Fiction and Lying:
The Case of *Fargo*'s Title Card

Ali Esrail (s2348780)
Leiden University

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Abstract

This study explores the nature of lying and its relationship to fiction. The purpose of this study is to challenge Meibauer's (2015:158-182) claim that fiction cannot lie because authors do not present their fiction as true. In doing so, this study will provide a compare-and-contrast analysis of the opening title cards of Joel and Ethan Coen's film *Fargo* (1996) and Spike Lee's film *BlacKkKlansman* (2018). Whereas the opening title card of the latter film appears to justly claim that it is based on a true story, the former appears to falsely assert this. This suggests that fiction may possess the capacity of lying. To determine this, the first chapter of this study establishes a pragmatic definition of lying, which, in essence, entails a speaker (S) asserting a proposition (p) which he/she does not believe in. Since this study focuses on fiction, the second chapter endeavors to establish a definition of fictional communication, which, in essence, entails an author (U) performing assertive illocutionary acts through fictive utterances and an audience (H) who ought to make believe the propositions (P) put forward in these utterances. The analysis and results of this study, which applies the theory provided in the first two chapters to the title cards of *Fargo* (1996) and *BlacKkKlansman* (2018), indicates that a speaker may well lie by means of a work of fiction.

Keywords: lying, assertions, fictional communication, illocutionary acts, Fargo, implicatures, make-believe

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INTRODUCTION

"Kids, fiction is the truth inside the lie, and the truth of this fiction is simple enough: The magic exists."

—Stephen King.

When I was eight years old, my family and I sat in front of the television to watch the movie *Titanic* (1997). Like many other people, at the end of the film, I found myself crying. But the reason why the film had this level of emotional impact on me was not (solely) because Leonardo DiCaprio is such an excellent actor. Rather, it had more to do with the fact that - before the film - my brother had told me that *Titanic* is a "true story." As I was just a child, I completely misinterpreted this phrase; I took it to mean that the dramatic events in the film were real and that they just happened to be captured on camera while they occurred. Therefore, I also thought Jack (Leonardo DiCaprio's character) died onscreen.

When I found out that this was not the case, not only did I feel foolish (despite my age, perhaps rightly so), I also felt misled. However, intuitively, it would have been somewhat ridiculous of me to assert that *Titanic* - a work of cinematic nonfiction - lied to me. Firstly, it was my brother who told me that the film was a true story, not the film itself. Secondly, works of cinematic (non)fiction do not assert to be true, they merely pretend to be true (Meibauer, 2015:158-182). Thirdly - and most importantly - even if it was James Cameron who told me that *Titanic* was a true story, it would have been reasonable for me to assume that the phrase was supposed to mean that it was *based* on a true story, rather than it actually *being* a true story.

Nonetheless, what the above anecdote suggests is that fiction - something that is imaginary - may well have real life consequences. In my case, the real life consequence was that I responded to the film by crying. Indeed, in experiencing fiction, we often "have genuine emotions of fear, sadness, anger and so on." (Sainsbury, 2010:15). However, these sorts of consequences to fiction may manifest themselves in various ways. Many of Shakespeare's plays, for example, were politically driven and much of his fictional work shaped audiences' world views. As Janes (n.d., 164) writes:

> Shakespeare's history plays have served as tools for political propaganda and have also reflected the attitudes of Englishmen at the time of any given production of these plays. What is especially interesting is how easily these plays […] can be adapted to fit the propaganda needs of any given era. Olivier's World War II era version of Henry V was staged in such a way as to emphasize patriotic ideals during a time of crisis, while a fairly recent production of Richard III sets the play in Nazi Germany. Richard III, of course, has been a propaganda tool from the beginning in its expression of the Tudor obsession with vilifying the king from whom Henry VII, the first Tudor, seized the throne.

The fact that fiction can affect audiences in such a way that they may bend their views on reality is not a surprise. Historically, McKee (2014:355) writes that fiction has always had the capacity to contain and spread fresh truths. In addition, Sainsbury (2010:4) writes:

> Many fictions contain straightforward truths, which the reader is supposed to take as true. In such cases, the author provides "local color" by telling us things which not only are true, but which the reader is intended to realize he is supposed to treat as true. In more complex ways, many fictions are supposed to reveal truths about love, honor, the human condition, or whatever, even if the truths are not explicitly stated.

Sainsbury (2010) exemplifies these 'truths' which the reader is supposed to take as true by examining a passage written by French author Marcel Proust in his book *The Guermantes Way*. According to Sainsbury (2010:4), "Proust … wants us to believe some of the "psychological laws" he hints at, including his cynical view that love is projection, even though they are illustrated by fictional events." Take a look at the following passage, the last sentence of which "smoothly moves out of narrative." (Sainsbury, 2010:5):

> Even the sight of Gilberte, which would have been so exquisite a pleasure only yesterday, would no longer have sufficed me. For I should have been anxious all the time I was not actually with her. That is how a woman, by every fresh torture that she inflicts on us, often quite unwittingly, increases her power over us and at the same time our demands upon her.

In this example, Proust is endeavoring to make the audience believe in what ways women can increase their power over men. In other words, what Sainsbury (2010:4) is asserting is that there can be some propositions in a work of fiction that the author is actively trying to make the audience believe in and that "the purely fictional and the things the author is trying to get us really to believe may be closely related, both thematically and in presentation."

It is observations such as the above which allow me to suspect that fiction may then also be utilized as a means to lie; because if an author of fiction may endeavor to make the audience actively believe in certain propositions and allow us to ascertain truths, could an author then also lie through a work of fiction?

With regard to this question, it is interesting to look at the case of Joel and Ethan Coen's opening title card to their film *Fargo* (1996):

> "THIS IS A TRUE STORY.
> The events depicted in this film took place in Minnesota in 1987.
> At the request of the survivors, the names have been changed.
> Out of respect for the dead, the rest has been told exactly as it occurred." (Coen & Coen, 1996)

The film opens by positing that it is based on a true story. It even refers to the real world by stating that the events took place in Minnesota in 1987 and that there were survivors and deaths. Just like we saw with Proust, the audience is thus expected to take this notice factually seriously. However, gripping as this title card is, none of the content of it is true. As was written in the media in 1998: "Had they [i.e. the audience] done any checking, they would have quickly discovered that nothing so much as vaguely resembling that level of carnage had occurred in Minnesota. Not in 1987. Not ever." (Snopes, 1998). Moreover, in an interview, Joel and Ethan Coen have declared that the movie "pretends to be true" and that "We wanted to make a movie just in the genre of a true story movie. You don't have to have a true story to make a true story movie." (Scott, 2017).

Although Meibauer (2015:158-182) asserts that "fiction is not lying" because authors "do not present their fiction as true" and that it is "presupposed that every reader knows the narrated events to be fictional", *Fargo*'s title card goes to demonstrate that an author's claim in a fictitious work can contradict people's real world beliefs. After all - despite these comments by the directors - many a viewer has been led to believe that the film was based on a true story (Vincent, 2015). Since a part of the film's audience have been undeniably deceived by its title card, *Fargo* raises the question whether fiction is capable of lying. This is also where I arrive at the research question of my thesis, namely: *To what extent did* Fargo*'s (1996) title card constitute a lie?*

To answer this, this thesis is divided into the following chapters: Firstly, in order to determine whether a work of fiction possesses the capacity of lying, it is important to establish a working definition of lying; by means of extant pragmatics - primarily Oswald (2010) and Meibauer (2015) - the first chapter of this thesis, "The Liar", will discuss the nature of lying and what it exactly entails. This chapter will also discuss assertions and implicatures and their relationship to lying. Ultimately, this chapter shall provide a definition of assertion and lying which will be used throughout the rest of this thesis.

Since this thesis focuses on fiction, it is also of value to know what is meant by this phenomenon: The second chapter is therefore titled "The Nature of Fictional Communication." This chapter will not only provide a definition of fiction, it will - most importantly - also provide a communicative definition of fiction, by which I mean a definition that shows the communicative mechanisms at play when a work of fiction communicates to its audience H. After all, should fiction possess the capacity of lying, one must also determine its communicative merits. The primary sources used in this chapter are Searle (1975), Sainsbury (2010) and Currie (1985). Just as Meibauer (2015), I will treat the author and the work of fiction as an interchangeable source of a (potential) lie in a work of fiction.

The third chapter of this thesis consists of an explication of the methodology which will be applied in the subsequent chapter, chapter 4, titled: "Did *Fargo* lie?" Chapters 1 and 2's explications on assertion, lying and fiction will be applied in chapter 4, ultimately with the goal of ascertaining whether *Fargo*'s title card can be classified as a lie. In order to illuminate the difference with other true story fiction, this chapter shall also apply the theoretical framework provided in the previous chapters to the satirical film *BlacKkKlansman* (2018), written by Charlie Wachtel, David Rabinowitz, Kevin Willmott, Spike Lee and directed by Spike Lee also. This compare-and-contrast analysis is relevant because it will shed light on my primary case, *Fargo*; I believe it is reasonable to assert this because, similar to *Fargo, BlacKkKlansman* also contains a title card which states that the movie is based on a true story.

The conclusion shall endeavor to answer whether *Fargo* did indeed lie to its audience and outline the differences between *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman*. The discussion section shall briefly expound on the (potential) pitfalls of this thesis.

CHAPTER 1: THE LIAR

To formulate a working definition of lying, this chapter will utilize the pragmatic theory discussed in Oswald (2010) and Meibauer (2015). The reason why I picked these two sources is because both have been published fairly recently and provide an extensive discussion on lying while examining previous theory as well.

In establishing my definition of lying, I will focus on assertions. I am aware of the fact that lying may also be realized through other speech acts. However, since I focus on the opening statement of *Fargo* (1996) - 'This is a true story' - I believe it is justified to solely discuss assertions, since that is exactly what I believe *Fargo*'s opening title card to consist of. This entails that - in order to describe lying - it is important to firstly define what is a speech act and what exactly constitutes an assertion.

1.1 Assertions and speech acts

In the pragmatics, a speech act is known as an utterance that not only conveys a certain type of information but performs an action as well (Searle, 1965:2). For example, if used indirectly, the utterance "Could you pass me the salt?" is a speech act as it expresses the speaker's desire to acquire the salt but is also presenting a request that their interlocutor pass the salt to them. An assertion is a speech act also as it performs the act of asserting. It is important to know what exactly this act of asserting comprises.

According to Meibauer (2015: 65), there is a plethora of theories on assertions on the market. However, similar to Meibauer (2015), I will only focus on traditional speech act accounts since that approach is more useful from a linguistic point of view and thus to the purposes of this thesis. This is because speech-act traditionalists focus on the ways in which "speech acts are systematically related to the forms of a language", rather than on the philosophical or psychological features of assertive meaning (which would be a speech-act fundamentalist approach) (Meibauer 2015:65).

