Signposts of Fictionality: A Narratological Perspective

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# Signposts of Fictionality: A Narratological Perspective

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Narratology has been largely disregarded by modern theorists in the ongoing discussion of fictionality. Far more often than not, borderlines between the fictional and the nonfictional realms of narration have been drawn, withdrawn, retraced, and re-effaced on various grounds—logical, ontological, phenomenological, pragmatic, speech-actional, deconstructive, semantic—without looking to the discipline that has dug most deeply into the ground of narrative itself.

There is a certain poetologic justice to this snub: narratologists themselves have, to a quite astonishing degree, ignored the question of demarcation between fiction and nonfiction. One can hardly deplore this omission in studies that openly (by way of title, subtitle, and/or prefatory remarks) limit their area of investigation to fictional narratives (Chatman 1978; Rimmon-Kenan 1983). But most narratological studies, including such classics of the discipline as Barthes's "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative" (1977 [1966]) and Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (1980), don't explicitly restrict their field, and some even quite expressly announce that they intend to encompass nonfiction as well (Bal 1985; Prince 1982b). In the absence of counterindications of any sort, a narrative poetics of this overarching kind leads one to believe that the entire panoply of conventions, the "figures," structural types, and discursive modes it identifies, applies equally within and without fiction, even when—as is nearly always the case—its textual exemplifications are drawn exclusively from the

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novelistic canon.[1] In view of this tendency to homogenize the entire narrative domain, it must appear unlikely that narratology can contribute substantially to a debate concerning the differential nature of fictional narrative.

My attempt in this paper to counteract this impression, particularly in regard to the branch of the discipline that has been labeled "discourse-narratology,"[2] will accordingly involve a pointed critique of existing narratological systems: a critique that questions whether established categories are or are not fiction-specific, that points up ways in which conceptual tools need to be qualified or modified before they can be applied to nonfictional narrative, and that spotlights discursively inscribed fault lines between the two narrative domains. But although my aim is to develop criteria of fictionality from within the confines of narratology itself, I do not conceive of these confines as rigid and impenetrable. As Gerald Prince (1982a: 185) has noted, even the most militantly text-oriented analyst does on occasion refer to authors and readers, to intentional and receptional processes. In critical practice the mutual interdependence of textual strategies and the production of meaning has become increasingly clear, and the difference between formalistic and pragmatic approaches has become largely one of relative emphasis.[3] I see no reason why these approaches should not likewise be regarded as complementary on theoretical grounds. The search for narratological criteria of fictionality, in particular, seems to me perfectly compatible with theories that base fictionality on "literary communication as a system of norms" (Schmidt 1976: 171), provided only that their spokesmen do not deny a priori (as many unfortunately tend to do) that fiction-specific signals may be found within texts themselves.

Of the three criteria I explore below, only the second is squarely

1. On account of this restriction of its textual repertoire, one might want to question whether the name that Todorov created for the discipline is not in fact misleading. I am not about, at this late date, to propose a more accurate neologism (fictiology? fictionology?); but a qualified "*fictional* narratology" might help to counteract the current tendency to identify unreflectively all narrative with fiction. Cf. Genette's revisionary comment that "literary narratology has confined itself a little too blindly to the study of fictional narrative" (1988: 15). But his proleptic announcement, "We will return to this question, which at times is definitely apposite," promises more than it delivers. In this respect *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1988) does little to improve on *Narrative Discourse* (1980), with the exception of the passage referred to in note 28, below.

2. The label is Pavel's (1985: 14–15). He advocates (against Genette) a capacious conception of (unqualified) narratology that includes the systematic study of story (plot) as well as discourse.

3. For a recent plea in favor of mutual interaction of text- and reader-oriented criticism, see Wimmers (1988: 154–63).

embedded in discourse-narratological terrain: it concerns narrative situations (voice and mode). The first criterion involves the most basic working assumption that underlies narratological studies: the distinction between levels of analysis (story and discourse). The third criterion, even as it centers on the concept of the narrator—a clearly narratological instance—relates that concept to its extratextual origin and effect.

In all three of my explorations I profile fictional narrative against the foil of historical narrative (with only occasional glances at other types of nonfictional narrative). I choose this perspective because it corresponds to the front where the borderline of fictionality has been most hotly disputed and most nearly stamped out. In the process, though I pretend to no expertise in the field, I will at times move the contrastive backdrop to the forefront of attention, proposing some rudiments for a historiographic narratology.

