

Can Fiction Change the World?



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CONTENTS



<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Notes on the Contributors</i>	x
Introduction	1
ALISON JAMES, AKIHIRO KUBO, AND FRANÇOISE LAVOCAT	
PART I. CHANGING DEFINITIONS: FICTION ACROSS TIME, CULTURES, LANGUAGES, AND MEDIA	
1 Poetic Forms of Narrative and Pragmatic Fiction: <i>Poiein</i> — <i>Plattein</i> — <i>Prattein</i>	17
CLAUDE CALAME	
2 The Fiction of Factuality: Some Perspectives from Premodern Japan	31
JUDIT ÁROKAY	
3 For a Theory of Fiction as <i>Show, Performance, Entertainment</i>	45
YASUSUKE OURA	
PART II. CHANGING MINDS: FICTION, BELIEFS, AND EMOTION	
4 The Moral Problem of Fiction: Rethinking the Emotional Effects of Fictional Characters	55
MARIO SLUGAN	
5 Lucianic Fictions and the Rise of Unbelief	69
NICOLAS CORREARD	
6 Fiction and the Modelling of Chance	85
ANNE DUPRAT	
7 Pygmalion's Virtual Doll: The Case of a Real Metalepsis?	97
NATHALIE KREMER	
PART III. CHANGING PRACTICES: POLITICAL USES AND EFFECTS OF FICTION	
8 Etiquette to 'Change the World'? Fictional Time-Order and Imperial Power at the Court of Emperor Go-Daigo	111
SIMONE MÜLLER	
9 The Construction of the Nation by Theatrical Fiction	129
CHARLOTTE KRAUSS	

10	Feminist Resistance and the Powers of Fiction ANNE ISABELLE FRANÇOIS	141
11	Engagement and Enchantment: Political and Ethical Uses of Fantasy Fictions ANNE BESSON	155
12	Fiction or Death: The Latin American Tradition of Nonfiction ANNICK LOUIS	165
13	Fiction as Legal Authority? Orwell, Snowden, and State Cyber-Surveillance HENRIETTE KORTHALS ALTES	177
14	Legal Revolutions as Fictions: Do they Change the World? OTTO PFERSMANN	191
PART IV. CHANGING FICTIONS: METAFICTIONAL EFFECTS		
15	Quixotism as a Humorous Reflection on Fiction's Effects YEN-MAI TRAN-GERVAT	205
16	Metafiction in Japanese and Western Literature: <i>Chô-kyokô</i> and Meta-Mystery MASAHIRO IWAMATSU	219
17	Killing the Reader? On Some Unfortunate Side Effects of Reading MAXIME DECOUT	231
18	When Fiction Changes the World... of Fiction FRANK WAGNER	241
	<i>Chapter Abstracts</i>	249
	<i>Further Reading</i>	257
	<i>Index</i>	259

INTRODUCTION



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Does fiction change the world? Can it do so? This book examines a question that is often treated superficially and in contradictory ways, whether in common conceptions of fiction or by theorists of fiction: the question of the effects that reading or viewing fictional works can have on individuals and society at large. Even when such effects are not denied, they are often underestimated or presented in an unfavourable light.

Fictions themselves often offer a critical view of the confusion between fiction and reality, or of attempts to cross the ontological boundary between them. As far back as the eleventh century, the hero of Murasaki Shikibu's great novel, the *Genji Monogatari*, did not wish anyone to read sentimental novels to his daughter: they would supposedly lead her to believe that reality resembles fiction, exposing her to many disappointments.¹ The characters of Don Quixote or Madame Bovary have given lasting shape to the idea that reading novels makes those engaged in them incapable of understanding the world or of acting on it. The gap between the ideal world of Amadis or Walter Scott's heroes and the stratified society of the seventeenth or nineteenth centuries is judged to be unbridgeable and produces an inexhaustibly comic effect. Jane Austen's Catherine Morland, in *Northanger Abbey* (1817) habitually misreads the social world by applying interpretative frameworks from Gothic fiction. In the twentieth century, cinema explores the relationship between real and fictional worlds via the fantasy of crossing the screen.² In Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.* (1924), a film projectionist becomes a fictional detective who solves a transposed version of the 'real' crime for which he has just been framed. Yet, on the level of the film's diegetic 'reality', it is his girlfriend who actually discovers the culprit, finding the stolen watch while he dreams. Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) reverses the trick by having the fictional character Tom Baxter (Jeff Daniels) emerge from the screen for the love of a spectator. However, he can have no impact on the unemployment and poverty of 1930s America; he cannot even modify the fate of an individual being, the unhappily married viewer (Cecilia, played by Mia Farrow) who falls in love with him. Alice or Dorothy, upon returning from Wonderland or Oz, find reality exactly as they left it. Numerous fictions that focus on the relationships between fiction and the real world emphasise their separation and incompatibility; they often mock those who exaggerate their