In the philosophy of language, which Meibauer (2015: 65) describes as "the constant source of linguistic concepts of speech acts", Brown and Cappelen (2011:2-4) provide four basic linguistic views on assertion:

(a) "Assertions are those sayings that are governed by certain norms – the norms of assertion."
(b) "Assertions are those sayings that have certain causes."
(c) "Assertions are those sayings that have certain effects."
(d) "Assertions are those sayings that are accompanied by certain commitments."

According to Cappelen (Brown and Cappelen, 2011:2-4), there is also a fifth view: namely, that

"there is no one correct way to characterize the extension of *assertion*." Although this may be true, it is important, in order to be able to define lying, to ascertain a concrete definition of assertion.

The first view described above is related to the creators of speech-act theory, John L. Austin (1962) and John R. Searle (1969). Their notion of speech acts are inextricably linked to so-called 'felicity conditions' (Searle, 1975:175). These are norms that speech acts need to fulfil in order for them to be considered as such. An example of one of these norms is a speaker believing that the propositional content that he[1] communicates to his interlocutor to be true. If a speech act fulfils such a requirement, it is deemed - in that aspect - 'felicitous' (Searle, 1975:175). The second view is related to Bach and Harnish (1979) who describe speech acts as the expression of an attitude (Bach & Harnish, 1979:397). This is to say that a certain attitude, or belief, expressed by the speaker constitutes the cause of the speech-act category of assertion (Bach & Harnish, 1979:397). The third view is related to Stalnaker (1979, 2002), who defines assertions through the effects they have on the communication between interlocutors (Stalnaker, 1979:316). Lastly, the fourth view is related to Brandom (1994), who defines assertions as being accompanied by certain commitments, such as "the commitment to present evidence for the truth of the asserted content" (Brandom, 1994). The reason why I include these views on assertion is because all of them touch upon significant aspects. However, considering the scope of this thesis, I will primarily focus on the first two views by Searle (1969) and Bach and Harnish (1979) as these are the ones that I consider the most elaborate.

A full definition is provided by Pagin (2007:1): "An assertion is a speech act in which something is claimed to hold." Meibauer (2015:66) exemplifies this definition by using speech acts (1)-(2); (1) and (2)'s respective contents can be found in (3)-(4):

(1) There is a traffic congestion on Adenauer Bridge.
(2) Markus has tooth ache.
(3) 'that there is a traffic congestion on Adenauer Bridge at t'
(4) 'that Markus has tooth ache at t'

These contents which start with 'that' are called propositions. It is important to know what propositions are because by making an assertive statement, one is also uttering a proposition. Propositions can be best described as "the content of thoughts" (Chapman, 2006:81). Chapman (2006:81) writes that these contents of thoughts can be thought of as "little pictures of the world" and that "when we express propositions in language, we tend to do so by means of simple declarative sentences, such as *spiders have eight legs* and *milk bottles grow on trees*." To simplify the notion of a proposition, I would like to add that a proposition can also be thought of as a proposal for a certain truth (hence 'proposition'). However, one should be cautious of the fact that this simplification only holds up for assertions. It does not hold up for other speech acts such as questions or requests. A request, after all, is not a proposal for a truth.

From hereon, should I happen to use any logical, pragmatic formulas, propositions will be

[1] I use male pronouns but they can be viewed as applicable to any gender.

represented by the letter 'p'.[2] Since propositions are to be uttered at a certain time and in a certain context, I will also use the time variable 't'. The speaker - i.e. the one who utters the proposition - will be represented by the capital letter S. The hearer - i.e. the one who receives the utterance - will be represented by the capital letter H.

A more elaborate definition of assertion can be found in Searle (1969). Searle (1969:175) describes assertions by means of the following rules:

Propositional content rule	What is to be expressed is any proposition p.
First preparatory rule	S has evidence (reasons etc.) for the truth of p.
Second preparatory rule	It is not obvious to both S and H that H knows (does not need to be reminded of, etc.) p.
Sincerity rule	S believes p.
Constitutive rule	Counts as an undertaking to the effect that p represents an actual state of affairs.

Once these rules are satisfied, we have, according to Searle, an assertion. It is important, therefore, to know what these rules entail.

The first rule is the propositional content rule, which entails that every proposition can be asserted. As Meibauer (2015:67) writes: "There is no restriction in that respect, for example, that a proposition must relate to a future state of affairs (as with a promise) or past state of affairs (as with an oath)." Moreover, the rule also demands that assertions must have propositional content. This means that "simply uttering *I assert* without any specification about what is being asserted does not count as a successful assertion" (Meibauer 2015:67).

The second rule is the first preparatory rule, which informs us that one must not assert a proposition if one has no evidence for the truth of this proposition. As such, uttering *Blade Runner is also a novel, but I have no evidence for that state of affairs* will not be sufficient. The second preparatory rule may seem complicated, but, in essence, it tells us that the obvious should not be asserted. For example, when it is clear to both the speaker and the hearer that *Blade Runner is a novel*, it does not make sense to utter this anyway. This goes hand in hand with McKee's (2014:360) claim that in reality speakers rarely tell each other something that they both already know. This observation is also relevant when it comes to *Fargo*'s title card, the details of which I will elaborate on in the analysis of this thesis.

The sincerity rule entails that, in case of an assertion, the proposition it puts forward must be believed by the speaker. Therefore, it will not be felicitous for a speaker to state that *Blade Runner is also a novel* when the speaker does not believe this thought to be true. Lastly, the constitutive rule teaches us that the proposition uttered by the speaker must count as an effort - on the part of the speaker - that the proposition represents a certain state of affairs. According to Meibauer (2015:67-68), the constitutive rule "comprises the essence of this type of speech act [i.e. assertions]: [because] the point of assertions is to represent something."

As pointed out earlier, Bach and Harnish (1979) describe that a speaker's attitude constitutes

[2] Note that later in my thesis, I will use a capitalized P when it comes to my definition of fiction.

the reason for uttering an assertion. See the following definition, provided in Bach and Harnish (1979:15), in which "R-intend" is short for "reflexively intend":

Expressing an attitude
For S to express an attitude is for S to R-intend H to take S's utterance
as reason to think that S has that attitude.

What this goes to show - and what is lacking in Searle's (1969) definition - is that by asserting, a speaker does not only represent a state of affairs but wants the hearer to share the same beliefs as regards the represented state of affairs as well. In other words, if I were to assert that *Amsterdam is the capital of The Netherlands,* I would also want the hearer to share the state of affairs proposed in this assertion. As such, according to Bach and Harnish (1979), the hearer's recognition of the speaker's intention is paramount.

Searle (1969) and Bach and Harnish (1979), as Meibauer (2015:79) writes, go to demonstrate that a certain commitment on behalf of the speaker is essential to the speech-act category of assertion. In Searle (1969), the commitment on behalf of the speaker is most prominently expressed in the presence of the first preparatory rule. In Bach and Harnish (1979), it is the speaker's commitment to a certain attitude.

Although these approaches are useful, they are also extremely deconstructive and for the purposes of this thesis, it would be better to provide a more concise definition of assertion. Fortunately, Meibauer (2015:99) provides a definition which not only captures the insights of the preceding views "but is [also] not overcomplicated and burdened with special theoretical assumptions."

Assuming that an assertion is inherently made by a speaker S at a certain time t and that it contains a certain propositional content, Meibauer (2015:99) provides the following definition:

(43) Assertion
S asserted at t that p iff[3]
(a) S uttered at t the declarative sentence σ meaning p,
(b) by uttering the declarative sentence σ, S presented p as true,
(c) by uttering the declarative sentence σ, S M-intended that an addressee
H to whom S uttered p actively believes that p.

Condition (a) shows that assertions require declarative sentences. Declarative sentences are considered to be sentences "that express a statement or an assertion" (Schleppegrell 58-59). For the purposes of this thesis, however, this definition is too superficial. Therefore, let us say that a declarative sentence is one that states or relies information to a certain audience (Gaskin, 1998:21). As such, the declarative sentence is "characterized essentially by its ability to say something true or false." (Gaskin, 1998:21).

The fact that assertions require declarative sentences is not surprising because assertions are

[3] Iff stands for *if and only if*.

claims that one holds to be true. Condition (b) resembles Searle's essential condition in that it "draws on the typical assumption to be found in many definitions of assertion, namely that in asserting p, the maker of an assertion commits themselves to the truth of the proposition expressed" (Meibauer, 2015:100). Lastly, according to Meibauer (2015:100) condition (c) is useful because it "situates assertion within the Gricean communication." This connection to Grice is specifically realized by the technical verb 'M(eaning)-intended' because it entails the Gricean abbreviation for non-natural (i.e. verbal) meaning (Meibauer, 2015:100). However, I do not believe that this Gricean connection is necessary for the purposes of this thesis. Therefore, I propose to make the definition even simpler by omitting the M-intention. The definition of assertion utilized throughout this thesis then is:

Assertion
S asserted at t that p iff
(a) S uttered at t the declarative sentence σ meaning p,
(b) by uttering the declarative sentence σ, S presented p as true,
(c) by uttering the declarative sentence σ, S intended that an addressee
H to whom S uttered p actively believes that p.

1.2 The subjective element to lying

Now that I have established a definition of assertion, I will proceed by defining lying. Oswald (2010:104) points out that an intuitive definition of lying would entail a speaker uttering an untruth. However, such a definition - which is merely centered on truth conditions - is not sufficient because not all false statements can be categorized as lies. Oswald (2010:104) elaborates:

> Imagine I honestly, but erroneously, believe that Geneva is the capital of Switzerland, and that for some reason I want to make my Argentinean interlocutor, who knows next to nothing about Switzerland, to believe that Berne is the capital of Switzerland (which I believe is false), and that I utter to this end: Berne is the capital of Switzerland.

Oswald's example may be considered somewhat artificial but it does problematize a definition of lying that would be solely dependent on truth conditions, as his example demonstrates that one might also be deceptive by uttering the truth. In this case, Berne is indeed the capital of Switzerland but because the speaker actively believes this is not the case, he may be accused of lying: "The reason for this is that, as far as *my* knowledge of the world is concerned, I sincerely believe that [Geneva is the capital of Switzerland]" (Oswald, 2010:105). In other words, as Galasinski (2000:23) explains: "It is a particular set of beliefs that constitutes a lie, rather than a relationship between the utterance and the extralinguistic state of affairs."

I agree with Oswald (2010:105) when he writes of Galasinski that it is strange to define lies as "a set of beliefs." After all, in the above example, the lie itself - "Berne is the capital of Switzerland" - does not reflect the belief of the speaker. Instead, I would phrase it as follows: Lying

inherently involves the speaker being consciously aware of the fact that he is bending his own subjective truth at the moment the utterance departs from his lips.

