about in this narrative style, which is more typical of fictional narrative than non-fictional narrative), students would be more likely to maintain awareness that degrees of opinion, judgment, bias, and possibility of error on the part of the narrator as well as the persons whose perspectives on the situations we are given.

Skeptical considerations could be brought to bear on the definitive judgments of characters and situations in these passages, if readers understood these problems as belonging to the greater currents of literary or popular fiction. With the kinds of expectations that become routine among the audiences for mysteries and thrillers of surprises, readers might be on the lookout for what Booth called "unreliable narrators" and also the excitement of Characters Who Are Not What They Seem. The All-Weather Case Studies are not intended to encourage that kind of fictional reading. Students are (as we have seen) not encouraged to concentrate on their fictionality at all.

What happens instead is that statements like "Miguel remains his professional self," and "Kioni, whom everyone in the department admires," become *fictional givens* within the world of the case study. Students can see into the mind of Linda. Students not only know that Linda "knows full well there isn't an arrogant bone in (Miguel's) body," they *know that Linda is right about this*.

“Gruff “or “trembly” voices, “disheveled hair”, and “high-handed” manners become more than just subjective impressions, as they would always have to remain in real life accounts. Within the fictions, they become unquestionable.

Dynamics of Rhetorical Fictionality in the “All-Weather Case Study”

The pedagogical advantage here is that a certain kind of student question is avoided in favor of the question relevant to the lesson at hand. Interpretive gaps are explicitly indicated in several ways – the difficult choice about how to communicate that the employee must make, which is the most specific gap, is directed toward the student as either an analytic task or a participatory task. The All-Weather exercises call for full student participation in the form of written responses that a character should compose. Here is one example:

Take up Erin’s task and write an e-mail addressed to Doug discussing the following points:

Analysis of both the candidates as seen from their interview performance.

Your recommendation on the candidate who deserves to be chosen and the reasons supporting your decision. (397)

Students must plunge back into the text to find the answers to the question of what Erin and Doug (who have conducted the interviews) think of the candidates. Here is an excerpt of the section concerning “Ashley.”

Ashley walks in with a briefcase in her hand. She is wearing a black suit and looks thoroughly professional. Erin wonders, however, whether Ashley would fit in All-Weather's no-frills culture (...) "I noticed when you came in that you looked very professionally dressed. Do you think you can interact with workers on the factory floor dressed in this manner?"

"Of course not," Ashley replies, softening her words with a polite smile.

"When I will be on the factory floor, which I know I will be, I will wear work clothes that will not intimidate anyone, I can assure you. (397).

Doug asks if Ashley will be comfortable working in a male-dominated workplace.

"I'd prefer to work in a more gender-balanced environment," Ashley says, keeping her voice free of emotion. "However, I'm first a professional, then a woman, so I can adapt, especially in a company that I'm excited to work for" (397).

As to some extent the book "gives you the answer" about Ashley's superiority as a candidate, the rest of the passage becomes evidence to be excavated for internal textual support for this "right answer." The student is implicitly encouraged to admire Ashley's measured response to Doug's provocation.

"I'm first a professional, then a woman," is the kind of statement that goes down easy with fellow professionals. It bears some resemblance to a similar example quoted earlier in the paper, when Miguel "remains his professional self" instead of becoming angry at what might in fact be a slight against him. The idea

that being a professional is something that is somehow more than being human, particularly more than being a female kind of human, is voiced again and again in business culture. It is the kind of statement Althusser called a *tenacious articulation*: a very insistent proclamation that reveals a great deal about the ideological underpinnings behind. Here the statement is also part of finding the “right answer” that students would be rewarded for, at least by the teacher grading their answer.

Yet there is more articulated in this passage about women as employees than just what Ashley avers. Ashley is presented as a good female candidate because she “soften(s) her words with a polite smile” and “keep(s) her voice free of emotion.” Doug clearly some ideas that there are certain female-specific drawbacks, such as the possibilities that Ashley might intimidate other workers by dressing too well, or might not understand that the factory floor is no place for being fashionable, or might not want to work around so many men. Ashley tries to overcome these prospective defects by saying the right things in the right way; professionalism requires that she not express any possible resentments.

Some clues to interpretation, including the placement of the major business task in the hands of Erin, and a careful separation by the authors of her point of view from the point of view implied by Doug, suggest there may be room within this fiction for students to write a memo expressing a point of view on female employees that is not so beholden to the “givens” expressed in the previous paragraph. What makes this problem a much more interesting exercise than simply determining who to kill with a runaway trolley is that it is a more

involving fictional situation, with more options. By contrast, business communication participatory fictions drive those who engage them toward more varied interpretive gaps, and thus toward a far wider range of creative choices possible in response.