attraction and powers and keep an unhappy or a ridiculous fate in store for them. At best, even if illusions do not lead to the downfall of those heroes who like fiction too much, fiction is presented as a mere space of projection, escapism, or wish-fulfilment.

However, is it really the case that these fictions have no effect at all on the real world — either as this world is represented in fictions, or as it exists outside of them? In the second part of *Don Quixote*, the Duke and Duchess who have avidly read the first part engage in games and disguises that transform their environment, for the pleasure of deceiving the hero, but above all that of becoming immersed alongside him in his universe of fictional chivalry. As for Emma Bovary's literary dreams, they at least incite Charles Bovary to transform himself after his wife's death, adopting her romantic ideas. Jane Austen intervenes in her narrative to criticise those who would mock her heroine Catherine by dismissing the knowledge brought by novels.³ Buster Keaton's projectionist mimics the romantic gestures seen on screen as he successfully reunites with the heroine, while Cecilia, the spectator in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, escapes, at least for a moment, her abusive husband. In real life, Don Quixote and Emma Bovary have become the paradigms and objects of identification for numerous readers and spectators. The demonstration of fiction's futility and its incapacity to change the world is thus reversed by the very strength of reader responses: these characters are inspiring enough to produce an '-ism' that extends their names — quixotism, *bovarysme* (see Baldick 2008) — to designate attitudes, ways of being and living in the real world. These fictions have allowed us to identify and name the effects of fictions on the world.

But are these effects limited to producing a few idealistic individuals who are unsuited to life in the real world? In fact, the dream of countless fictions — and perhaps of all fiction — is to modify or reinforce readers' beliefs, to convince them to embrace a cause, and even to make them take action. Whether fictions are celebrated, recommended, feared, or reviled, testimonies to such real effects abound. The very hostility that fiction arouses allows us to trace a cartography of its supposed effects — one that evolves according to time and genre, even if we can discern some continuities.

1. From Fiction to Reality

There is indeed no shortage of examples that show the influence of fictional universes on lives, identities, and social practices, today as in the past. The thousands of men and women who, between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe, and even Brazil or Saint-Domingue, adopted the names of shepherds and shepherdesses in literary academies, are a good illustration of the large-scale impact of a fictional universe on society (Penge 2020: 223). Since the 1980s, the spread of theme parks inspired by the worlds of Disney and others have demonstrated the material inscription of fictions in the physical and economic world — to the point, according to Jean Baudrillard, of almost extending across the whole world, and even of replacing the real world with a simulation (Baudrillard 1981).

But above all, fictions are alleged to transform individuals by acting on emotions, beliefs, and feelings. The effect most often attributed to fiction is undoubtedly the incitement to love, whether it takes the form of a corruption of morals or a sentimental education. Leaving aside erotic books, which from the seventeenth century onward boast of making love to the reader via the eyes and ears (see Jeanneret 2003), the great novels of the same period, such as Honoré d'Urfé's *L'Astrée* (1607–1623), deliver models of discourse, behaviours, epistolary style and above all expression of feelings, to the point that readers signed their private letters with the name of Céladon, the hero of that novel (Denis and Lavocat 2008). Fictions, which are schools of feeling in the form of the great love and adventure novels of the seventeenth century, can also provide models of high virtues, inciting bravery and great endeavours; this is in any case the view of Pierre Fortin de la Hoguette (1648), who recommended in his will that his children read chivalric novels. Such a sympathetic view of fiction is far from being the rule, however, especially in that period: the Jansenist Pierre Nicole, and many other despisers of theatre, suspect that the evil passions expressed by the actor on stage might be contagious. Not only is the actor infected, but also the spectators and above all female spectators (for a long time, the presence of women on stage or in the theatre was not widely accepted). The emotions aroused by representations of fictional events were considered strong enough to provoke the most varied effects in the audience: men flee,⁴ women miscarry, and people sometimes confess their crimes out loud when they recognise them on the stage (Lecerclé 2012). We recall that Hamlet hopes in vain for this result when he stages a pantomime to remind Gertrude and Claudius of the crime they committed.

