Death on the Freeway: Imaginative resistance as narrator accommodation

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Consider the following fictional discourse from Weatherson (2004):

(1) [. . .] When Craig saw that the cause of the bankup had been Jack and Jill, he took his gun out of the glovebox and shot them. People then started driving over their bodies, and while the new speed hump caused some people to slow down a bit, mostly traffic returned to its normal speed. **So Craig did the right thing, because Jack and Jill should have taken their argument somewhere else where they wouldn't get in anyone's way.**

The final, bolded sentence of (1) is jarring. So much so that our engagement with the fiction seems to break down. Why should this be, given that much of what we find in fiction is strange, impossible, or immoral, without hindering our engagement? A related observation is that the bolded sentence of (1) seems false in the world of the fiction. That is, it appears that the author of (1) cannot make it fictionally true that Craig did the right thing. Why should this be, given that an author has the authority to describe (truthfully in the fiction) a sociopath who robs, rapes, and assaults innocent people for his own amusement (as in Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*)?

Such questions are familiar from the rich philosophical literature on *imaginative resistance*: an instance in which "an otherwise competent imaginer finds it difficult to engage in some sort of prompted imaginative activity" (Liao & Gendler 2016). In this talk, we propose that some evaluative propositions, such as in (1), trigger the accommodation of an (unreliable) narrator. It is well known in semantics that, depending on various factors, accommodation can be more or less difficult for the processor. (1) is on the extreme end of the difficulty scale for two reasons. First, right up until the final statement, the story adheres to the standard conventions of a third person omniscient narrative, i.e., without a specific narrating character in the story; narrator accommodation forces us to break out of this frame, and reconceptualize the story as told from a first person perspective. Second, the accommodation is triggered rather indirectly, as opposed to a more explicit introduction of a narrating character through a first person pronoun (cf. 'Call me Ishmael').

In the talk we sketch a formal implementation of these ideas. First, we develop a toy analysis of fiction using a version of the dynamic semantic framework of Discourse Representation Theory (DRT, Kamp 1981). Crucial to our analysis will be the idea from Lewis 1978 that in all worlds compatible with a fiction there must be someone telling the story ("as known fact"). Our DRT/Lewis-based framework for representing fiction allows us to distinguish first person or, following Genette's (1980) now standard terminology, *homodiegetic narration*, from third person or *heterodiegetic narration*: only in the homodiegetic case is the narrator represented explicitly by a discourse referent, on a par with the rest of the fictional characters. In this way we try to capture the idea, well known from narratology research, that heterodiegetic narration involves an "effaced" narrator that is not part of the story and never referred to (e.g. by indexicals) in the fiction. Subsequently, we build on our toy analysis to include different update mechanisms for dealing with both reliable and unreliable information. Combined with the idea of accommodating a narrator discourse referent, this will allow us to analyze (1). We conclude the talk by considering an objection from Byrne (1993) to the Lewisian modal semantics of fiction underlying our DRS boxes, namely that there are narratorless fictions. We discuss how to revise our Lewisian assumptions in light of the objection and what this may mean for analyzing imaginative resistance discourses as instances of narrator accommodation.