It goes without saying that I consider this subjective element of lying paramount. After all, in order to lie, a speaker must necessarily bend his own truth to some extent. This is not to say that a speaker's non-conformity to the objective truth does not matter. Rather, I would say that the element of bending one's own truth *always* matters as it occurs consistently in lying and constitutes its deceptive nature.

The first distinctive features of a lie are thus: i) the speaker has the intention to deceive, and ii) the speaker believes that the content he is communicating is false (Oswald, 2010:106). With regard to the speaker's intention to deceive, Meibauer (2015:103) too points out that it does not matter what actually is the case; "it only matters what the speaker believes to be the case." Direct lies then, according to Meibauer (2015:103), comes down to:

"*Lying*
S [i.e. the speaker] lied at t [i.e. at a certain time] if and only if
(a) S asserted at t that p [i.e. a certain proposition]
(b) S actively believed at t that not p."

Although the intention to deceive is not explicitly mentioned in this formula, I would say that it is still present. Simply because when performing act (a) - i.e. to assert as a speaker at t that p - while simultaneously believing (b) - i.e. to actively believe as a speaker at t that not p - is in and of itself an act that intends to deceive; because, regardless of the utterance's truth-conditional content, the speaker still has the intention to conceal (a part of) the truth. To avoid any confusion, however, I hereby provide a reformulation that does include the intention to deceive:

Lying
S lied at t if and only if
(a) S, with the intention to deceive, asserted at t that p
(b) S actively believed at t that not p.

1.3 Implicatures and lying

Oswald (2010:106) proceeds by stating that if one does away with truth-conditional meaning in an account of lying, then it opens the door to discussing the status of non-truth-conditional contents, such as implicatures. For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to establish whether lying can be realized by means of implicature.

In his renowned *Logic and conversation*, Grice (1975:24) inquires "into the general conditions that, in one way or another, apply to conversation." He refers to the pragmatic notion of implicature as a substantial consequence of these general conditions; Grice (1975) thereby

distinguishes between what is *said* (the conventional meaning of the words) and what is *implicated* (what is actually meant). The latter is referred to as the implicature. Grice (1975:24) exemplifies as follows:

> Suppose that A and B are talking about a mutual friend, C, who is now working in a bank. A asks B how C is getting on in his job, and B replies, *Oh quite well, I think; he likes his colleagues, and he hasn't been to prison yet*. At this point, A might well inquire what B was implying, what he was suggesting, or even what he meant by saying that C had not yet been to prison. The answer might be any one of such things as that C is the sort of person likely to yield to the temptation provided by his occupation, that C's colleagues are really very unpleasant and treacherous people, and so forth […] It is clear that whatever B implied, suggested, meant in this example, is distinct from what B said, which was simply that C had not been to prison yet.

In other words: By means of implicature, interlocutors may say one thing ('p') but mean something else ('q') entirely.

The question arises, then, whether implicatures are capable of generating lies. Oswald (2010:106) examines this by means of the following implicature: Ann has four children. What is said here is that Ann has four children. What is implicated is that Ann has exactly four children. If the speaker possesses the knowledge that Ann has in fact five children, can he be held accountable for having lied? Oswald (2010:106) writes that:

> If we do away with truth-conditions and go on to considering that lying requires *at the same time* the intention to deceive *and* getting the hearer to infer a false statement, then (26) [i.e. Ann has four children] is lying, for (26) is formulated with the goal of misleading the hearer into inferring (26') *and* (26') is additionally false (it is not true that Ann has exactly 4 children).

Oswald (2010:106) goes on to claim that this would mean that the definition of lying - provided in section 1.1 - needs to be reformulated to "lying defines more loosely cases where the speaker communicates (either explicitly or implicitly) a representation she believes to be false." However, I do not find this reformulation necessary because I do not see in what way it is different from the original definition: Both, after all, contain the first element of deception and the second element of communicating a false belief.

More importantly, however, Oswald (2010) notes that he does not consider the 'Ann has four children' example, from hereon referred to as (26), a lie. This has firstly to do with the fact that as long as Ann has four children, the utterance will be true (Oswald, 2010:106). Secondly, "if the speaker believes that Ann has 5 children, she must also accept as true the belief that Ann has 4 children by logical necessity." (Oswald, 2010:106). Therefore, Oswald (2010:106) does not consider (26) a lie as "there is no contradiction between what the speaker knows is true ("Ann has 5 children") and what the speaker is explicitly saying ("Ann has 4 children"). Oswald (2010), in determining whether (26) can be counted as a lie, thereby prioritizes the relationship between what is explicitly said and the speaker's belief rather than the relationship between the implicature and said belief.

I find Oswald's (2010) analysis somewhat curious. He is reluctant to classify (26) as a lie

because as long Ann has four children, the proposition will be true, while, in his previous example (i.e. Berne is the capital of Switzerland), he does not show the same reluctance, even though - truth-conditionally - this proposition is undoubtedly true also. Moreover - more often than not - the ultimate meaning of people's utterances is not generated by what is explicitly said but by what is indirectly suggested.

In elaboration, consider the following scenario: Ann's babysitter, Mia, has been arrested by the police. During the interrogation, Mia is asked how many children Ann has. Due to the nature of the case, Mia knows that the police is only interested in knowing the total amount of Ann's children. Nonetheless, she utters, with the intention to deceive, that "Ann has 4 children", while knowing, in fact, that Ann has five children. Even though Mia's explicit utterance is not contradictory to what she believes, can this still not be considered a lie?

To me, it can. After all, it is the scalar implicature (what is not said is not the case) that ultimately generates the meaning of this utterance, which is: Ann has exactly 4 children (otherwise Mia would have said five) (Levinson, 1995). A scalar implicature typically entails an utterer (Mia) having a reason for not using a more informative scale (in this case, the scale being how many children Anne has). If the utterer, for example, states that "there will be five of us for dinner tonight", this suggests that in total there will only be five people for dinner tonight, even though in this statement five is also logically consistent with there being six people for dinner (Levinson, 1995).

Since the implicature is of undeniable importance as to the true meaning of Mia's utterance, and since it does not correspond with Mia's belief that Ann has exactly five children, I conclude that it is a lie. Indeed, whereas Oswald (2010) prefers to prioritize the effect of what is said, I - in this case - prioritize the effect of the implicature. Note that I am not stating that Oswald (2010) is wrong in believing that (26) is not a lie. Rather, I am stating that, depending on the context (as demonstrated by the example above), it *can* be a lie. One such contextual condition reflected in the above example is that Mia knows which information the police is after (namely, the total amount of Ann's children). These contextual conditions may vary from case to case but, in essence, as Meibauer (2015:114) writes: "When one considers the fact that many assertions are connected with conversational implicatures. These implicatures are intended by the speaker and are intended to be derived by the hearer. If the implicatures are believed by the hearer, then it is of course possible to lie by intentionally using false implicatures."

Meibauer (2015:123) elaborates that implicatures are additional propositions arising from the utterance. As such, they cannot be ignored at the expense of what is explicitly said. Because if conversational implicatures generate several propositions, then these propositions must either be true or false (Meibauer, 2015:123). Following from this observation, four pairs of propositions - in relation to their implicatures - can be set up, namely:

"a. p (what is said) is true and q (what is implicated) is true
b. p is true and q is false

c. p is false and q is true
d. p is false and q is false" (Meibauer, 2015:124).

1.4 A definition of lying

In short, for my analysis, it is important to know that the relevant propositions of the opening title card to *Fargo* are paraphrased as follows:

p = Fargo is a true story.
q = Fargo is based on a true story.

Considering the above, the definition of a lie used throughout this thesis is thus:

Lying
S lied at t if and only if
(a) S, with the intention to deceive, asserted at t that p
(b) or S, with the intention to deceive, asserted at t that p to implicate q
(c) in case of (a) S actively believed at t that not p
(d) in case of (b), S actively believed that not q

CHAPTER 2: THE NATURE OF FICTIONAL COMMUNICATION

In order to understand what it is that I am analyzing, it is crucial to investigate what fiction entails, which is what I will be doing in this chapter. My primary focus will be on the communicative nature of fiction, since that aspect of fiction is more valuable to the goal of this thesis. After all, it is imperative to know, communication-wise, what exactly fiction entails in order to ascertain whether it is capable of lying. This chapter shall therefore characterize the notion of fiction within pragmatic theory. To realize this, this chapter will answer the following question: *What is fiction and what is fictional communication?*

2.1 What is fiction?

One of the most elaborate accounts on fiction can be found in Sainsbury (2010). Sainsbury (2010:4) writes that "we contrast fact and fiction, but we cannot say what fiction is by saying it is not fact, or that it is not represented as fact, or that it is presented as not being fact." According to Sainsbury (2010:1), fiction always involves some kind of form of imaginative representation. In telling a tale, for example, "a novelist represents a course of events." These events are typically experienced through an imaginary character (the protagonist).

Sainsbury (2010:5) goes on to write that "in seeking to understand what fiction is, we can look either to the producer or the consumer or to some combination." The problem, however, is that consumers can be mistaken (Sainsbury, 2010:5). For example, the public might treat a movie as if it were a factual narrative (like I did with *Titanic*) or a factual narrative as a movie (Sainsbury, 2010:5).

Given that consumers of fiction are "fallible", we, according to Sainsbury (2010:5), ought to look at "something distinctive about the production of fiction." Sainsbury (2010:6) posits that "whether something is fictional is determined by how it came into existence, and in particular by the aims and intentions of the producer." Sainsbury (2010:6) claims that this observation already proposes a significant aspect of how fiction is to be identified. Sainsbury (2010:6) expounds as follows:

> If two authors, by some extraordinary accident, produce fiction which are word-for-word the same we should say that two works of fiction have been produced, because they originated in different acts. By contrast, if the second author was not really an author, but was simply transcribing the first work, then there is only one fiction.

Sainsbury (2010:6) adds that even if the second author is acting in such a way that reflects the aims and intentions characteristic of one that produces fiction (for instance, if the second author were to endeavor that his work be treated as fiction by audiences), he still has to do with aims that exclude his work from being fiction: that is, "he is not making the story up, but relying on an already extant

text" (Sainsbury, 2010:6). Thus, a work of fiction can be regarded as a story that is written about imaginary characters and events, which are not based on facts, and - most importantly - the production of which beholds an original fictive intention.