## I. Levels of Analysis

No conceptual tool has been more fundamental for the formalist-structuralist approach to narrative than the distinction between those two levels (or aspects) of analysis that anglophone critics commonly label "story" and "discourse." To question the distinction's validity is to question the validity of this approach itself.[4] Ever since its first appearance in the guise of the *fabula/sjuzet* dichotomy, this partition has functioned as the initiating and enabling move of all major narratological studies, including of course the "Introduction" to the publication that launched this entire movement in France (Barthes 1977: 85–88). It has, moreover, dictated the organization of all studies that overarch both levels, that is, after Barthes's own, those of Chatman (1978), Rimmon-Kenan (1983), Prince (1982b), and Bal (1985)—notwithstanding certain terminological and subdivisional variations.[5]

In contrast to its centrality for fictional narratology, the story/discourse dichotomy has remained marginal at best for the analysis of historical (or generally nonfictional) narrative. Significantly, Paul Ricoeur,

4. See Smith (1980) for an antinarratological polemic based on a critique of the "two-level model."

5. The correspondence between principal variations can be summed up as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Russian Formalism: | fabula | sjuzet |
| Barthes (1977): | functions + actions | narration |
| Genette (1980): | story | narrative + narrating |
| (1972): | *histoire* | *récit* + *narration* |
| Chatman (1978): | story | discourse |
| Prince (1982b): | narrated | narrating |
| Rimmon-Kenan (1983): | story | text + narration |
| Bal (1985): | fabula | story + text |

whose monumental *Time and Narrative* has been called "the most important synthesis of literary and historical theory produced in our century" (White 1987: 170), never touches on the bi-level model at all in the part of his work devoted to narrative history (Volume 1), whereas in the part devoted to narrative fiction (Volume 2) he gives the model its full due in a long chapter entitled "Games with Time" (1985: 61–99). Here, he introduces it by explaining that the redoubling of narrative into utterance and statement (*énonciation* and *énoncé*) is the "privilege" of fictional over historical narrative. To my mind, this rather overstates the case. While one must grant that the two levels relate in more stable, and accordingly less absorbing and arresting, ways in historiography as compared to fiction, Ricoeur makes it sound as though this were an absolute rather than a relative distinction between the two narrative domains. As I will argue below, the features that set the two domains off from each other cannot be clearly perceived unless full comparative attention is given to both levels in both domains.

As I see it, the essential reason why theorists of history neglect the bi-level model of narratology is not that it is inapplicable or irrelevant to their discipline but, much rather, that it is insufficient and incomplete. The fact is that a text-oriented poetics of fiction excludes, on principle, a realm at the very center of the historiographer's concern: the more or less reliably documented evidence of past events out of which the historian fashions his story. It is this other relationship, between the story level and what we might call the referential level (or data base), that has riveted the attention of historiographers ever since it has become problematized by modern poetics. The possibility of viewing this relation along narratological lines, in terms of two levels of analysis, is graphically confirmed in a recent article by Robert Berkhofer (1988). This historian systematizes what he titularly calls "The Challenge of Poetics to (Normal) Historical Practice" with the help of a series of increasingly complex layered diagrams, displaying the historian's two-way trajectory between a level initially labeled "Past → Evidence" and another initially labeled "History ← Synthesis." Berkhofer, moreover, confirms my sense that the relationship between these two levels does not replace but, much rather, complements the fiction-oriented narratologist's focus on the story/discourse relationship: in a footnote, even as he acknowledges the importance of the story/discourse distinction to historical productions, he explains that "it would only complicate my argument without greatly affecting its main points" (Berkhofer 1988: 443).

It becomes clear at this point that historical narrative, if it is to be viewed in terms of a stratified model at all, needs to add an extra level

to the story/discourse model that has dominated fictional narratology.[6] Whether such a tri-level model—reference/story/discourse—would serve to clarify historiography per se will have to be assessed by specialists in the field. I propose it here merely on account of what seems to me its heuristic value for a comparative perspective on historical versus fictional narrative. For the tri-level model points up the basic dissymmetry between the semiotic concerns that must enter the study of the two narrative domains, a dissymmetry that the standard narratological focus on the story/discourse relationship too readily disregards.

In postulating a referential level of analysis for historical narrative and in denying such a level to fictional narrative, I do not mean to oversimplify the vexing problem of reference in either narrative domain. But the idea that history is committed to verifiable documentation and that this commitment is suspended in fiction has survived even the most radical dismantling of the history/fiction distinction. In historiography the notion of referentiality, as Mink (1978: 148–49), Ricoeur (1988: 142–56), and Berkhofer (1988: 450) have shown, can, and indeed must, continue to inform the work of practitioners who have become aware of the problematics of narrative construction. And in fictional poetics, though the concept of reference has recently been reinstated, its qualification by such terms as "fictive," "non-ostensive," or "pseudo-" sufficiently indicates its nonfactual connotations, even when it denotes components of the fictional world taken directly from the world of reality.[7]

A good starting point for clarifying the divergent relational concerns of historical and fictional narrative poetics is the conceptual-analytic level that historiography and narratology most clearly hold in common: the story level. Prior to the advent of "metahistory," this was where theorists preferred to locate the demarcation line between the two narrative domains, in accordance with the Aristotelian criterion of unity of plot (forgetting that the *Poetics* uses it less to *describe* than to *prescribe*). But in the wake of the discovery and emphasis (by such theorists as W. B. Gallie, Louis Mink, and Hayden White) of *plot*[8] as

6. Significantly, it was a theorist of literature, not of history, who first proposed a model of this kind in a brief intervention at a lengthy symposium on historical narrative (see Stierle 1973). To my knowledge, his proposal has neither been further developed by himself nor taken up by others.