As expected, when readers have to make choices within a fiction, the importance of the usual author-reader dynamic is diminished to some extent. This condition is particularly evident in this case. The student-participant in the fiction is asked to take the point of view of Erin, becoming something of an insider-outsider character in the fiction. As the audience joins in helping to complete the fiction by making choices as a character living within the implied fictional world in the problem, the implied persona of the author becomes diminished. Having tried as hard as possible to distance themselves from fictionality of their own problem, the authors of the problem have attempted to achieve a kind of invisibility.

Still, a good question about the application of the intercommunicative dynamic is whether it exists in some other form. The intercommunicative dynamic at play here might also be seen between teacher and student, because the student composes in the context of a classroom. The student enters the fiction but alters it to some extent, making the audience something of a subordinate co-author. This would be particularly evident in any case where a student asks to what extent further fictionalization is allowed in a written answer. At this point the teacher becomes, willingly or unwillingly, an arbiter *within* the fictional situation, assuming yet another semi-authorial role in an increasingly

crowded scene. Anyone who has taught these problems gets asked questions about how much extra information can be added to the fictional situation in order to compose from the standpoint of a fictional character. Many textbook problems encourage students to fill in fictional gaps with additional “made-up” details in order to answer questions, but decisions about what additions are acceptable are up to the teacher who evaluates student performance.

The extratextual dynamic at play shows itself in two major ways. The absolute self-referentiality of the situation could doom the exercise to irrelevance if it did not clearly resemble the kinds of difficult decisions that employees need to make in hiring decisions and also differences of worldview among employees, here with a special attention to worldview differences arising from gendered expectations. The scenario as presented meets the need of the Aristotelian rhetorical example because its “plot” makes sense—what would cause the characters in the fiction to respond in the ways that they do holds up to scrutiny. Relevance is established because the task given to students allows them to use both their own understandings of how the world works and their emerging understanding of the principles being taught in the course to create response within the self-referential fiction.

Conclusion

Business communication problems that employ fictionality allow students to conceptually access situations that they are in no position to access in the real world. The primary activities that take place in classrooms devoted to the teaching of best practices and genre conventions of professional communication

require student composition within these genres. The “high stakes” assignments nearly always require students to practice producing communications within these genres, whether they emerge in written, oral, visual, or electronic forms. The use of fictionality is a pedagogical strategy that has proven very durable for these ends. Potentially, the principles being taught “come to life” when students engage thoughtfully with a fiction.

It ought to be somewhat surprising, however, that the textbooks that include these problems are reticent to acknowledge the use of fictionality or provide any clear suggestions for how to negotiate fictional situations to students and teachers. Perhaps the authors assume that everyone already knows how to handle fictions without further guidance. Perhaps the authors are reluctant to highlight that their fictional scenarios are “made up.” But the gap in acknowledgment causes problems for teachers.

Just as the researchers testing responses to trolley problems do, teachers end up in the position of having to arbitrarily improvise limits and conditions on the fictional situations. As students attempt to create work that acceptable “for a good grade” while either analyzing characters or pretending to compose business communication as those fictional characters, they necessarily encounter fictional gaps that require filling. No guidance is provided in any of these textbooks regarding what “rules” apply in terms of student additions of fictional data to the fictions that have been provided; students also do not necessarily understand some of the contextual reasoning that undoubtedly goes into the creation of these fictional problems that remains unshared by the textbook authors. The authors

of textbooks bury the fictionality of these kinds of problems by refusing to acknowledge their own use of fictionality.

There is no good reason for the writers of fictional professional communication problems not to be forthright and clear about engaging openly with their own practice, and being open about what happens when fictionality is used for pedagogical purposes. Perhaps seeing the open use of fictionality as a good rhetorical choice with many practical aspects, rather than hiding it as though it were a faintly disreputable practice, could help with making this longstanding pedagogical practice even more educationally rewarding.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

The impetus that eventually led to this dissertation came nearly two decades ago: a straightforward suggestion by my creative writing advisor in regard to my own struggles over whether I should tell a story from my life as an autobiographical account or label it fiction (changing very little from what had really happened, you see). He urged me to not fret too much about the choice because “it is all your *writing*” and that my “*voice*” would come through either way.