2.2 What is fictional communication?

Meibauer (2015:158) writes that fictional communication "in the prototypical case, may be understood as a text consisting of fictive utterances produced by an author." Similarly, Currie (1990:35) writes that "a work is fictional if and only if it is the product of a fictive utterance." It should be noted, however, that the fictive utterance ought to be part of the original recounting of a fiction (Currie 1990:35). As Sainsbury (2010:6) justly elaborates:

> Not just any recounting of a fiction is an event partly constitutive of the creation of that work. When I read a bedtime story, I recount a fiction and I have fictive intentions (I intend the children to treat what I say as fiction). But I am not creating the fiction.

In essence, Sainsbury (2010) writes that if one were to read the sentence of a fictional work out loud it cannot be categorized as a fictive utterance, although it would be tempting to do so, since one is reciting a work of fiction. But it would be unreasonable to categorize recitals as fictive utterances because the recital of an utterance is not akin to the original utterance. In other words, the recital of an utterance is not part of its original source material.

Moreover, Sainsbury (2010:6) writes

> If we think of an utterance as the utterance of just one sentence, one fictive utterance does not a fiction make – or, at least, this would be a very untypical case. Not only are most written fictions created using many sentences, there are typically many different episodes of fiction-making activity, taking place over weeks, months, or years, the author pausing for meal breaks, vacations, or other projects in between.

The fact that there are, as Sainsbury calls it, several 'episodes of fiction-making', provides evidence that typically a work of fiction does not consist of a single utterance. In other words,

> We need to recognize that when a work of fiction is created, there are a whole series of utterances, possibly spread over wide stretches of time, connected by complicated relations, and typically not all having the same status. At one moment, our author is describing the purely fictional events of purely fictional characters; we are not supposed to mistake this for a historical record. At another, she is seeking to convey a realistic sense of place by describing the statues on Prague's Charles Bridge.

Sainsbury (2010:6) points out an important element of fiction here, namely that not all parts of a work of fiction are sharing the same fictional status. After all, fictional works can at one point describe fictional events and also smoothly move out of narrative such as we saw with Proust's *The Guermantes Way.* In the latter case, the author "should get things right." (Sainsbury, 2010:6). If the author does not, critics will inevitably "point out errors as defects" (Sainsbury 2010:6). All of this is to say that some fictive utterances are not beholden to reality, while others are (Sainsbury 2010:6).

At one moment, an author may make pronouncements which we are supposed to regard as literally true, whereas at other moments, the author may make an ironical utterance within the fiction which "we are not supposed to take this even as literally true in the fiction, but only as pointing us to some fictive truth not directly expressed." (Sainsbury 2010:6).

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice,* for example, opens with the renowned fictive utterance that "it is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." (Austen:1). But this utterance "is not to be treated either as something Austen is trying to get us to believe is so in the story." (Sainsbury, 2010:7). After all, the most important characters in Austen's novel do not live up to this notion at all. Instead, Sainsbury (2010:7) emphasizes that Austen is using the opening line to "sketch a milieu to which some of her characters belong, one in which it would be 'universally acknowledged that …,' and also agreed that this truth is universally acknowledged."

According to Sainsbury (2010:7), it is this intention of the author which determines that something is a work of fiction. Sainsbury (2010:7) calls this the *distinctive intention*. Sainsbury (2010:7) writes that a distinctive intention ensures

> that a given utterance is a contribution to a work of fiction, even if the total work is woven with threads of a very different composition as well; and a distinctive intention would be required of some utterances in a series if the series is to constitute the production of a work of fiction.

Earlier research on fictional communication has been carried out by Currie (1985). It is vital to elaborate on this, since Sainsbury ultimately refers to Currie's definition as well. Currie (1985:385) writes that in order to comprehend what exactly allows us to recognize fiction as fiction and not as some other kind of discourse, it may be useful to investigate "the conditions which must prevail in order for a successful act of fictional communication to take place." Currie (1985:385) goes on to state that such an approach invites for a 'speech act' analysis of fiction. There are different kinds of speech acts. For the purposes of this thesis, I will solely focus on illocutionary acts, which are defined as follows: "Illocutionary acts … are acts done **in** speaking, including and especially that sort of act that is the apparent purpose for using a performative sentence: christening, marrying, and so forth." (Sadock, 2004:54). In the example "Can you pass me the salt?" - assuming that both speakers are physically intact and capable - the indirect illocutionary act is requesting. The direct one is asking.

In his "Logical Status of Fictional Discourse", the idea that fiction is associated with the performance of a distinctive illocutionary act - i.e. an assertive one - is rejected by Searle. Searle (1975) argues that there are several illocutionary acts an author can perform in utilizing a fictive utterance. Searle (1975:64) thereby adheres to the following:

> In general the illocutionary act (or acts) performed in the utterance of a sentence is a function of the meaning of the sentence. We know, for example, that an utterance of the sentence "John can run the mile" is a performance of one kind of illocutionary act, and that an utterance of the sentence "Can John run the mile?" is a performance of another kind of illocutionary act, because we know that the indicative sentence form means something different from the interrogative sentence form.

Although Searle's account may seem somewhat befuddling, the point Searle (1975) - as becomes evident from the first quoted sentence - is endeavoring to make is that the meaning of a sentence determines the kind of illocutionary act it is supposed to perform. Currie (1985:385) calls this the *determination principle* and states that this principle applies to the idea that "the difference between fiction and non-fiction is a difference between kinds of illocutionary acts performed." Currie (1985:385) expounds that "on this view, the writer of nonfiction is performing the illocutionary act of asserting (when using the indicative sentence form), while the writer of fiction is performing the illocutionary act of "telling a story."

Searle (1975:64) ultimately dissents from this theory on the ground that the writer of fiction may use the same indicative sentences as the writer of nonfiction and that this would be inconsistent with the determination principle. As a result, Currie (1985:385) points out that "we would have sameness of meaning and distinctness of illocutionary act." In this case, the distinction would be that between asserting and storytelling.

Currie (1985) disagrees with Searle (1975). Currie (1985:386) states that Searle's (1975) argument "depends entirely upon the determination principle." Currie's (1985:386) objection, however, is that the determination principle is obviously false, since the same sentence, such as 'You are going to the concert.', may, considering the right context, be utilized as an assertion, a question, or as a command.

Moreover, Currie (1985:386) writes that Searle's own theory contradicts the determination principle. Searle's (1975:65) view is that the author of fiction engages "in a nondeceptive pseudo-performance which constitutes pretending to account to us a series of events." In doing so, "an author of fiction pretends to perform illocutionary acts which he is in fact not performing." In other words, instead of performing an illocutionary act of any kind, the author, according to Searle (1975), is pretending to perform in the illocutionary act of assertion the moment he writes an indicative sentence.

Beardsley (1981:170) follows Searle's 'pretended assertion' theory for reasons similar to Searle's:

> ... if certain words are generally used in performing an illocutionary act of one kind, then to utter those words without fulfilling all the conditions for that illocutionary act is to present something that is like-not quite-that illocutionary act. Thus deception becomes possible-and also harmless pretending. It is only necessary to make it clear that one or more of the requisite conditions are lacking, while at the same time inviting the receiver (the hearer or reader) to make-believe that they are present, in order to convert a genuine illocutionary action into a fictive one. *So fictive discourse, on this view, is discourse in which there is make-believe illocutionary action, but in fact no such action is performed.*[4]

Key word here is 'make-believe.' According to Beardsley, the author of fiction invites the audience to engage in a form of make-believe. However, as Currie (1985:387) rightly points out: "The question is whether, in doing so, the author himself engages in make-believe or whether, as Beardsley says, the author performs a make-believe illocutionary act rather than a genuine one."

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[4] My italics.

Currie (1985:387-388) adds that although it is correct that an author of fiction "utters sentences which normally have the illocutionary force of assertion, without their doing so in his mouth … this is not conclusive evidence that no illocutionary act is being performed." As Currie (1985) remarked against Searle (1975), the audience is "clearly capable of transposing utterances from one illocutionary key to another." By virtue of this, Currie (1985: 387) concludes that "it is not true, as Beardsley suggests, that to utter a sentence generally used to perform one illocution [i.e. asserting or commanding] without fulfilling the conditions appropriate for that act is always merely to perform a pretence of that act." Currie (1985:387) states his case as follows:

> Suppose that a speaker who utters an indicative sentence, "It's hot in here," is actually giving the command "Open the window." We would not describe such an action as a pretence. The speaker intends his utterance to be understood as a command, and believes that the context will enable his hearer to divine his intention. So too with the author of fiction. He relies upon the audience being aware that they are confronting a work of fiction, and assumes that they will not take utterances which have the indicative form to be assertions. He is thus not pretending anything.

Instead of merely pretending, Currie (1985:387) argues that the author of a work fiction invites the audience to pretend. More specifically, Currie (1985:387) asserts that the author invites us to engage in a game of make-believe.

Sainsbury (2010) follows Currie in that if one is looking for a distinctive feature of fiction, make-believe is the most promising. Sainsbury (2010:10) similarly claims that in contrast to a person recounting a fact, a story-teller "is trying to get the audience to make-believe the things he says," whereas the former "is trying to get the audience to believe the things he says."

Sainsbury (2010) also provides an important nuance when it comes to Searle's 'pretended assertion' theory. Sainsbury (2010) firstly states that Searle is right in saying that concocting a story is not akin to engaging in the act of assertion. Searle (1975:328) exemplifies this by referring to the Sherlock Holmes novels, which are written in the first person narrative, with Dr. Watson as narrator. Searle (1975:328) posits that "in first-person narratives, the author often pretends someone to be someone else making assertions." The problem with this observation, however, is that it is not obvious that this pretense entails the act of assertion. As Sainsbury (2010:8) points out: "I can pretend to be someone else singing without pretending to sing (but instead really singing); likewise I could pretend to be someone else making assertions by making assertions while pretending to be someone else."

In order to demonstrate why make-believe is the most accurate distinctive feature of a fictional work, Sainsbury (2010:10) points out the difference between pretending, imagining and make-believe. Sainsbury (2010:10) firstly points out the difference in formation profiles with regard to these verbs. He writes that although they are similar activities, one can

> pretend to be an elephant or to clean the windows, but cannot imagine or make-believe to be an elephant or to clean the windows (though I can imagine or make-believe that I am an elephant or that I am cleaning the windows). We can imagine an elephant, but cannot pretend or make-believe one.

However, these are merely grammatical differences and the non-grammatical differences - i.e. the practical ones - between pretending, imagining and make-believe are also of importance. Sainsbury (2010:11) firstly shows that "we don't have to do any pretending to produce or engage in fiction." When an author produces a work of fiction, he does not need to pretend he is doing anything other than telling a story (Sainsbury, 2010:11). Similarly, the consumer of a work of fiction does not need to pretend he is doing anything other than "reading the story, entering into it, and, with luck, enjoying it." Therefore, Sainsbury concludes, pretending is irrelevant as regards the discussion as to what constitutes a work of fiction (Sainsbury 2010:11).