7. This, at any rate, is what I take to be the consensus among the most differentiated approaches of recent years to the problem of fictional referentiality; see esp. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1982), Harshav (1984), Pavel (1986), and Hutcheon (1987).

8. I should explain at this point that I will use the terms "story" and "plot" interchangeably. This conflation is in line with Rimmon-Kenan's critique (1983: 17) of Forster's distinction.

the moving force of historical narration, we have become increasingly aware of the extent to which history and fiction overlap in this respect, and that indeed some historical works (including many autobiographies) are no less artfully plotted than their novelistic counterparts.[9] For this reason narrative theories restricted to the story level—and this applies to plot grammars of the type fashioned by Brémond, Prince, and Pavel no less than to the plot typologies proposed (on entirely different grounds) by Frye and Todorov—can in no way serve to plot a divide between fiction and nonfiction.

But can the closing of the divide on this single level be taken to signify the undividedness of the narrative domain?—Clearly, only if we take the overlap of history and fiction on the level of story as the whole story. This limited perspective can easily lead to the "characterization of historiography as a form of fiction making" and inspire such statements as the following: "Readers of histories and novels can hardly fail to be struck by the similarities. There are many histories that could pass for novels, and many novels that could pass for histories, considered in purely formal (or I should say formalist) terms. Viewed simply as verbal artifacts histories and novels are indistinguishable from one another." In writing this, Hayden White (1978: 121–22) expressly blocks out the referential level of historical narrative, signalling his disregard with the phrases "considered in purely formal[ist] terms" and "viewed simply as verbal artifacts." But what he signifies with these phrases is solely structuration on the story level: the level of analysis at which White discovers that narrative histories and novels can take on analogous archetypal forms.[10] He never looks to the level of discourse, where (as I will soon show) narratology can come into play to define highly differentiated formal features that, in our daily reading practice, *do* in fact prevent histories from passing for novels, and vice versa.[11] But before we ourselves look at that level, a

9. On occasion one still finds an argument in favor of the plot of enigma and detection (Barthes's hermeneutic code) as a distinctive feature of fiction (e.g., in Smith 1978: 195–96). But one need only think of such artfully plotted journalistic reports as Berton Roueché's "Annals of Medicine" series in the *New Yorker* to realize that factual narratives can easily compete with fiction in this regard.

10. The collection that contains the essay quoted from above, "The Fictions of Factual Representation," also includes "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," where White argues along similar lines (see esp. 1978: 82–85). To be sure, in at least one later essay White places somewhat greater emphasis on the difference, rather than the sameness, of fiction and history but only on the basis of the latter's problematical relationship to its data base: "Narrative becomes a *problem* only when we wish to give to *real* events the *form* of story" (1980: 8 [White's emphases]).

11. In fact, White's "purely formal terms" and "verbal artifacts" closely resemble the phrases used by Russian Formalists to describe, not the fabula, but the sjuzet (i.e., the level White disregards): "in the sphere of formal study [the sjuzet assumes

few remarks are in order on distinctions that the differently stratified models themselves can bring into view.

Modern theorists concerned with the construction of historical narrative from the traces of past events (the referential level) have coined a number of conceptual terms for this process: "configurational act" (Mink), "emplotment" (White), *mise en intrigue* (Ricoeur). All these terms essentially signify an activity that transforms preexisting material, endows it with meaning, makes it into "the intelligible whole that governs the succession of events in any story" (Ricoeur 1980: 171). These same theorists also stress the decisive role played by selection in a historical text, what it includes and what it excludes, with its all-important temporal corollary: where it begins and where it ends. Even this summary account of the relationship between the level of story and the level of reference in historical narrative makes it clear that its terms do not apply to the structure, or even to the construction, of fictional narrative. A novel can be said to be plotted but not *em*plotted: its serial moments do not refer to, and cannot therefore be selected from, an ontologically independent and temporally prior data base of disordered, meaningless happenings that it restructures into order and meaning. In this respect the process that transforms archival sources into narrative history is qualitatively different from (and indeed hardly comparable to) the process that transforms a novelist's sources (whether autobiographical, anecdotal, or even historical) into his fictional creation. The former process is highly constrained and controlled, subject to the author's justification and the reader's scrutiny, with its obligatory correspondence to the happenings it narrates overtly displayed in the text itself. The latter process is free, remaining tacit or, when mentioned, assumed to be spurious; its true origination may (and often does) remain forever unknown—sometimes to the writer himself.

The level of reference introduces a diachronic dimension into the tri-level model of historical narrative that is absent from the bi-level model of fictional narrative. Story and discourse, as narratologists have repeatedly stressed (e.g., Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 8), are conceived as synchronous structural aspects of fictional texts, with no presumption of priority of story over discourse. When the story/discourse model is applied to nonfictional narrative without the postulation of an additional referential level, the transfer can easily result in a misleading perception of parity between the two domains. This, it seems to me, is what happens when Peter Brooks, as his title "Fictions of the

its place] as a specific property of literary works" (Ejxenbaum 1978: 16); "a sjuzet is wholly dependent on artistic construction" (Tomashevsky 1965: 68 [translation modified on advice from Jurij Striedter]).