With the advent of Romanticism, new themes expand the repertoire of supposed effects and associated fears. The reality of the 'Werther Effect', which allegedly entailed an epidemic of suicides after the publication of Goethe's novel (1774), seemed sufficiently established for the Leipzig theological faculty to ban the work a year later (Siebers 1993). We also find that fiction influences public opinion enough to induce societal reforms or shape major political events. Fiction undoubtedly played a role in the emergence and spread of French anticlericalism; particularly, in the nineteenth century, in the denunciation of the Jesuits. The 554 performances of Molière's *Tartuffe* between 1801 and 1850, the dozens of re-editions of this play, and the novels that took up the character of the hypocritical and criminal Jesuit (including Eugène Sue's *Le Juif errant* of 1844), all indicate that fiction contributed powerfully to the formation of a liberal current of opinion (Leroy 1992). In the United States, a single book (along with its influential theatrical adaptations) was credited by both its admirers and opponents with changing minds and thus the world: Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), alleged to have sparked the Civil War. Written with an overt abolitionist aim, the bestselling book directly shaped political debates via its impact on public opinion. Nonfictional slave testimonies by Josiah Henson, Frederick Douglass, and others, also had an effect, of course — not least on Stowe herself who used them as a source of material for her novel (Reynolds 2011: 102–13). But the book's significant impact can be attributed in large part to the specific appeal of fiction — its ability to immerse readers

in a story and create sympathy for characters (even among some contemporary readers who were unsympathetic to its politics).⁵ Still, some later readers rejected what James Baldwin would call ‘everybody’s protest novel’; for Baldwin, it is a sentimental pamphlet that is both aesthetically and morally insufficient (Baldwin 1955). If Stowe’s novel has a complicated afterlife, it is in part because of the very conventional elements that helped give its radical message mainstream success (its deployment of stereotypes, didacticism, and sentimentality), and in part due to the gradual transformation of its cultural meaning in light of new reading practices, especially among African American readers (Hochman 2011).

The twentieth century sees a continued concern with the effects of fiction, intensified by the influence of mass culture and its new media forms — even if the dominant genre of the novel often remains the focus of critical debates. Particular works of fiction are considered to have had a profound impact on public opinion. Henri Barbusse’s *Le Feu* (*Under Fire*), a bestseller that won the Goncourt Prize in France in 1916, supposedly contributed to the rise of pacifism during the Great War. This example is all the more interesting since Barbusse did not originally conceive of this work as the pacifist novel that it would become thanks to its generic malleability and polyvocality (Pernot 2018: 147); moreover, the work is later accused of offering an inadequate documentary account by writers as different as Jean Norton Cru and André Breton.⁶ In this case, the proximity of fiction to reality is a site of friction. After World War II, theories of literary engagement cast the novel as the privileged genre for both unveiling the world and acting upon it. This is not just a matter of realism (socialist or otherwise): thus, for Jean-Paul Sartre, the writer’s free exercise of invention is understood to be inseparable from an appeal to the freedom of the reader (Sartre 1988: 139–40) — exceeding the real world in order to change it.