This is not the case for imagining and make-believe because readers have to imagine a story and therefore are required to be imaginative (Sainsbury, 2010:11). As such, without any form of imagination, a reader of a story cannot engage in reading one. But imagination is a feature that pertains to the production and consumption of non-fiction (Sainsbury, 2010:11). Although Sainsbury (2010) does not elaborate on this last statement, it seems to me that what he is trying to say is that when we read a work of non-fiction, we have to imagine the events in our minds as they happened, whereas, when we read a work of fiction, we have to create these images even though they have never occurred. Put differently: When it comes to fiction and make-believe, we conjure up aspects - such as an image - of the fictive sentence that are solely property of the fictive sentence. Whereas, when it comes to non-fiction and imagination, the non-fictive sentence we conjure up is already based off of an image that has actually occurred in real life. It is this difference which constitutes the reason as to why make-believe is a concept that is distinct of fiction, and imagination pertains to the realm of non-fiction.

In contrast to Searle (1975:326) and Beardsley (1981), Currie (1985:385) argues that a work of fiction can be understood as "the performance of an illocutionary act on a par with assertion." Currie (1985:387) goes on to write that the illocutionary act of a work of fiction stems from the author's assertive illocutionary intention, which is the intention for his work to be recognized by the audience as make-believe. To clarify, according to Currie (1985:387-390), the text of a fictional work contains multiple propositions and "the author of fiction … relies upon the audience being aware that they are confronting a work of fiction." Currie (1985:387) elaborates that what is required is that the reader understands which attitude toward the propositions of the text the author intends him to adopt, and "in the case of fiction the intended attitude is one of make-believe." In other words: "The author of fiction intends that the reader make-believe *P,* where *P* is the sentence or string of sentences he utters." (Currie, 1985:387). To exemplify, when Darth Vader announced to Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* that: "No, I am your father!" (Brackett & Casdan, 1980) the audience is called upon to make believe P (i.e. Darth Vader is Luke Skywalker's father), and this proposition P that ought to be make believed by the audience ultimately stems from an assertive illocutionary act from the author.

Currie (1985:387) presents the following definition (F) of fiction, where U is the utterer, ø a variable ranging over characteristics of persons, and P a proposition:

"(F)

> U performs the illocutionary act of uttering fiction
> in uttering P if and only if
> There exists ø such that U utters P intending
> that anyone who were to have ø
> (1) would make-believe P;
> (2) would recognize U's intention of (1);
> (3) would have (2) as a reason for doing (1)."

Currie's (1985) definition is comprehensive but I do think it requires some polishing. This has primarily to do with the fact that condition ø - as he himself admits also - is somewhat elusive (Currie, 1985:388). Currie (1985:388) writes that ø is supposed to represent "any characteristics or group of characteristics … the author would acknowledge as sufficient to ensure that anyone possessing them would, under normal circumstances, grasp his illocutionary intentions." These characteristics or group of characteristics may be as general as "member of the author's speech community." (Currie, 1985:388). The problem, however, is that this general description of ø makes it hard to determine what we can and what we cannot include in it. For example, can we include in it the fact that a person possesses the capacity of breathing? Of reading? Of feeling? Of seeing? Since it is so arduous to grasp what exactly ø is supposed to signify, I propose - especially because ø alludes to 'normal circumstances' - to omit this condition entirely. The communicative definition of fiction would then look as follows:

(F)

> U performs the illocutionary act of uttering fiction
> in uttering P if and only if U utters P intending
> that the audience
> (1) would make believe P;
> (2) would recognize U's intention of (1);
> (3) would have (2) as a reason for doing (1).

Yet this definition does not suffice either. Because what happens if the author uses words and sentences non literally, such as is the case with metaphors and irony? As Currie (1985:390) puts it: "There are things that we are called upon to make-believe in a work of fiction" that are conversationally implicated. Clearly, then, one should hold into account that an author may utter P but intends the audience to make believe Q. For example, when a work of fiction - such as *Fargo* - states that it is a 'true story', the audience is undoubtedly called upon to derive its implicature: namely, that the work of fiction is based on a true story, rather than it actually being a true story.

The above definition of fiction should therefore be polished further, in such a way that it encompasses the inevitable presence of implicatures in works of fiction:

(F)

U performs the illocutionary act of uttering fiction
in uttering P if and only if U utters P intending
that the audience
(1) would make believe P (and/ or its implicature Q*)*;
(2) would recognize U's intention of (1);
(3) would have (2) as a reason for doing (1).

This perception of fiction as consisting of speech acts - in this case assertive illocutionary acts - is significant because it suggests that fiction may then also consist of lies. This is the question which I will attempt to answer in chapter 4 of this thesis.

2.3 True story notices

Thus far, I have discussed previous literature and have provided a definition of fiction. However, although Currie and Sainsbury's contribution to my definition of fiction have been substantive, I think there is one important aspect they are missing out on. As Sainsbury (2010) and Currie (1985) themselves have both pointed out already, a work of fiction may smoothly move out of narrative. This is to say there are certain propositions an author may put forward in his work of fiction that one has to believe rather than make believe. This observation is of great value because I consider true story notices such as the one used in *Fargo*'s title card to typify such propositions.

Valsesia, Diehl & Nunes (2017:105) found that true story notices - or '*truth-based labeling'* - such as the one in *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman* are traditionally utilized to state that certain elements of the story occurred in real life. What is more, they state that the primary motivator for truth-based labeling is to heighten plausibility of stories and improve audience evaluations (Valsesia, Diehl & Nunes, 2017:106). Therefore, it would be odd for the audience to make believe - instead of believe - these true story propositions. Since the true story notice in *Fargo* is an inherent part of the screenplay, I also consider it part of the fiction. After all, the true story notice of *Fargo* can also be found in the screenplay (see appendix) and not just in the film itself which indicates that truth-based labeling in *Fargo* is not just a non-fictive proposition in an otherwise fictive story.

This information leads to one last - albeit necessary - revision to my definition of fiction, so that it includes the audience's process of believing instead of merely make believing. My definition of fiction thus looks as follows:

U performs the illocutionary act of uttering fiction
in uttering P if and only if U utters P intending
that the audience
(1) would **(make) believe**[5] P (and/ or its implicature Q);

[5] Bold to highlight difference with preceding definition.

(2) would recognize U's intention of (1);
(3) would have (2) as a reason for doing (1).

On a final note, it is necessary to point out that I have primarily treated the author as the source of the lie in a work of fiction. I have elected this approach because Meibauer (2015:158) does this as well and since I am essentially challenging his claim that fiction cannot lie because authors do not present their fiction as true, it would be inconsistent to not treat the author and his relationship to his work of fiction the same as Meibauer (2015). Secondly, I do not think it is possible for a work of fiction to lie without the presence of its creator. Indeed, to an extent I believe the author and the work of fiction are interchangeable entities. I am aware, however, that this is a complicated issue. As such, I will elaborate on it in the discussion chapter of my thesis.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Now that I have discussed and set up the foundational definitions for the analysis of my thesis, **t**his chapter will briefly elaborate on the methodology utilized for the analysis of this thesis. More specifically, I will show what kind of research design will be applied, explain the appropriateness of the research design, state the cases which I will analyze, and explicate the specific procedure which I will be applying for the analysis.

3.1 Data collection

Since my primary focus is on the movie *Fargo* (1996)*,* the analysis of this thesis consists of a qualitative research approach. A qualitative approach ensures that I can focus on a limited amount of works of fiction. This means that this approach will suffice to demonstrate the fact that fiction may indeed be capable of lying. As such, I believe a quantitative research approach is unnecessary; after all, if *Fargo* - a work of cinematic fiction - did indeed lie to its audience, I consider this discovery to be sufficient evidence for the fact that fiction possesses the capacity of lying.

In order to strengthen my case and illuminate the fact to what extent *Fargo*'s title card constitutes a lie, I will compare and contrast the Coen brothers' film to Spike Lee's film *BlacKkKlansman* (2018). As was stated in my introduction, the reason for this is that - similar to *Fargo*, *BlacKkKlansman* too shows an opening title card that states the movie is based on a true story. What is more, *BlacKkKlansman* is based on the book *Black Klansman* by Ron Stallworth, which is a work of non-fiction. The film may thus - since it is based on actual events and has not been invented out of thin air - also be viewed as a work of non-fiction rather than a work of fiction. Indeed, due to this fact, there is no discussion in the media - in contrast to *Fargo* - as to whether *BlacKkKlansman* is based on a true story.

There is, however, a difference in the way the data between *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman* has been collected. Whereas the title card of *Fargo* can be found in the movie itself and in the screenplay, the title card of *BlacKkKlansman* is solely available in the movie. This is to say that it is not written down in the screenplay but was added later in the editing process. Therefore, my data specifically comprises the screenplay for *Fargo* and the digital film of *BlacKkKlansman*. The screenplay - like most screenplays - is available for free on the internet. The one I use is downloaded from the website www.scriptslug.com. I have added the first page of the screenplay - which includes the title card - to the appendix of this thesis. The digital copy of *BlacKkKlansman* was purchased through 'Pathé Thuis', which is a digital platform for movies in The Netherlands, launched by the film distribution company Pathé.

3.2 Procedure of analysis

The theoretical framework provided in chapters 1 and 2 will be applied in the analysis of *Fargo*

and *BlacKkKlansman*. I will hereby focus on one section of the two movies: the opening title cards. Since I believe that both movies assert something - namely that they are based on a true story - I find it necessary to first prove if both opening title cards constitute an assertion. In addition, my definition of lying utilizes the assertive speech act as its cornerstone, so it is only logical to prove first whether *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman* did indeed assert something. I will do so by applying the definition of assertion which I have established in the first chapter of this thesis.

Recall my definition of assertion:

Assertion
S asserted at t that p if and only if
(a) S uttered at t the declarative sentence σ meaning p,
(b) by uttering the declarative sentence σ, S presented p as true,
(c) by uttering the declarative sentence σ, S intended that an addressee
H to whom S uttered p actively believes that p.

This means that I have to identify the major formulaic components of this definition. In other words:

- Who is the speaker 'S'?
- What is the declarative sentence σ?
- What is the proposition p?
- What did S present as true?
- Who exactly is the addressee H?

Once the assertion of the title cards has been established, I will proceed by applying my definition of fiction to both of the opening title cards of *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman*. The definition of fiction was provided in the previous chapter and looks as follows:

U performs the illocutionary act of uttering fiction
in uttering P if and only if U utters P intending
that the audience
(1) would (make) believe P (and/ or its implicature Q*)*;
(2) would recognize U's intention of (1);
(3) would have (2) as a reason for doing (1).