Wolf Man" (1984: 273–85) indicates, transforms Freud's case history into a case fiction by taking the biographical events underlying the patient's neurosis as the fabula out of which the psychoanalyst shapes his sjuzet. A similarly homologous application of the bi-level story/discourse model to both fiction and nonfiction (where, in the latter, "story" is again misapplied to the temporally prior level of reference) enables Jonathan Culler (1980) to discover an overriding "double logic" in all narrative texts: a paradoxical structuration that dictates an understanding of its story simultaneously as both cause and effect of its discourse.[12] Enlightening as the recognition of this mutuality has been for the analysis and interpretation of fictional narrative,[13] its application to historical narrative severely occludes the perception of difference. For here the synchronous interplay of story and discourse is undergirded—no matter how shakily—by the logical and chronological priority of documented or observed events.

The varied and potent impact of referential constraints on the discursive level of historical narratives, which ranges from the most overt and direct to the most covert and indirect, can only be fully assessed when one looks at history in the comparative light of fiction. What most immediately jumps into view is, of course, the presence of an entire "perigraphic" apparatus (foot- or endnoted, prefatory or appended) that constitutes a textual zone intermediating between the narrative text itself and its extratextual documentary base.[14] But this base also penetrates into the narrative itself, which, as Michel de Certeau puts it, "combines the plural of quoted documents into the singular of *quoting* cognition" (1975: 111 [my translation]). This citational process can be more or less smoothly integrated, less so when archival sources are quoted directly, more so when they are paraphrased or summarized. But the stratum of testimonial evidence obligatorily lines even the most homogeneously surfaced historical narrative.

There is, as a rule, nothing that corresponds to this testimonial stratum in fictional narratives. Needless to say, this rule, like all rules, can

12. In an essay in progress I take up Brooks's and Culler's conflation of fictional and nonfictional narrative in greater detail, particularly as it applies to Freud's treatment of the "primal scene" in the "Wolf Man."

13. *Pace* Culler, who mistakenly believes that narratologists (including Genette) predicate the priority of story over discourse: "Action [in the story/discourse model] becomes something that exists independently from the narrative presentation" (1980: 28). A similar misapprehension provides Smith (1980) with fuel (and straw men) for her fire.

14. The term "périgraphie" is used by Carrard (1986) in an article that examines the discursive norms of narrative history as displayed in a standard French history of World War I.

be broken: authors of historical novels have on occasion felt moved to include a referential apparatus, usually in the form of an afterword explaining the extent to which they have followed (or, more often, the reasons why they have decided *not* to follow) archival source materials. This pattern—found in works as diverse in other (including formal) regards as Yourcenar's *Hadrian's Memoirs*, Broch's *Death of Virgil*, and Gore Vidal's *Lincoln*—seems to be on the rise and deserves serious investigation. As is generally true for generic borderline cases, such works, far from effacing the border they straddle, offer an opportunity to study the historical and theoretical grounds for its existence. And I would suggest that such a study might profit from the differentiation, proposed above, between a bi-levelled and a tri-levelled model for fictional and historical narratives, respectively.

Up to this point I have mentioned only features that historical narrative *adds* to the discursive virtualities of fiction, not the ways its referential constraint may alter or restrict these virtualities themselves. This impact of referentiality on the relation between discourse and story does not directly affect structures of temporality. Here the narratological system (as standardized by Genette) seems to me to apply outside no less than inside the fictional domain. No narrative genre makes the order of its discourse consistently adhere to the chronologic sequence of an abstracted story line, nor makes its discursive pace advance with isochronic regularity. Barthes, glancing at varying relationships between the two temporal levels in the works of classical historians (1970 [1967]: 146–48), finds all manner of accelerations, inversions, and zigzags not only performed, but self-consciously alluded to in their discursive language. But although his suggestive remarks could be further elaborated, filled in, systematized, and expanded to other nonfictional narrative genres (journalistic reports, autobiography), I doubt that such a survey would yield any temporal "figures" not already identified by Genette in fictional texts.

This is not to say that historians "play" with time in the same sense as novelists: their departures from chronology and isochrony tend to be functional, dictated by the nature of their source materials, their subject matter, and their interpretive arguments, rather than by aesthetic concerns or formal experimentation. No history of early twentieth-century Dublin swells discourse-time over story-time in the manner of *Ulysses*; no family monograph twists it in the manner of *The Sound and the Fury*; no account of the years preceding World War I programs its acceleration in the manner of Hans Castorp's seven *Magic Mountain* years. But such artful perturbations of the temporal structure are as a rule conditioned by the narrative situation through which the story is transmitted to the reader: the combined modal and vocal structures

that convey the fictional world and the characters who experience it.[15] This is where the discourses of history and fiction take on a qualitative difference, where the former's ties to the level of reference and the latter's detachment from this level determine distinct discursive parameters that narratology has thus far failed to chart.[16]

## II. Narrative Situations

Among the many theorists of various persuasions who have reiterated the thesis that fictional and nonfictional narratives are look-alikes, it will serve my purpose to single out one who provides an example to prove his point. In his well-known essay "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," John Searle writes: "There is no textual property, syntactic or semantic, that will identify a text as a work of fiction" (1975: 325). And again: "The utterance acts in fiction are indistinguishable from the utterance acts in serious discourse, and it is for that reason that there is no textual property that will identify a stretch of discourse as a work of fiction" (ibid.: 327). These statements appear in a speech-act theoretical discussion of the following "stretch of discourse" (ibid.: 322):

> Ten more glorious days without horses! So thought Second Lieutenant Andrew Chase-Smith recently commissioned in the distinguished regiment of King Edwards Horse, as he pottered contentedly in a garden on the outskirts of Dublin on a sunny Sunday afternoon in April nineteen-sixteen.