The rapidly changing media landscape of the late twentieth century, along with the emergence of new digital forms of fiction, brought new or intensified fears about the psychological consequences of immersion in fictional environments. Debates raged about the individual or social effects of television series and video games, with the latter in particular reviving the old Platonic notion of the victory of imitations over reality (see Schaeffer 2010: vii–xi). The rise of cyberculture, however, does not transfer all the (real or alleged) influence to interactive digital fictions. In the twenty-first century, Dan Brown’s novel *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) caused such great concern to the Catholic Church that scholarly publications were produced to counter the idea that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene (Ehrman 2004). While media representations are often accused of perpetuating stereotypes, they can also work against them; it has even been claimed that the TV series *24* contributed to the election of Barack Obama, via the so-called ‘Palmer effect’ that allowed viewers to become comfortable with the idea of an African American president (Yanes and Carter 2014: 73).

Lawsuits against writers illustrate the alleged effects of fiction from another perspective, while also pointing to the fragility of fiction’s boundaries — especially when it borrows from reality. In France, charges of invasion of privacy have been

brought against authors of autofiction such as Camille Laurens or Christine Angot (see Sapiro 2013); in Japan, when Yukio Mishima published *After the Banquet* (1960), the former minister of foreign affairs Hachiro Arita sued the novelist for allegedly breaching his privacy in this *roman à clef*.

2. Theories of Fictional Effects

Fictional worlds (i.e., mostly made up of imaginary and non-referential elements, even if we admit that most are ontologically hybrid) are often considered to be detached from the real world. John Searle describes fictional utterances as ‘nonserious’ utterances that do not commit authors to the truth of their propositions (1975: 320–21). How, then, can such non-truths affect us? In recent decades, philosophers and theorists have attempted to understand to what extent and by what means fictions shape our beliefs and actions. Some have taken seriously the ability of fiction to model emotions, feelings, and relationships (a question we return to in Part II of the present volume). The philosopher Stanley Cavell, for instance, argues that Hollywood ‘comedies of remarriage’ are a serious attempt to recreate marriage on the basis of the demand for acknowledgment and mutual freedom in the couple; cinematic fiction can thus have ‘powers of instruction and redemption’ (Cavell 1981: 7).

These accounts of the positive effects of fiction often hinge on the notion of empathy. Martha Nussbaum has explored fiction’s ability to stimulate empathetic responses and develop the moral imagination (e.g., Nussbaum 1990 and 1995, making this point the centre of her larger defence of the role of the humanities in training democratic citizens (Nussbaum 2010)). In the area of French literary studies, Alexandre Gefen has analysed the contemporary vogue for the idea of a consolatory fiction that heals intimate injuries and traumas (Gefen 2017). Our intuitive sense that fiction enlarges our capacity for empathy has also been put to the test scientifically. Seeking empirical evidence for the cognitive and moral benefits of fiction, psychologists have confirmed (to lesser or greater degrees) the influence of fiction on social cognition and skills associated with the theory of mind — in other words our capacity to discern the feelings and intentions and others (e.g., Mar, Oatley, and Peterson 2009; Dodell-Feder and Tamir 2018). Some work in literary studies then aims to bring insights from cognitive science back to literature (e.g., Zunshine 2006). While philosophical and cognitive approaches tend to focus on literary fiction (with some notable exceptions such as Cavell’s attention to popular film), Sandra Laugier (2019) has recently shown how television series teach us to live, while a long-term sociological study by Sabine Chalvon-Demersay (2015) demonstrates how viewers of such series regularly mobilise fictional situations for the purposes of comparison, to help with decision-making. However, such claims for cognitive and moral benefits of fiction still have their sceptics; in his recent book *Imagining and Knowing* (2020), for instance, Gregory Currie casts doubt on whether we can really acquire much knowledge or empathy from fiction. James Dawes challenges the frequent claim that ‘literature promotes empathy, and empathy

promotes rights' (Dawes 2015: 427), suggesting furthermore that 'our collective conceptions of empathy are at best fractured and at worst incoherent' (429); that is, it may be the case that empathy does not take us beyond the reader to larger real-world effects. While arguing that fictions can be 'formative' in pragmatic terms and help us hone our mental capacities, Joshua Landy dismisses as 'wishful thinking' the prevalent affective and moralising understandings of fictional utility (Landy 2012: 9–10). The value of empathetic responses to fiction may also be questioned from another perspective: in Chapter 4 of this volume, for instance, Mario Sluga raises the possibility that the emotional effects of fiction may be ethically problematic. How can we justify caring about fictional characters, sometimes even more than we care about real-life people?