Similar to the definition of assertion, before being able to apply it, I will first have to identify its major formulaic components. In this case, these are:

- Who is the utterer U?
- What is the proposition P*?*
- Is there make-believe involved?
- What is (if there is any) the implicature Q*?*

Next, I will proceed by ascertaining to what extent *Fargo*'s title card lied to its audience. I will apply the definition of lying provided in the first chapter of this thesis to both *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman*'s title cards. The definition looks as follows:

Lying
S lied at t if and only if
(a) S, with the intention to deceive, asserted at t that p
(b) or S, with the intention to deceive, asserted at t that p to implicate q
(c) in case of (a) S actively believed at t that not p
(d) in case of (b), S actively believed that not q

Again, before being able to apply this definition, I will first have to identify its major formulaic components. These are similar to the ones described in my definition of assertion. I am, for example, once more required to identify the speaker S of the utterance and the proposition p.

However, there are significant elements that still need to be identified. They are:

- What is the intention to deceive?
- What is the implicature q?
- Did S actively believe at t that not p or not q?

Once I have answered these questions, I will be able to fully apply my definition of lying. The remainder of the procedure is twofold and will endeavor to provide answers to the following questions:

A. 1. *What did* BlacKkKlansman's *(2018) title card assert?*
2. *Did* BlacKkKlansman's *(2018) title card assert at t that p or q? Or both?*
3. Did *Spike Lee believe at t that not q?*
4. *Did Spike Lee, by means of his title card, have the intention to deceive?*

B. 1. *What did* Fargo's *(1996) title card assert?*
2. *Did* Fargo*'s title card assert at t that p or q? Or both?*
3. Did *the Coen brothers believe at t that not q?*
4. *Did the Coen brothers, by means of their title card, have the intention to deceive?*

CHAPTER 4: DID *FARGO* LIE?

Now that I have established a definition for assertion, lying and a communicative definition of fiction, I will attempt to answer my research question: *To what extent did* Fargo*'s (1996) title card constitute a lie?* As stated in the previous chapter, I will do this by applying the theoretical framework which I have explicated in chapters 1 and 2. Moreover, since - as I have pointed out before - works of fiction consist of multiple propositions, I will solely focus on the ones that can be found in *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman*'s (2018) opening title cards. In doing so, I will primarily focus on the true story propositions found in these title cards.

4.1 *Fargo'*s alleged assertion: major components

In order to be able to identify the alleged assertion made in *Fargo*'s title card, it is fundamental to know what exactly the opening title card entails. As was stated in the introduction, the full title card looks as follows:

> "THIS IS A TRUE STORY.
> The events depicted in this film took place in Minnesota in 1987.
> At the request of the survivors, the names have been changed.
> Out of respect for the dead, the rest has been told exactly as it occurred." (Coen & Coen, 1996)

4.1a Who is *Fargo*'s speaker S?

Since this title card is neither spoken out loud by a character, nor is it part of the dialogue between characters, I find it reasonable to state that the speaker S is represented by the writers of the screenplay: Joel and Ethan Coen. It appears, then, that in this case we have multiple speakers. Since there is no reason to believe that an S consisting of more than one person may impact my analysis, from hereon, the formulaic component S may also represent multiple speakers.

4.1b What is *Fargo*'s declarative sentence σ?

Similar to the component S, *Fargo'*s title card also contains multiple declarative sentences. The first one is "This is a true story." The second one is "The events depicted in this film took place in Minnesota in 1987." The third one is "At the request of the survivors, the names have been changed." Lastly, the fourth one is "Out of respect for the dead, the rest has been told exactly as it occurred." We know all four of these sentences to be declarative ones because they all rely information to the audience that can either be true or false.

4.1c What is *Fargo*'s proposition p?

The propositions - i.e. the proposals for a certain truth - are similar to the declarative sentences.

Namely, *Fargo*'s title card proposes the truths that (1) the film is a true story, that (2) its events took place in Minnesota in 1987, that (3) the names of the characters have been changed at the request of the survivors, and that (4) out of respect for the dead, the rest of the story will be told exactly as it occurred. The proposition I will primarily focus on is the first one: "This is a true story."

4.1d What did S present as true?

The answer to this question is identical to the answers of the question 'what are the propositions in *Fargo*'s title card?': The film is a true story, its events took place in Minnesota in 1987, the names of the characters have been changed at the request of the survivors, and that out of respect for the dead, the rest of the story will be told exactly as it occurred.

4.1e The addressee H

The addressee H to *Fargo*'s title card is the film's audience. This can either be the reader of the screenplay or the viewer of the film.

4.2. *BlacKkKlansman*'s alleged assertion: major components

The alleged assertion made in *BlacKkKlansman* looks slightly different and less detailed than the one found in *Fargo*; the *BlacKkKlansman* title card looks as follows:

Dis joint is based upon some fo' real, fo' real sh*t (Lee, 2018)

4.2a Who is *BlacKkKlansman*'s speaker S?

Since this alleged assertion - as we saw with *Fargo* - is also a title card, it is neither spoken by a character, nor is it part of the dialogue in the film. This means that it is legitimate to state that S is represented by Spike Lee, the director of the film. It is also legitimate to state this because the title card is not part of the screenplay, so it would not make sense to ascribe S to the writers of the film. However, one might argue that S is represented by the editor of the movie. But since the editor may have received instructions from the director, I will leave the speaker to be represented by the director of the film since the latter is also the one who ultimately carries the highest level of responsibility as regards the end product of the film. Therefore, unlike *Fargo*'s title card, I will not treat *BlacKkKlansman*'s title card as carrying multiple speakers.

4.2b What is *BlacKkKlansman*'s declarative sentence σ?

The declarative sentence σ is simply that the movie (i.e. 'dis joint') is based on a true story (i.e. 'on some real sh*t'). One can identify this to be a declarative sentence since it relies information to the

audience that can either be true or false. There is a singular declarative sentence σ in this case, instead of multiple (as we saw with *Fargo*).

4.2c What is *BlacKkKlansman*'s proposition p?

The proposal for truth in *BlacKkKlansman*'s title card is that the film is based on a true story. Only one such proposition can be found in *BlacKkKlansman*'s title card.

4.2d What did S present as true?

The speaker S, Spike Lee, presented as true that the film *BlacKkKlansman* is based on a true story. Unlike *Fargo*, this is the only proposition in the title card that the speaker presents as true.

4.2e The addressee H

The addressee H is the audience, i.e. the viewer, of the film. Note that, in this case, the audience cannot be a reader, since the title card cannot be found in the screenplay.

4.3 The assertion

Now that I have identified all the major components found in *Fargo*'s and *BlacKkKlansman*'s title cards, it is time to establish whether *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman* actually asserted something according to the definition which I have described in the first chapter of this thesis. Again, this is important because I suspect *Fargo* lied through the speech act of assertion.

Let us first analyze *Fargo*'s (1996) alleged assertion. One can say with relative certainty that condition (a) has been satisfied, since the speaker(s), i.e. the Coen brothers, have uttered at a certain time the declarative sentence(s) σ which mean p (see sections 4.1a-4.1c). Condition (b) has been met as well: The Coen brothers, by uttering these sentences through their work of fiction *Fargo* presented p as true as well, as they certainly did not present it as untrue and utilized declarative sentences to rely truth-based information to the audience.

Condition (c) is a trifle more complicated, as it is hard to ascertain whether the Coen brothers actually intended that the audience should actively believe p. In an interview with the Huffington Post, the Coen brothers stated that the reason why they put the title card in was because they "wanted to make a movie just in the genre of a true story movie. You don't have to have a true story to make a true story movie" (Bradley, 2016). However, this explanation does not provide conclusive evidence as to whether the Coen brothers wanted the audience to actively believe p. Intuitively, however, one could say that they did: because why else would they include the title card? Put differently: If the Coen brothers did not intend the audience to believe the title card, there

was no reason to put it in. Therefore, I find it reasonable to state the condition (c) has been met as well.

As for *BlacKkKlansman*, we can similarly say that condition (a) has been satisfied: the speaker S, i.e. Spike Lee, has uttered at a certain time the declarative sentence σ that represents a certain proposal for a truth P (see sections 4.2a-4.1c). Spike Lee, by uttering this sentence through his work of fiction *BlacKkKlansman,* also presented p as true. Again, in this case, we can argue that S did present p as true by virtue of the observation that it did not present p as untrue and utilized a declarative sentence to rely truth-based information to the audience H. Since *BlacKkKlansman* is an adaptation of the non-fiction book *Black Klansman* (2014), which was written by the agent Ron Stallworth (the protagonist of the film), it is reasonable to state that condition (c) has been met as well. After all, since the film is based on a non-fiction book, and we know that Spike Lee knows this, it is only logical that he intended the audience to believe this.

As such, both *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman'*s title cards consist of an assertion. It is this finding that will lay the groundwork for the question whether these films lied or did not lie. Prior to that particular analysis, however, I am required to ascertain in what ways *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman'*s title cards constitute fiction.

4.4. *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman*'s fictive utterances: major components

As was stated in the methodology chapter, before being able to apply my definition of a work of fiction, we first have to inventory whether all major formulaic ingredients are available as regards the title cards of *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman*.

4.4a Who is *Fargo'*s utterer U?

The fictive utterance can be traced back to the author of the work of fiction. In this case, it is the author of the screenplay/film *Fargo*. The utterer U of the title card is identical to the speaker of the assertion, namely Joel and Ethan Coen.

4.4b What is *Fargo*'s proposition P (or its implicature Q) that ought to be (make) believed?

At the semantic level, the proposition that *Fargo*'s title card is intending the audience H to adopt is that the film is a true story. However, since *Fargo* is a piece of cinematic fiction, this is self-evident. As such, there must be another reason as to why the Coen brothers found it necessary to point this out.

In chapter 2, "The Nature of Fictional Communication", I have shown that propositions generated in works of fiction may also come about by means of implicature. Currie (1985:390) points out that in case an author uses a sentence non-literally, then "he is uttering proposition *P* but not with the intention of getting us to make believe *P*." Instead, Currie (1985:390) argues that the

author then "intends us to make-believe *Q*, where *Q* is a proposition distinct from *P*." In other words: "If the author says *P* at some point in his text, and if […] it seem[s] inappropriate we should make believe *P* at that point, then we cast about for some other proposition that it would be appropriate for us to make believe" (Currie 1985:390).