Searle, who tells us that he picked this passage (the inception of Iris Murdoch's *The Red and the Green*) "at random," seems quite unaware of how effectively it disproves his case. To mention only the most obvious: What "serious" discourse ever quoted the thoughts of a person other than the speaker's own? Even if the genre-tagged cover page of

15. "Narrative situation" is a combinative concept, first used by Stanzel (1971), that Genette adopts in the section of *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1988: 114–29) where he amends his earlier, overly disjunctive discussion of his modal and vocal categories.

16. To my mind, *Time and Narrative* (1984–88) despite the scrupulous and prolonged attention Ricoeur devotes to the findings of narratology in investigating the history/fiction relationship, is not entirely satisfying in this respect. I see this shortfall as being due to Ricoeur's intense focus on the phenomenology of time and his relative neglect of vocal and modal structures. Although at several junctures he points to the omniscient presentation of fictional characters' minds as the "magic" that most clearly separates fiction from history (see esp. 1985: 89–91), this distinctive mark of fictionality is very nearly (and, to my mind, unconvincingly) retracted when he ultimately scumbles the borderline between the two narrative domains (see esp. 1988: 180–92). Needless to say, Ricoeur's magnum opus, even with regard to only this limited problem, deserves a far more careful assessment. I record my reaction here merely to explain why I have not drawn more extensively on *Time and Narrative* in this study.

this novel were removed, we would know from its first sentence that this scene tells of a *fictional* Second Lieutenant—a character known to his narrator as no real person can be known to a real speaker.[17]

This is not, at any rate, the manner in which historical figures are known to historians. Here is how a master practitioner—even as she announces her intention to forego it—labels and samples the historian's standard manner of presenting the inner lives of his human subjects:

> I have tried to avoid . . . the "he must have" style of historical writing: "As he watched the coastline of France disappear, Napoleon must have thought back over the long. . . ." All conditions of weather, thoughts or feelings, and states of mind public or private, in the following pages have documentary support.

Thus Barbara Tuchmann, in her "Author's Note" to a work (*The Guns of August* [1976]) whose every "Krafft was 'stunned,'" "Bülow was furious," "a horrid doubt entered the mind of General von Kuhl" is referentially annotated for verification. And it is indeed only when such privately revealing sources as memoirs, diaries, and letters *are* available to him that a scrupulous historian will feel free to cast those of his statements touching on psychological motives and reactions into the past-indicative tense. In the absence of reference, he will have to make do with inference (and its grammar)—or else opt for a history devoid of any allusions to individual psychology.

In their different ways, the examples above of a theorist's blind spot and a practitioner's insight point up a distinction that, obvious as it may appear, has somehow gotten lost in the narratological shuffle: the minds of imaginary figures can be known in ways that those of real persons cannot. As will become apparent, this distinction itself, as well as its far-reaching implications for the modal structure of historical as compared to fictional discourse, has never been clearly formulated or analyzed in narratological terms, despite the ever-more refined typologies of narrative situations that have been devised for the fictional domain itself.

This holds true even for the one incursion into the historical domain that sets out by asking the right question, Barthes's previously

17. Needless to say, not all novelistic beginnings are fiction-specific in the manner of *The Red and the Green*. Most novels written before 1900 don't start out *in mediam mentem* but initially adopt the manner of a historical narrative, often of a biography, before focalizing on one or more characters. But sooner or later their discourse does reveal their fictionality. In this connection, see my argument (Cohn 1989: 4–6) against Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1978), who illustrates her thesis that third-person novels typically look (and read) like biographies with an example (from the early pages of *Ivan Illich*) that looks deceptively persuasive but only when taken out of its context.

mentioned essay "Historical Discourse": "Is there in fact any specific difference between factual and imaginary narrative, any linguistic feature by which we may distinguish on the one hand the mode appropriate to the relation of historical events . . . and on the other hand the mode appropriate to the epic, novel or drama?" (1970 [1967]: 145). As may be surmised from the rhetorical form of the question, Barthes is heading for a negative answer. He reaches it in part by equating the historian's standard pose as "objective subject" with that of the Realist novelist (ibid.: 148–49): both make it appear as though the story "writes itself," as though (in Benveniste's phrase) "nobody speaks." What Barthes passes by in silence here is that this stance is characteristic and stable only for the historical narrator, not for the fictional narrator. As none other than Barthes himself had shown on an earlier occasion—in a passage that has become a locus classicus of discourse narratology[18]—fiction is able to alternate between this "a-personal" mode and another "personal" mode, where it adopts the vantage point of a character. This omission of *the* distinctive modal feature of fictional discourse from his answer to the question regarding "any linguistic feature by which we may distinguish . . ." places Barthes's "Historical Discourse" at the precise blind spot that has obfuscated the vision of modern theorists ever since.[19]