As this last point indicates, the effects of fiction are not always considered to be beneficial. Old worries about the psychological or social harm caused by fiction have not disappeared, even if they have taken new forms since Plato's criticism of poetic mimesis. Today, works of fiction are put on the hot seat for two main reasons. The first line of criticism, which primarily concerns role-playing games and video games, entails supposing that game-playing promotes aggression and violence; this idea remains widely accepted and is supported by some evidence, even if empirical studies remain inconclusive (Prescott, Sargent, and Hull 2018). Cinematographic fictions are also blamed for a number of crimes, since the perpetrators themselves sometimes invoke forms of imitation: the American serial killer Joel Rifkin claimed he had been inspired by Hitchcock's *Frenzy* (1972), the Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik by Lars Von Trier's *Dogville* (2003), the French spree killers Florence Rey and Audry Maupin by Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994), the Colorado mass shooter James Holmes by Batman comics and films. The online news media often emphasises these ties between fiction and murder (e.g., Ferenczi 2012; Marikar and Dola 2012). The second line of attack involves attempts to control fictions that implicitly or explicitly express contested values — whether this control is exercised through direct government censorship, through official organs such as the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel in France, or simply through public pressure.

These debates have arguably grown more intense in the second and third decades of the twenty-first century, most recently with the impact of the #metoo movement and social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter. One widespread worry is that fictions do not simply represent, but also disseminate and perpetuate harmful stereotypes and behavioural norms regarding race, gender, or sexuality; or else that they offer an inadequate representation of women and minorities. The 'representation matters' slogan links questions of mimesis to questions of political representation. These tendencies do not necessarily lead to demands for suppression, however, but can also bring a useful recontextualisation and re-evaluation of popular fictions from the past, such as *Gone with the Wind* (see Stewart 2020).

In any case, both the attacks on and apologies for fiction, which belong to a long tradition even as they engage with changing social contexts, clearly rest on the same assumptions and are thus tinged with ambivalence. The effects of fiction are

sometimes held to be beneficial (in terms of education, care, or the advancement of liberal freedoms) or harmful (the incitement of excessive passions and even violent acts, the diffusion of false or unpleasant images of the world, the legitimization and thus continuation of forms of social and political domination...). But all these claims are based on granting, perhaps to an exaggerated degree, the considerable power of fictions to influence minds, shape opinions, and change the course of events. The playful dimension of fiction seems to fall by the wayside in such debates. However, if the use of fiction is indeed a matter of ‘shared ludic feint’ — that is, of playful pretence, as Jean-Marie Schaeffer argues (2010: 138–39), how are we to measure its actual impact on our beliefs and our lives? This is the question we ask in this volume. The answer that we bring is a complex one. While communities of readers may well mobilise fictions for specific ends, and while fiction may also condition our norms and practices in more subtle ways, fictional works also resist this form of instrumentalisation and operate in a space of free imagination — a world without consequences. Fiction *can* change the world — but may do so less often than is generally believed. Still, fiction is constantly evaluated, sometimes too hastily or speculatively, in terms of its perceived social and moral influence. This is especially true in our current moment, which is witnessing an intensified (and perhaps excessive) anxiety about the effects of representation.

3. Fiction and Fictionality Studies: New Approaches

The question of the relative autonomy or effective power of fiction opens up varied research perspectives, a number of which are represented in this volume. The book presents selected papers from the founding colloquium of the International Society for Fiction and Fictionality Studies (ISFFS/SIRFF), held at the EHESS, the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle and the University of Chicago Center in Paris on 28–30 November 2019. Presenting a multi-disciplinary approach, it examines the question of fiction’s effects from theoretical, sociological, historical, legal, and literary perspectives. Although it does not aim to be exhaustive, its case studies are drawn from varied periods and cultural traditions, including classical antiquity, medieval Japan, and the European Renaissance.