In this case, the proposition Q the audience ought to make believe is that *Fargo* is based on a true story, rather than it actually being a true story. Note, however, that Currie approaches the implicature Q as flowing forth from Grice's (1975) exploitation of conversational maxims. For example, by using sentences non-literally, a sentence exploits Grice's so-called maxim of quality.[6] The maxim of quality entails the idea that when using language one should make his/her contribution as truthful as s/he can (Grice, 1975:26). But in flouting this maxim - i.e. deliberately violating it - one is able exceed the literal meaning of the sentence and generate an implicature. An example of one such implicature would be the metaphor '*you are the cream in my coffee*' (Grice, 1975:34). This sentence is deliberately used non-literally, thereby flouting the maxim of quality, subsequently exceeding the meaning of its basic proposition, and, in turn, generating an implicature (Q).

However, the way in which *Fargo*'s implicature is generated is different from Currie's observation that authors can allow us to make believe implicatures by solely exploiting Grice's conversational maxims. Rather, I believe the way *Fargo*'s implicature is generated has more do with Grice's generalized implicatures. I will elaborate on this in section 4.5a '*Fargo*'s alleged lie.'

The question arises, however, whether the audience ought to make believe this implicature Q or actually believe it. After all, an author may also concoct an implicature which he intends the audience to believe rather than make believe (Currie, 1985:388). This is what was also evident in Sainsbury's (2010) Proust and Austen example. I believe, in the case of *Fargo*, that the audience ought to *believe* the implicature instead of make believe it; it would not make sense for the audience to make believe that *Fargo* is a true story as the implicature is accompanied by references to the material world: namely, that "The events depicted in this film took place in Minnesota in 1987." (Coen & Coen, 1996).

4.4c Who is *BlacKkKlansman*'s utterer U*?*

As we saw with *Fargo*, the fictive utterance can once more be traced back to the author of the work of fiction. In this case, it is the director of the film *BlacKkKlansman*, Spike Lee. The utterer of the title card is identical to the speaker of the assertion.

4.4d What is BlacKkKlansman's proposition P (or its implicature Q) that ought to be (make) believed?

The basic proposition that ought to be (make) believed is that the film *BlacKkKlansman* ('dis joint')

[6] I am aware of the fact that other Gricean maxims may be exploited as well.

is based upon 'some real shit.' This is what the proposition says. What is meant, however, is that the film is based on true events. Since the ultimate meaning of this sentence is generated non-literally, there is an implicature involved. The implicature is generated by means of the speaker flouting Grice's maxim of quality. After all, the word 'shit' is used non-literally to refer to true events. The word 'joint' is slang and part of African American Vernacular English (the movie pertains to being black in the United States) and can refer to "any place or thing" (Urban Dictionary, 2009). Due to context and convention (see section 2.3 on true story notices), the audience can infer the word 'joint' to refer to the film itself.

But is the audience called upon to make believe the title card or actually believe it? Since the title card is a declarative sentence that relies truth-based information to the audience, and since the film is based on a non-fiction book, it is reasonable to conclude - as we saw with *Fargo* - that the audience ought to believe the title card instead of make believe it. The title card is also not part of the screenplay, which suggests that it is not an integral part of the plot either. This is all the more evidence that the title card is merely an informative sentence to the audience.

Thus far, we can definitely say that both the Coen brothers and Spike Lee perform the illocutionary act of uttering fiction since they both intend the audience to (make) believe the proposition Q. Condition (1) has therefore been met.

Conditions (2) and (3) are more difficult. We cannot definitively say that the audience would recognize the Coen brothers' and Spike Lee's intention of having them believe Q. For a conclusive answer, we would have to look into the mind of the audience. This is not possible. Yet we can reasonably assume that the audience recognize U's intention of (1) - and the audience would have (2) as a reason for doing (1) - by means of conventionality. As a moviegoer, it would be odd to visit the cinema, sit down in front of the screen, knowing that you will be watching the fictive work of an artist and not recognize the intention of the artist U, that is him/her trying to have one (make) believe his/her propositions P (or in this case Q) contained in the story. Why else would one take the time to experience a work of fiction if one does not recognize the author's intention that you ought (make) believe their story? The audience are the people who visit a movie and voluntarily look forward to (make) believe the story. There is no better recognition of U's intention of (make) believe than that. As such, I find it reasonable to state that conditions (2) and (3) are satisfied, simply by means of common practice.

4.5 *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman*'s alleged lies

Since I have already identified the major formulaic components for my definition of assertion and fiction, I do not deem it necessary to repeat this process as regards my definition of lying, given the fact that the answers will be identical. In other words, I trust that it is now sufficiently clear who are the speaker(s) S, what is the proposition p they have put forward, and what is the eventual implicature q flowing forth from the proposition. Therefore, I will now commence analyzing to what extent the title cards of *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman* constitute a lie.

4.5a *Fargo*'s alleged lie

Let us first apply my definition of lying to the film *Fargo*.

- The first question that must be answered when it comes to my definition of lying is: *What did* Fargo's *title card assert?*

  As we saw in the assertion section of this chapter, the answer to this question is relatively clear: namely, that the film is a true story.

- The second question that should be answered: *Did* Fargo*'s title card assert at t that p or q? Or both?*

  As I have stated in section 4.4b of this thesis: By means of implicature, interlocutors may assert one thing ('p') but mean something else ('q') entirely. It should be clear by now that which the Coen brothers were asserting with their opening title card is not simply that their work of fiction is a true story ('p') but that it is based on a true story ('q'). Firstly because - as I have pointed out - it would not make sense for the audience to interpret the title card as representing p instead of q because it is already obvious that *Fargo* is a story (and therefore a true story). After all, *Fargo* is a work of cinematic fiction; therefore, it is not necessary to announce this before the start of the film unless the proposition would serve another purpose. Indeed, what I argue is that the meaning of the phrase 'This is a true story' - in this context - is more or less fixed. The implicature under investigation thus resembles a generalized conversational implicature: This is to say that the implicature 'this is a true story' is one where "one can say that the use of a certain form of words in an utterance *would normally carry*[7] such-and-such an implicature" (Grice, 1975:37).

  In this case I believe the GCI[8] (i.e. *Fargo* is based on a true story) is generated through Levinson's (1995) Q2 heuristic, a "framework of assumption that can be taken to amplify the coded content of messages in predictable ways unless there is an indication that they do not apply." (Levinson, 1995:96). Levinson's Q2 heuristic entails that which is described in an utterance is "stereotypically exemplified" (Levinson, 1995:97). This is to say that the utterance "invokes world-knowledge of stereotypical relations." (Levinson, 1995:97). An example of a Q2 implicature would be: *John stopped the car*. In a stereotypical way, we infer this GCI to mean that John is stepping on the brake pedal rather than stopping the car by, for example, jumping in front of it. In the case of *Fargo*'s title card, we similarly infer the proposition p, i.e. *Fargo* is a true story, to mean q, i.e. *Fargo* is based on a true story, by means of stereotypical relations. We

[7] My italics.

[8] From hereon, I will use the abbreviation GCI for the term 'generalized conversational implicature.'

do this because this inference - for reasons stated in the previous paragraph - is the most appropriate interpretation. This is not to say that *Fargo*'s title card did not assert p. On a semantic level, it does precisely this. However, on a pragmatic level - and this is what we are interested in - it is much more reasonable for the audience to adopt its implicature q. And in this case, the implicature is that *Fargo* is based on a true story.

- The third question that should be answered: *Did the Coen brothers believe at t that not q?*

  Firstly, the Coen brothers have admitted that the story is "made up" (Scott, 2017). Secondly, the brothers have explicitly declared that the movie "pretends to be true" and that "We wanted to make a movie just in the genre of a true story movie. You don't have to have a true story to make a true story movie." (Scott, 2017). Condition (c) is therefore satisfied because the preceding quotes by the directors - specifically the remark that *Fargo* pretends to be true and is made up - do show that they actively believed that *Fargo* is not based on a true story. Therefore, the Coen brothers believed at t that not q.

- Lastly: *Did the Coen brothers, by means of their title card, have the intention to deceive?*

  At first glance, it so appears that one cannot definitively posit that *Fargo* lied because the speaker's intention to deceive cannot be proven. After all, although the Coen brothers have admitted that the movie pretends to be true, this does not automatically provide conclusive evidence that they also had an intention to deceive their audience. Yet what if we can somehow argue that condition (b) has been met, regardless of the Coen brothers' subjective intention behind their words? In its core, the question I am asking here is: Is it possible to objectify the intention to deceive based on contextual circumstances? As I have pointed out in the first chapter of my thesis, if the answers to the above questions are in the affirmative, I believe that the intention to deceive has been automatically satisfied. Nevertheless, there are certain contextual circumstances one should take into account. In this case, I believe the intention to deceive has been met because the speakers, i.e. the Coen brothers, have admitted that the story pretends to be true. This indicates that they had the intention to conceal at least a part of the truth. Otherwise, they would have stated the entire truth in the title card, which is that the movie pretends to be true, instead of it being true.

4.5b *BlacKkKlansman*'s alleged lie

Let us now apply the same analysis to *BlacKkKlansman*.

- *What did* BlacKkKlansman*'s title card assert?*

As was pointed out in the assertion section of this chapter, *BlacKkKlansman*'s title card asserted that the film is based on a true story.

- *Did* BlacKkKlansman's*'s title card assert at t that p or q? Or both?*

  BlacKkKlansman's title card, as was pointed out earlier, was used non-literally and thus also contains an implicature q. As a result, the basic proposition p is rendered irrelevant as to the true meaning of the title card. *BlacKkKlansman*'s title card therefore asserted at t that q.

- *Did Spike Lee believe at t that not q?*

  As was stated earlier, we know the film to be based on a true story because it is based on a bestselling memoir, *Black Klansman* by Ron Stallworth. We know this to be true because the book has been marketed as such, even prior to the movie's release. For example, on Amazon, the cover states that the book will soon be a major motion picture (Black Klansman: A Memoir, n.d.). We also know that the memoir tells the true story of the author, detective Ron Stallworth, the first black detective in the history of the Colorado Springs Police Department and that Spike Lee fully acknowledges the plot of the source material. We know Lee to acknowledge the source material because not only did he hold an interview with Ron Stallworth on CBS This Morning, he also stated that - albeit indirectly - without the book, the movie would not have been made (CBS This Morning, 2018). After all, Lee had not heard of the book until his director friend Jordan Peele told him about it and pitched the story to him for a movie (CBS This Morning, 2018). In addition, Lee told the actor John David Washington - who plays the protagonist of the film - to read the book before shooting (CBS This Morning, 2018). All of the above allows us to conclude that Lee did indeed not believe at that not p. Instead, Lee believed at t that q: namely, that the film is based on a true story.