Still, if we combine (as Barthes does not) the passing insights of the two passages mentioned above, we can catch a glimpse of the parting of the modal ways of history and fiction. And if we remember that Barthes's "personal" mode became Genette's "focalized" mode (or "internal focalization"), then a correlation between a mainstream category of discourse narratology and the principal history/fiction distinction begins to emerge.[20] This category, however, designates only what historical discourse *cannot* be and do: it cannot present past events through the eyes of a historical figure present on the scene, but only through the eyes of the forever backward-looking historian-narrator. In this sense we might say that the modal system of historical (and all other nonfictional) narration is "defective" when compared to the virtual modalizations of fiction.

18. The famous *Goldfinger* analysis in "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative" (1977: 112–13), originally published in 1966, a year prior to the original publication of "Historical Discourse" in 1967.

19. One can only speculate why Barthes's vision failed him here. My hunch is that it was because the problematic story/reference relationship of historical narrative—with which this essay (despite its title) is largely concerned—drew his attention away from the story/discourse relationship.

20. In what follows I use Genette's widely known typology of focalizations as representative for discourse-narratological modal systems generally. My critique could apply equally well to the modal categories of his competitors and/or critics: Stanzel, Bal, Rimmon-Kenan, Chatman et al.

When it comes to characterizing the narrative mode of historiography in positive terms, however, neither one of the two remaining Genettean types of focalization—zero or nonfocalization and external focalization—seems entirely adequate. Zero focalization is a notoriously vague category, which Genette comes closest to defining clearly when he concedes (if I understand him correctly) that it is no more than a kind of floating relay station between narrative segments variously focalized by different characters (his formula for this being "zero focalization = variable, and sometimes zero, focalization") and that, accordingly, no fictional work can be said to remain nonfocalized in its entirety (1988: 74). This clearly discourages its application to works of history, where the mode remains stably unfocalized from start to finish. In this regard external focalization would seem to offer a more promising fit: this type, which Genette identifies with what some theorists call "neutral" and others "camera eye" (ibid.: 120–21), by definition excludes the presentation of characters' inner lives. But the unsuitability of this fictional type for describing historical narration becomes clear from the texts most often cited to exemplify it: works that consist of a single scene (Hemingway's "The Killers"), or of a series of scenes without intervening summaries (Duras's *Moderato cantabile*[21]), and that feature nothing but dialogues linked by behaviorist descriptions of the characters' gestures. At most one might see a narrow zone of overlap between this liminal fictional mode and the narrative situation that pertains on those rare occasions when historians narrate a scene in great detail (with due documentary reference to their observer-source).

It appears, then, that Genette's typology of focalizations would have to be considerably modified to make it applicable to historical narration: that is, enlarged to include a type conjoining nonfocalization and external focalization in a manner that I have not found described in any discourse-narratological work to date—which goes to show how slim the chances are of its being identified (and given its due) in any study based on a textual repertoire limited to fictional works.[22] Avoiding an unprovable negative, I will resist declaring that no fictional

21. This example is used, though by no means very convincingly, by Lintvelt (1981: 70–73). The quotations he features in fact revert time and again to internally focalized narration: "Elle remarqua ces mains posées côte à côte pour la première fois"; "il suivit son geste des yeux et péniblement il comprit"; etc.

22. The theorist who comes closest to defining the historical type of focalization is Rimmon-Kenan (1983: 75–76)—and this, paradoxically, despite the explicit limitation of her study to fictional narration. She mentions the possibility of a narrator-focalizer (roughly corresponding to Genette's zero focalization) who perceives an object (i.e., a character) "from without . . . his feelings and thoughts remaining opaque." Could it be a coincidence that she reaches outside her modern fictional corpus for an example of this type, i.e., to Genesis?

narrative has ever been (or ever could be) written that adhered to the historical mode from beginning to end. The fictional history of an other-worldly or future-worldly society, for example, or, for that matter, an "apocryphal history" of our own world might be effectively told by a narrator posing as historian.[23] But if an author imposed this role on the narrator of a historically realistic novel, the result would be a generic anomaly; for unless it announced its fictional status para- or peri-textually, nothing would prevent such a work from passing for a historiographic text.[24]

This is clearly *not* the case with the genre we normally refer to as "historical novel," least of all when such a novel includes "real" historical figures in its cast of characters. In such "documentary" historical novels, as Turner (1979: 337) calls them, even as the *matter* comes closest to narrative history, the *manner* becomes unmistakably and distinctively fictional. Typically, this occurs in one of two ways: Either the historical figure is itself the focalizing subject, the central consciousness through which the events are experienced (the case of fictionalized historical biographies, like Büchner's *Lenz* or Burgess's Shakespeare novel *Nothing Like the Sun*); or else the historical figure is the focalized object, observed by another character, who may himself be either historical or invented (the case of novels in the Scott tradition favored by Lukács). In neither case are historical novels presented as (or as though they were) history, as one is so often told in discussions of this genre. Nor is this relationship accurately described by saying that the reader grants the documentary historical novelist "greater freedom than the historian to speculate" (Turner 1979: 349). Marked by their distinctive discursive modes, historical fiction and history are different in kind, not merely in degree.