I was soon familiar with a widespread and very sophisticated tendency, especially evident in the post-structuralist era, to treat *all* communication as equally a “construction of reality,” thereby rendering questions of fiction vs. non-fiction labeling irrelevant. In some circles of my acquaintance, it is almost a commonplace occurrence to hear someone say, “everything is a fiction.” This statement generally betrays a weary understanding and has more than a kernel of truth to it. Presumably, however, the statement itself is not *also* meant as fiction.

It is true that nobody is able to fully and accurately describe the conditions that make up reality; it is true that everybody is biased in some way that affects the truth-value of any claims they make. I have still never been satisfied with this answer. I also know that, for example, a “fictional” signature on a bad check, and many other forms of deliberate communicative invention deployed in pursuit of

earthly ends, produce very non-fictional outcomes for those who get caught trying them. No one in the docket has ever beaten a rap by calmly announcing that “everything is a fiction” and then nodding, knowingly.

So my questions didn’t go away, and ultimately they coalesced around rhetorical concerns. What difference does it make to the rhetorical influence of a communication if it is labeled as a fiction? Something interesting happened while I was working on the project: a number of other scholars announced a vital interest in the same questions that concerned me. The online *Living Handbook of Narratology* suddenly featured an entry for *Fictionality* that had not existed when I began this project. I began exchanging ideas with these scholars. In January 2018 I was included on an MLA panel on *rhetorical fictionality*, which had not been a topic of sufficiently widespread interest previously to justify inclusion. In the presentation I presented some of my ideas on this subject that appeared in Chapter 1, presenting alongside scholars whose work I first encountered because I was working on this dissertation. My project that began as an outlier inquiry now has more scholarly company as it comes to a close. What follows is a summary of the major claims I make in my dissertation and an outline of future directions in research that I believe would be worth pursuing.

Findings

This dissertation has demonstrated that a gap exists in rhetorical scholarship. Fictionality has been neglected as a topic by rhetorical scholars.

Some of the reasons for this neglect include the notion that fiction and non-fiction can be treated interchangeably, as the important work of Walter Fisher and Wayne Booth implicitly and sometimes explicitly suggest. Although the field of rhetoric as a whole has perhaps been more comfortable with the analysis of non-fictional materials, fiction has not been neglected. Fiction is regularly studied by rhetorical scholars, but the difference that the *fictionality* of fiction makes to the way that fiction functions rhetorically has not been a topic of study.

One further issue that this dissertation has illuminated is that the word *fiction* is used in a number of conflicting ways. These variances in usage contribute to an impasse in discussion. Practical problems arise when analysis of fictions that have been pre-announced is simply conflated with analysis of the more disreputable kinds of “fictions” such as lies, delusions, etc. Helping to establish the explicit study of overtly announced fictionality, as other scholars are doing more and more, allows for these kinds of communications to be considered as forms of rhetoric in a more coherent and careful way.

This dissertation has contributed an original analytic framework for considering the practical effects made on rhetorical influence by the labeling of communications as fictional. The focus on *dynamics* instead of solely textual effects highlights the relevance to the concept of *rhetorical situations*, a cornerstone of rhetorical scholarship. I identified these dynamics as those occurring between internal textual events and outside events, authors and audiences, and fictional givens and gaps within a text. Thinking of the changing relationships between these identifiable features as dynamics also helps

illuminate the differences made when fictions are participatory, and therefore demand audience input in order to become completed.

Because fictionality tends to work in the form of rhetorical examples, the work of Aristotle provides the most obvious potential source for understanding how fictionality would work. However, Aristotle's treatment of rhetorical examples in the *Rhetoric* describes only the simplest kinds of fictionality that could be used by orators: fables. A major task of this dissertation has been to show that more complicated and varied kinds of fictionality could be understood as rhetorical resources by combining Aristotle's views in the *Rhetoric* and his views in the *Poetics*. Rhetorical fictional examples that do not fit the simplistic model of fables can be understood more effectively as a result of this synthesis.

This synthesis in turn helps when analyzing two widely employed kinds of fictionality that have not been studied as rhetorical fictionality: thought experiments and classroom problems. The thought experiment form as fiction, when it is presented in variations of the widely discussed "trolley problems," is designed in such a way as to force a particular answer from participants in dire, rushed (but fictional) circumstances. Participants are often explicitly discouraged from resisting the implausibilities built into the scenarios. Some indications of how laborious it is to argue against the rhetorical messages of trolley problems have been indicated by the length of exposition required in the chapter devoted to them.