- *Did Spike Lee, by means of his title card, have the intention to deceive?*

  Considering the answer to the previous question, it would be highly unlikely for Spike Lee to have the intention to deceive. One could state that not all elements of the film were factually accurate and thus argue that Lee did, to some extent, have the intention to deceive the audience. For example, the protagonist's romantic interest in the film has not happened in real life ("Questioning the Story", 2018). What is more, the real life Ron Stallworth - unlike the protagonist Ron Stallworth - does not believe the people of United States' views on race has changed since the days he infiltrated the KKK ("Questioning the Story", 2018). There are plenty of more facts such as these which allow one to argue that at least a part of the film was not based on facts. This, however, does not mean that the title card is less true, as the heart of the film's plot (the premise) - i.e. a black man infiltrates the KKK - is still based on a true story. The

title card also does not claim that *all* events in the story have occurred in real life. As such, Spike Lee did not have intention to conceal a part of the truth, and therefore did not have the intention to deceive either.

4.6 Final overview

Now that I have analyzed all the relevant aspects of *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman*'s title cards as regards lying, an overview of my analysis looks as follows:

	***Fargo* (1996)**	***BlacKkKlansman* (2018)**
Did S assert at that p/q?	✓	✓
Did p/q constitute fiction?	✓	✓
When asserting p/q, did S have the intention to deceive?	✓	✗
Did S believe at t that not p or not q?	✓	✗

A few major differences emerge. Whereas *Fargo* satisfies all conditions, *BlacKkKlansman* does not. After all, *BlacKkKlansman* neither had the intention to deceive, nor did it believe at t that not p.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this thesis was to challenge Meibauer's (2015) claim that fiction is incapable of lying. This thesis has done so by investigating whether the movie *Fargo* possesses the capacity of lying. More specifically, this thesis has investigated the opening title card of *Fargo* which states that the movie is a true story. Since I suspected that this title card may be categorized as a lie, the research question I had formulated was: *To what extent did* Fargo*'s (1996) title card constitute a lie?*

To answer this question, I have conducted a compare-and-contrast analysis with the movie *BlacKkKlansman* (2018), which similarly stated that the movie is based on a true story. It was first important to know through which speech act *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman* allegedly lied. In the first chapter of this thesis, "The Liar", I hypothesized that *Fargo* allegedly lied through the speech act of assertion. In the analysis chapter, I have indeed found that *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman*'s title cards constitute an assertion. Furthermore, since I have claimed that *Fargo* is a piece of fiction, it was important to know when a work actually constitutes fictional communication. Therefore, I have established a communicative definition of fiction in chapter two, "The Nature of Fictional Communication", and applied this definition to *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman*'s title cards in the final chapter of this thesis. I have found that *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman*'s title cards do indeed constitute fictional communication.

However, when it comes to lying - which was the primary research topic of this thesis - there are a few major differences that emerged. The definition of lying provided in this thesis was that S lied at t if and only if (a) S, with the intention to deceive, asserted at t that p (b) or S, with the intention to deceive, asserted at t that p to implicate q (c) in case of (a) S actively believed at t that not p (d) in case of (b), S actively believed that not q. I have found that, first of all, *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman*, both assert by means of an implicature q that their plots are based on a true story. For *Fargo*, I have found that the speakers, i.e. the Coen brothers, of the title card did in fact lie. Firstly, the Coen brothers asserted at that p (this is a true story) while meaning q (this movie is based on a true story). Secondly, the Coen brothers actively believed at t that not q, since they have openly admitted in the media that the film pretends to be true. As such, since they were intentionally concealing a part of the truth, one can also state that the directors had an intention to deceive. All of the conditions of my definition of lying were therefore satisfied. I believe, therefore, that *Fargo*'s title card fully constitutes a lie.

For *BlacKkKlansman*, an entirely different scenario unfolded. While Spike Lee - whom I viewed as the speaker of the title card - asserted at t that p, he did not, in contrast to *Fargo*, believe at t that not p. He also did not have the intention to conceal a part of the truth since that which he had uttered through his fiction (i.e. "Dis joint is based upon some fo' real, fo' real sh*t") was nothing but the truth. In other words, the director did not have the intention to deceive. *BlacKkKlansman*'s title card, therefore, did not constitute a lie.

I am aware of the fact that there are still potential complications concerning my argument.

Firstly, I have treated the Coen brothers and their work of fiction *Fargo* as an interchangeable source for the lie in the title card. This approach can be problematic. Because instead of pointing to the work of fiction as the source of the lie, what if it is just the authors who have lied? In other words, would it be more reasonable to say that the Coen brothers have lied *by means of* a work of fiction rather than saying that it is the work of fiction itself that lied? This is a tough question and I think there is something to say for both of these options.

I think the first option is undoubtedly true: It is the Coen brothers who lied through their work of fiction *Fargo*. However, I think it is also reasonable to state that the work of fiction itself lied, since the title card is part of the screenplay (see appendix). In addition, however, a work of fiction cannot enjoy existence without its authors. This is to say that a work of fiction cannot speak to us by itself; it cannot perform its assertive illocutionary acts of (make) believe without the author. This is why I ultimately treated the authors as the speakers S instead of the work of fiction.

To an extent, I do believe the work of fiction and the author are interchangeable entities. But there is a counterargument that can be made against this proposition. Say, in the future, when artificial intelligence has developed in such a way that it is capable of generating lies[9], will we really point to the creators and claim that they were the ones who were lying? The answer would most likely be in the negative. For although the creators may be held responsible for the creation of the AI, that does not mean they must also be held responsible for the lies of the AI. The creators simply created the physical environment and conditions for the AI to lie, not the lies itself.

But if we were to approach the relationship of the author and its work of fiction the same way as we would with the AI analogy, my entire argument would be undermined. After all, can a work of fiction genuinely possess the intention to deceive? Can a work of fiction genuinely believe at t that not p or not q? I do not think so. And this would mean that fiction cannot lie since these categories are preeminent conditions for lying.

We should be aware however of the fact that the relationship between author and work of fiction is different from the relationship between creator and AI. Unlike AI, a work of fiction itself does not possess consciousness the way humans do (AI may well possess this trait, at least sometime in the future). Unlike AI, a work of fiction is in the end a lifeless object which cannot reflect on its own beliefs and values. To me, this is more evidence (albeit not conclusive evidence) that fictive utterances should be traced back to the author instead of to the work of fiction. Yet this argument still does not satisfactorily answer the question whether it is the work of fiction that is generating the lie or its creators.

Should we view the authors and their fiction as separate entities or as a mixture of entities? In his *Death of the Author*, Roland Barthes (1968:143) once famously argued that a work of fiction should be regarded as just that and that authorial intention should not play a role in interpreting fiction. Instead he argues that the writing and creator are unrelated. This Barthesian approach to a text means that when should one posit that a text has lied, it is the work of fiction that has lied instead of the author. This is because, according to Barthes, authorial intention ceases to exist once

[9] Note that this may well already be the case.

the book is out in the real world (Barthes, 1968:145). And if this is the case, it is impossible for an author to lie because he cannot have an intention and therefore cannot intend to deceive. But - as I stated in the previous paragraph - a work of fiction also cannot have an intention or believe a certain proposition as it does not possess consciousness. This indicates, again, that fiction cannot lie in the first place.

I believe Barthes's approach - albeit undoubtedly valuable and to a certain extent true - is a trifle too radical. I believe a work of fiction ultimately consists of a mishmash between the text and the author. Although Barthes recommends that readers should at all costs refrain from involving an author's biographical information to their interpretation of the text, sometimes it would just be unreasonable to do so. Coleridge's poem *Kubla Khan*, for example, is based on a dream of the author and it is highly arduous to make sense of this text without this pre-existing knowledge.

There is another complication to my argument that should be pointed out. As Currie (1985:389) puts it: If one part of the propositions of a text is non-fiction, but the entire part is fiction, can we then simply state that the work of fiction has lied, even though the part of that same work of fiction that generates the lie is not intended to be make believed? Currie (1985:388) exemplifies:

> It has been suggested to me that this was Defoe's intention in writing Robinson Crusoe. I do not know whether this is the case, but it certainly might have been. If we were to discover that it was we would surely not cease to regard Robinson Crusoe as fiction.

Currie makes an important point. Can we really regard the title cards of *Fargo* and *BlacKkKlansman* as fiction? I have included 'believe' in my definition of fiction but one could question the fact that if we really ought to believe the proposition p put forward by the film, does that part of the film then genuinely count as fiction? The title cards are also shown as an introduction to the film. Are they then also part of the story? When does the film and the audience's process of make-believe actually commence?

In case of *Fargo*, I think the line is blurred. Nonetheless, I do think a convincing argument can be made that the title card is part of the fiction simply because it is an integral part of the story. This is epitomized by the fact that it is part of the screenplay (see appendix) and that the Coen brothers intended the story to pretend that it is a true story (Scott, 2017). For *BlacKkKlansman,* however, I would not consider it inequitable when one should state that the title card is not part of the fiction. After all, unlike *Fargo*, *BlacKkKlansman*'s title card was not an inherent part of the screenplay and, therefore, the story.

In short, the following occurred with regard to *Fargo*'s opening title card: The speakers S (the Coen brothers) asserted at t that p (*Fargo* is a true story) while meaning q (*Fargo* is based on a true story). The speakers intended the audience to believe (rather than make believe) the proposition that *Fargo* is based on a true story by means of an assertive illocutionary act, realized through their work of cinematic fiction. The truth of the matter is, however, that *Fargo* is not based on a true story. But is one then also justified in concluding that *Fargo*'s title card constitutes a lie? I believe

this question can ultimately be answered in the affirmative: After all, the Coen brothers, through their work *Fargo*, asserted - with the intention to deceive - at t that p while meaning q when they actively believed at t that not q.

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APPENDIX

This is the first page of *Fargo*'s (1996) screenplay, written by Joel and Ethan Coen, which also contains the true story title card.

FARGO

The following text fades in over black:

This is a true story. The events depicted in this film took place in Minnesota in 1987. At the request of the survivors the names have been changed. Out of respect for the dead, the rest has been told exactly as it occurred.

FLARE TO WHITE

FADE IN FROM WHITE:

Slowly the white becomes a barely perceptible image: white particles wave over a white backgound. A snowfall. Wind whispers. Ominous music builds. With a low chord, a car bursts through the curtain of snow. The car is equipped with a hitch and is towing another car, a brand-new blue Cutlass Ciera with the pink sales sticker still showing in its rear window.

As the cars roar past, leaving snow swirling in their draft, the title of the film fades in:

FARGO

Green highway signs point the way to MOOREHEAD Minnesota/FARGO North Dakota; the roads for the two cities diverge; a sign says WELCOME TO NORTH DAKOTA and another just after says NOW ENTERING FARGO ND POP. 44,412.

The car pulls into a Rodeway Inn.

LOBBY

A man in his early forties, balding and starting to paunch, goes to the reception desk. The clerk is a woman of about the same age.

Clerk
And how are you today, sir?

Man
Real good now. I'm checking in, Mr. Anderson.