Beyond the bare recognition of its peculiarity (when seen from the vantage point of fictional narratology) lies the larger task of describing the modal system of historical discourse (not to mention nonfictional discourse generally): a task for an as-yet unborn historiographic nar-

23. McHale (1987: chapters 3, 4, and 6) discusses numerous postmodern novels of these types (most of them unknown to me). To judge from his remarks, they seem either to be narrated by homodiegetic narrators, or, if narrated by heterodiegetic voices, to be focalized, in the customary novelistic vein, by one or more characters. Of the works I know at firsthand, only Beckett's brief *The Lost Ones* and a one-page Kafka text (not discussed by McHale), "Das Stadtwappen," conform to the historical mode. Focalization, it would appear, is almost as irresistible for writers of surreal fictions as it is for those who locate their fictions in the "real" world.

24. This was (or very nearly so) the fate of a recent novel that deliberately adhered to the discursive norms of historical biography in presenting the life story of an ostensibly real (but actually imaginary) member of the English Romantic movement: Wolfgang Hildesheimer's *Marbot: Eine Biographie* (1981). For a discussion of this mock-historical travesty and its reception, see Cohn (forthcoming).

ratologist. He would no doubt find the categories identified in various discourse narratologies useful, but I doubt that he would find them sufficient. To mention only two special parameters with which he would have to deal: First, the fact that history is more often concerned with collective "mentalities" than with individual minds, a focus that creates altogether distinctive discursive conventions requiring detailed examination. (One notorious recent "case" that comes to mind in this connection is the scandal created in the West German Bundestag when its president, Philipp Jenniger, inadvertently breaking the modal code of historical discourse, reverted to free indirect style to represent the anti-Semitic mind-set of the German people in the thirties.[25]) A second, related factor is the massive prevalence of summary over scene in historical narration, where external focalization is maintained over rather vaster (and less closely paced) temporal stretches in the lives of individuals or nations than the tense hour in Henry's lunchroom covered by "The Killers." But even where historical narration concerns individual figures and singulative moments—Napoleon watching the coastline of France disappear, Queen Elizabeth giving orders to execute Mary Stuart, the young Dostoevsky facing the firing squad on Semenovsky Square—it draws on a language of "nescience" (as we might call it), of speculation, conjecture, and induction (based on referential documentation) that is virtually unknown in fictional scenes of novels (including historical novels) cast in third-person form.[26]

This is the point where the category of person (or voice) must enter our comparative discussion of narrative situations in fiction and history. In all I have said until now, I have taken it for granted that the historian-narrator corresponds to the narrator of third-person fiction or—to use Genette's more precise term—to the heterodiegetic narrator. It is from this perspective that the modal system of history may be said to be "defective" when compared with fiction. At this juncture we would do well to recall that the constrictions and constraints under which the historian writes are not entirely absent from (nor unknown to) fictional narrators. The pages of certain novels abound in laments concerning the limits of knowledge, particularly where the psychic opacity of protagonists is concerned, as when the narrator of *Cat and Mouse* says about his mysterious friend Mahlke: "His soul was never introduced to me. I never had occasion to hear what he thought" (Grass 1983: 25 [my translation]). The voices that emit such

25. See Gordon Craig's discussion of this incident in the *New York Review of Books*, 2 February 1989, p. 10.

26. For a first descriptive approximation of this language for historical biographies, see Cohn (1989: 9–12).

complaints, however, belong, not to narrators who are alien (*hetero-*) to the world of the stories they tell, but to those who inhabit these same worlds, those whom Genette calls *homo*diegetic narrators. They are themselves presented as human beings with human limitations, including the inability to perceive what goes on in the minds of their fellow beings, to perceive what others perceive. In this respect they are comparable to historians, who can likewise only tell their protagonists' stories—to the extent that they are not their own (autobiographical) protagonists—in external focalization, and for the same reasons.

This analogy with homodiegetic narrators becomes more plausible when we call to mind the plain fact that historians do, after all, live in the same (*homo-*) world as their narrative subjects—a fact that we tend to forget when their stories deal with faraway times and places, but that we cannot forget when their stories verge on those we read in the morning newspaper. A particularly instructive work in this regard is Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), which intertwines a report on the contemporary events of a trial at which the author was physically present in 1962, a year before the book's publication, and a history of the Holocaust (1938–45). In its first sentence, "'*Beth Hamish-path*'—the House of Justice: these words shouted by the court usher at the top of his voice make us jump to our feet . . .," the homodiegesis of the narrative situation is expressly marked by the first-person form. And although Arendt was not herself at the scene of the earlier historical events she recounts, her relation to them is nonetheless "homodiegetic," if we take diegesis to mean "the universe in which the story takes place" (Genette 1988: 17).

