

“How Narratology and Speech Act Theory Decipher Quidditch, Klingon, and Kwik-E-Mart”

In this paper I carry out a narratological analysis that offers an explanation for a growing and striking cultural trend: the crossing of the ontological border between fiction and reality. That fictional entities have asserted their prominence is evident. For instance, in 2004 a course in the Elvish language Sindarin was offered at the University of Wisconsin-Madison; in July of 2007 a dozen North American 7-Eleven stores were reborn as Kwik-E-Marts; scores of colleges and universities now have Quidditch teams that compete in a World Cup; in September of 2010 an opera entirely in Klingon debuted in The Hague.

I postulate that the permeability of this border is the consequence of textual acts: since text (here conceived pantextually to include literature, paintings, music, film, and even advertisements) is the material conduit of fictionality, it stands to reason that textual acts bear upon the characteristics of the ontological boundary.

Having laid out the narratological foundation of several such textual acts, I argue that the narratological bears on the ontological by means of performative speech acts, as portrayed in J. L. Austin's tripartite model of locution, illocution, and perlocution. The textual acts are akin to speech acts in that fictional entities gain nonfictional status by means of an implicit narratological and at times social contract at the heart of the textual act. I show that coupling narratology and speech act theory allows us to solve the mystery of how certain entities begin in fiction and cross the border into reality.