However, an interesting result of this difficulty in directly arguing with these kinds of thought experiments has emerged: rhetorical fictionality inspires

more rhetorical fictionality. One fictional problem “argues” with another by setting up a slightly different but related set of circumstances. Every variant of the trolley problem amounts to a concerted effort to produce a different participant reaction than the trolley problems it has been made in response to.

To some extent, the business communication textbooks examined here trade arguments via fictions as well, but less overtly. The most important difference between them and the thought experiments examined is that they do not tend to offer their problems in such a way as to provoke a claustrophobic praxis in the reader contemplating how to respond to them. The range of acceptable choices to be made includes stylistic choices in communication as well as a wider choice of acceptable fictional actions in response to the situation. There is usually more than one “right” way to handle a fictional business communication problem. The use of the analytic framework demonstrates that the pursuit of *fictional gaps* in relationship to *fictional givens* produces a range of acceptable responses.

One condition found in both thought experiments and business communication problems is that the use of fictionality is seldom explicitly referenced. Problems that arise from this reluctance to actually admit using fictionality include unnecessary ambiguity for those trying to negotiate these problems. When researchers exploring trolley problems need to insist that their participants do not question any of the stranger fictional conditions, and when the authors of business communication textbooks seem reluctant to acknowledge their own use of fictionality, the less helpful aspects of using fictionality for

rhetorical purposes come to the fore. If fictionality can come to be understood as a rhetorical strategy with its own advantages and disadvantages, its own strengths and weaknesses, this would be a great improvement over the current situation where fiction, announced or not, is a close cousin of lying, and always potentially disreputable.

Directions for Future Research

The analytic framework I propose in this dissertation is intended as a tool for isolating the rhetorical differences that fictionality makes, but the only way we could find out if it is effective is if it gets used for that purpose by other scholars and teachers. Applying the analytic framework outlined in this dissertation to multiple instances of fiction used for rhetorical purposes would be an important step in establishing its usefulness. While I have here applied this framework to several examples of communication that make use of rhetorical fictionality emerging from the fields of land-use pedagogy, business communication pedagogy, and ethics, many more examples of rhetorical communications that employ fictionality could and should be analyzed. The analytic framework should be “road-tested” with many different kinds of examples including conventional fictions. The strengths and weaknesses of my analytic framework should emerge from repeated application.

It is important to note again that my analytic framework is not intended to cover all the aspects of rhetorical fictionality that are most significant; my

analytic framework is designed to focus on what is *different* about using fictionality rhetorically from using non-fictional approaches rhetorically. No claim is intended that these differences produce the most important effects in any particular communication.

Because of this built-in limitation, it would be worth examining other important aspects of the rhetorical effects resulting from the use of fictionality that are not necessarily *unique* to fictionality. For example, strong audience engagement with the people being described in a narrative can occur in fiction or non-fiction, and surely such engagement has major effects upon the rhetorical impacts made by narratives. The question of how fictionality affects such engagement has barely been broached by my analysis in this dissertation, so examination of this surely constitutes a promising and necessary direction for further research.

With participatory fiction used for pedagogical purposes, much important work could be done by tracking the thinking and composing processes of students doing the work. Such projects should certainly focus on finding out what students *do* and *do not* presume about fictional situations presented in textbooks. How do students figure out what responses to fictional situations would receive the best evaluations from their teachers? Many interesting questions are worth asking about how students engage with these problems.

As the authors of these kinds of persuasive and pedagogical works employing fictionality have been shown to be reluctant to explicitly acknowledge their own use of fictionality, it could be worthwhile to find out how they think of

the fictions they make by systematically interacting with them. What are their own attitudes about crucial questions of fictionality relating to their work? Relevant questions that could be explored include (but are not limited to) finding out what, in their view, makes a particular fiction more or less effective as a teaching tool or persuasive tool, how they believe others interact with their own textual creations, and what the limits of acceptable fictional-choice making by participants are in participatory fictions. It could only help all of us to find out more specifically what the inventors of these interesting problems think.

Finally, it is worth noting once again that fictionality is widely employed for rhetorical purposes, appears in a wide variety of genres, and will likely continue to be used for these purposes. It deserves further study by scholars who have many different interests and emphases. The effective study of fictionality requires precisely the kind of close attention to language, voice and textual nuance that traditional aesthetically oriented literary criticism encourages, as well as the resources of rhetorical scholarship and narrative scholarship. Ultimately, the further study of rhetorical fictionality could make us all more aware of what happens to our opinions, actions and learning when it is employed, and more carefully and confidently able to use it for rhetorical purposes ourselves.

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