The Society aims to extend its research areas to as many cultural and linguistic spheres as possible; at this early stage, our membership has strengths in certain areas. The present volume is characterised by several contributions from Japan specialists (see Chapters 2, 8, and 16), as well as by Japanese scholars working on general issues in the theory of fictionality (Chapters 3 and 16). This relatively strong presence of Japanese culture and scholarship can be explained by two main factors. First, the Japanese context holds particular interest for fiction studies. From the particular form of self-writing known as the ‘I-novel’ (*watakushi-shôsetsu*) to *otaku* practices such as cosplay, many facets of Japanese culture allow us to investigate both the universality of fictional practices and their cultural specificities. Second, Japanese scholars have shown particular interest in Western theories of fiction. Major works translated into this language include Kendall Walton’s *Mimesis as Make-Believe*

(1990), Marie-Laure Ryan's *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory* (1991), and Jean-Marie Schaeffer's *Why Fiction? (Pourquoi la fiction?)* (1999/2010). These theories of fiction have also become a subject of reflection for Japanese scholars, as demonstrated by the philosopher Kunihiko Kiyozuka's work *Fikushon no Tetsugaku (The Philosophy of Fiction)* (2009/2017) and the collective volume edited by Yasusuke Oura, *Fiction de l'Occident, fiction de l'Orient (Fiction of the West, Fiction of the East)* (2010), which questions the scope of Western theory from a comparative perspective.

The authors of the chapters collected here agree for the most part on a definition of fiction as deriving from an attitude of 'shared ludic feint' (inspired by Searle [1975] and Schaeffer [2010]) and postulating non-referential states of affairs or 'possible worlds' (according to a semantic conception drawn from analytic philosophy). However, many contributions give greater emphasis to the pragmatic aspect of this definition. Claude Calame, a literary theorist and specialist in Ancient Greece, highlights the role of *plattēin* or fabrication: the verbal and visual means which give fiction its pragmatic efficacy. More radically, Yasusuke Oura defines fiction in terms of performativity and performance. Furthermore, while most of our authors envisage fiction in the form of artistic artifacts, Otto Pfersmann follows Bentham, Kelsen, and Vaihinger in considering that laws and legal norms, and indeed the whole of the law, constitute fictions. These redefinitions indicate how the 'pretence' or make-believe of fiction can indeed be held to have real-world effects.

Our comparative and transhistorical approach highlights the varied understandings and impact of fiction in different contexts. While we have not neglected the debate on the emotional and behavioural effects of fiction on the individual level (see for example Chapter 4), our selection of papers has privileged approaches that evaluate the collective effects of fiction on communities of readers, whether from the point of view of intellectual history (Chapters 5 and 6), nation building and the consolidation of political power (Chapters 8 and 9); or, on the contrary, forms of activism that contest existing power structures (Chapters 10, 11, and 12). We also ask how technological change affects the ontological distinction between real and fictional entities (Chapter 7), and how legal reasoning may draw on fiction (Chapters 13 and 14). The question of the distinction between fact and fiction, a much-debated topic most recently explored by Lavocat (2016), Fludernik and Ryan (2019), and Fülöp (2021), has obvious relevance to the subject of this volume — whether we are considering the way fiction addresses those facts it wishes to change, or how it influences states of things in the world. Chapters 2 and 12 consider cases where the relationship between fiction and nonfiction is blurred for particular purposes, while Chapter 16 argues that self-referentiality in fiction takes on a transgressive force that it does not possess in nonfiction. The task we take on here is a broad reflection on a range of cases that bring to light fiction's many kinds of effect, and the different scales of these effects. The volume is also distinguished by its expansive treatment of the category of fiction, not limited to literary narratives but extending across a range of cultural forms: theatre and performance, fantasy fiction, digital simulations, and contemporary television series are among the domains considered.

Part I, ‘Changing Definitions: Fiction Across Time, Cultures, Languages, and Media’, offers a preliminary reflection on definitions of fiction — which does not mean the same thing in different times and places — and lays the groundwork for a pragmatic approach to the uses and effects of fiction. Examples drawn from East and West, and from Antiquity to the contemporary period, offer sites for exploring the scope and parameters of such a perspective. Claude Calame, in his contribution, turns to ancient Greek poetics to argue for an anthropological approach to fiction, which must be understood in relation to the historical and cultural context of its production; fiction refers to a world of shared representations, while its meaning is refigured through specific practices of interpretation and performance. Judit Árokay examines the continuity between fictionality and factuality in medieval Japan, in the case of texts that were read both for historical information and for entertainment, and which made use of conventional signs to establish the reliability of the narrator, frame the reading contract, and shape a community of reception. The connection of fiction to action and performance is the focus of Yasusuke Oura’s chapter, which gives priority to the figure of the actor and explores the paradoxes of audience responses to embodied fictional enactments.

The second section, ‘Changing Minds: Fiction, Belief, and Emotions’, picks up this question of audience response in order to explore the cognitive and emotional effects of fiction as the privileged vector of its action on the world. This section also investigates the precise mechanisms by which fiction can contribute to shaping beliefs. These effects are not necessarily always positive, however: Mario Sluga uses examples from television and film to explore the philosophical and ethical problems posed by the effects of fiction on our emotions. How do we explain and justify our psychological investment in invented situations and characters? Even if the emotions provoked by fictional entities do not lead to real-life action, it remains troubling that we often respond more intensely to these characters than to real people. If this chapter asks whether we may believe too fully in fictional characters, in the following chapter Nicolas Correard explores the opposite possibility: that fiction may generate unbelief, exposing accepted notions and entities as inventions or constructions. The author investigates the underestimated contribution of Lucian of Samosata’s novels to the spread of atheism in the early modern period. As an oblique form of expression, Lucianic fiction allows thinkers to envision what was still unthinkable: the fictional character of divine providence. Examining fiction’s relationship to probabilistic models of prediction and projection, Anne Duprat explores the role of literary and artistic fiction in shaping our understanding of chance events. Fictions bridge the gap between the available scientific models for theorizing contingent probabilities and our understanding of the human meanings of chance, and may therefore offer a spur to effective action in the face of large-scale events, of varying degrees of unpredictability, such as the global pandemic or climate change. According to Nathalie Kremer, the real-life creation of androids and automatons may not exactly transgress the boundary between reality and fiction (as in a case of ‘real’ metalepsis), but it does operate a reversal of levels, whereby fiction can condition our daily practices and social norms.

While Part II moves from the individual effects to the larger-scale influences of fictional representations, Part III ('Changing Practices: Political Uses and Effects of Fiction') focuses more particularly on the instrumentalisation of fiction to construct public opinion, norms, and identities, whether in national or international contexts. Chapter 8, by Simone Müller, studies the case of the Japanese court in the fourteenth century: the court's rites and etiquette were codified in literary and semi-fictional form, creating an idealised regime that contributed to consolidating imperial power while allowing the emperor a degree of autonomy. Turning to nineteenth-century Europe, Charlotte Krauss studies the paradoxical role of theatre in the construction of national identities: on the one hand, playwrights develop an epic tendency in complex works that turn out to be unperformable; on the other, staged reinterpretations and reductions of these works allow a real social impact. Anne Isabelle François explores feminist engagements with works of fiction, showing in particular how the dystopian world of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (and its television adaptation) has inspired new modes of positive action. For Anne Besson, fantasy fictions such as *Game of Thrones* or the *Harry Potter* series are especially well-suited to forms of ethical and political appropriation, often engaging utopian thought precisely through the power of their dystopian imaginaries. In Chapter 12, Annick Louis shows how hybrid docufictional forms both draw on and challenge multiple kinds of discourse in the Latin American context, extending narrative possibilities to stage an unpredictable form of intervention into reality, and often exposing the insufficiency of legislation or legal discourse. This question of legal discourse and its relationship to fiction is a point of connection with the next two contributions, which address the impact of fiction on law from two distinct perspectives. Considering the case of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Henriette Korthals Altes argues that reference to fiction can directly shape case law by articulating cultural norms in the absence of legal precedents, even if the legal debate does not fully grasp the complexities of Orwell's novel. Studying the role of founding documents in moments of historical revolution or rupture, Otto Pfersmann argues that changes to legal systems depend on fictional elements, with immense consequences for the course of history.

The fourth and final part ('Changing Fictions: Metafictional Effects') considers how humour, metalepsis, *mise en abyme*, and other metafictional techniques reveal or question the effects of fiction — on readers and on the world. As we have noted, these effects can be portrayed as harmful or beneficial. Varied responses are found in the many works inspired by *Don Quixote*, as Yen-Mai Tran-Gervat shows in her reconsideration of the 'Quixotic principle' as a mode of humorous self-reference. Connected to reflexivity and empathy rather than satire and parody, humour allows us to acknowledge our own susceptibility to the pleasures of fiction. Masahiro Iwamatsu takes a comparative approach to metafictional genres that emerged in the late twentieth century, exploring the different forms of self-reflexivity that are proposed in Japan, Europe, and the United States. By bringing narrative enunciation to the forefront, these paradoxical metafictions reveal what the reader expects of fictional communication. Asking just how far such communication

can go, Maxime Decout's contribution studies the darker fantasy of the book that either kills its reader, or casts him or her as a murderer; these extreme situations, represented by various means in a number of twentieth-century works, at once stage and call into question the power that fictions hold. Frank Wagner's chapter concludes the volume by studying the propensity of fiction to represent, through techniques of *mise en abyme*, its own possible virtues and dangers.

This final section brings us full circle back to the world of fiction, and to a central dilemma: what can fiction tell us about its own effects? Does it grant itself a purely imaginary power? Whether fictional works make a *pro domo* case, or on the contrary portray the negative effects of fiction, or even dramatise their own lack of real purchase on the world, they set out the terms and the stakes of the question. However, it is another matter to measure, empirically, the ways in which fiction shapes both our understanding of the world and our actions in the world. As well as showing how fiction itself reflects on this problem, the varied chapters in this volume offer detailed studies of a range of cases where fiction can be said to have shaped attitudes, provoked responses, or to have been mobilised for various ends. They also point to directions for further study — in areas ranging from cognitive science to reception studies — in order to fully assess individual and collective responses to fiction.

Fiction, of course, is part of the world. Our initial question does not contest the fact that, as Jean-Marie Schaeffer points out, 'fiction is also a reality' (Schaeffer 2010: 186).⁷ Indeed, it is hard to imagine a world without fiction. However, the specificity — and indeed the power — of fiction lies in the difference that it introduces between regimes of representation, and in its capacity to transform, transpose, or even leave behind the world of facts — even if it is never entirely cut off from reference. In this sense the real power of fiction is inseparable, paradoxically, from the very gesture of playful distancing that limits its direct efficacy. It is the various modalities of this indirect impact, which operates through the modelling, configuration, and reconfiguration of our relationship to reality, that the following essays address.

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Notes to the Introduction

1. “Please do not read our young lady naughty tales like that,” he said. “Not that a heroine secretly in love is likely to catch her interest, but she must not come to take it for granted that things like that really happen” (Murasaki Shikibu 2001: 462).
2. On this form of metalepsis, which puts into play the relationship between the ‘real’ diegetic universe of the screening room and a metadiegetic filmic universe, see Genette (2004: 64).
3. ‘Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried. From pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost as many as our readers. [...] “I am no novel-reader — I seldom look into novels — Do not imagine that I often read novels — It is really very well for a novel.” Such is the common cant. “And what are you reading, Miss — ?” “Oh! It is only a novel!” replies the young lady, while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame. “It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda”; or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language’ (Austen [1818] 2003: 36–37)
4. This is said to have been the effect provoked by the ghost of Hamlet’s father at the beginning of Shakespeare’s play (see Marchand, Lecerle and Schweitzer 2012).
5. For instance, a columnist for the *Ohio State Journal* responded to a reader who objected to a favourable review: ‘It does not necessarily follow that we are in favor of running [slaves] off from their masters, to the very doubtful benefits of freedom in Canada, because we think ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ a readable book’ (*A New Objection*, 1852: 2).
6. The former, in his book on witness accounts of the Great War, accuses Barbusse of fictionalising and thus deforming the experience of soldiers (Cru 1929: 555–65); the latter sees in Barbusse’s style a derivative naturalism that cannot compare to documentary film footage (Breton [1926] 1992: 286).
7. On this point see Frank Wagner’s contribution to the present volume (Chapter 18).