Returning from this vantage point to the comparison between the modal behavior of the historical narrator and the narrator of a third-person (heterodiegetic) novel, their difference now appears in a new light. It is grounded, quite simply, in the fact that the former (the historian) is a real person who inhabits the real world, and who is separated from all other beings in that world, living or dead, by what Proust called "those opaque sections impenetrable to the human spirit" (1932: I, 64). His modal restrictions, in other words, result from (and in) his adherence to what speech-act theorists call "natural" (Smith) or "serious" (Searle) discourse. These restrictions apply equally to the homodiegetic fictional narrator, a figure, by definition, whose fictional "reality" determines (and is determined by) his imitation of real-world discourse.[27] But these same restrictions become null and void for the heterodiegetic narrator, whose voice (if we take the term "diegesis"

27. This imitative constraint on homodiegetic narration is most aptly designated by Michál Glowinski's term "formal mimetics" (1977: 106).

in its exact meaning) is, by definition, other-worldly, by nature unnatural.

That the arti-factuality of this voice has escaped the notice of narratologists no less than of speech-act theorists is, I think, in large measure due to their common lack of emphasis on the distinction between the two regimes of person (voice) in fiction.[28] It is surely no coincidence that the theorist who has drawn the sharpest division between the fictional and nonfictional narrative domains is also the one who has most sharply separated the two regimes of person in fiction. I refer, of course, to Käte Hamburger's *Logic of Literature* [*Die Logik der Dichtung*] (1968 [1957]), which is in this respect unique. Having repeatedly discussed this work elsewhere (most recently, in Cohn 1989), I return to it here only to underline that the radical divergence in modal "logic" that I have been stressing as fiction's major departure from history on the level of narrative discourse applies exclusively to heterodiegetic fiction. By which (unlike Hamburger) I don't mean that homodiegetic novels fall outside the domain of fictionality altogether, or that there is no clear-cut distinction between fictional and historical homodiegesis. What I do mean is that the differential coming into play in the first-person regime is not *modal* in nature, nor, for that matter, distinctive in any other manner on the discourse level. Homodiegetic fiction signals itself solely by way of the fictional identity of the narrator, and in this respect it presents the easy, because explicitly marked, case of a structural distinction that remains far more elusive in fiction, whose discourse itself eludes the norms of real-life communication. This touchstone of fictionality will be inspected in my final section.

## III. Narrators and Authors

In what follows, I will disregard the deconstructive critique (by Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, and others) of the author concept, but not without noting in passing that this critique, addressing as it does the personified source of *all* written texts—narrative and non-narrative, fictional and nonfictional alike—has tended to erase the very borderline that I am attempting to retrace. For by questioning the unitary

28. Genette, who somewhat grudgingly amends this disregard in *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1988: 96–113), does at one point draw attention to the bearing of vocal structure on the history/fiction distinction: "Homodiegetic fiction . . . simulates autobiography much more closely than heterodiegetic narration ordinarily simulates historical narrative. In fiction, the heterodiegetic narrator is not accountable for his information, 'omniscience' forms part of his contract. . . . As for the homodiegetic narrator, he is obliged to justify . . . the information he gives about scenes from which 'he' was absent as a character, about someone else's thoughts, etc." (1988: 77–78).

origin and authority of textual discourse in general, regardless of genre, one is inevitably led to ignore, if not to deny outright, the *added* equivoque that attends the origin of fictional texts in particular.[29] I will assume, then, that the reader of a nonfictional narrative understands it to have a stable uni-vocal origin, that its narrator is identical to a real person: the author named on its title page.

The notion of a cleavage of this vocal unity in fiction is actually of fairly recent vintage, having entered the mainstream of narrative poetics (at least in Germany) when Wolfgang Kayser declared, in answer to the titular question of his essay "Who Narrates the Novel?": "not the author . . . : the narrator is a created character [*eine gedichtete Person*] into which the author has transformed himself" (1958: 91 [my translation]). Although Kayser's trope of metamorphosis has given way to less surreal, and also less kinetic images, the general idea of a functional distinction between the two narrative instances has become widely accepted. It informs, in particular, a variety of graphic models that distance narrators from their authors spatially, place them on different levels, segregate them in concentric frames, align them at separate points on transmission diagrams—more often than not with an "implied author" standing guard between them (quite unnecessarily, as Genette has, I think, convincingly demonstrated [1988: 137–54]). But although the author/narrator differential by now appears to be a widespread poetological axiom, one finds it invoked quite incidentally, as though postulated anew and ad hoc for clarifying certain specific theoretical and critical problems, including such diverse matters as narrative motivation,[30] unreliable narration,[31] fictional tense,[32]

29. In this regard it is interesting to note that Barthes, in his seminal "Death of the Author," launches his thesis that "the voice [of the text] loses its origin" (1977: 142) with a quotation from a *fictional* work (a Balzac story), and one cast in free indirect style at that. Yet his death sentence explicitly extends to the authors of nonliterary texts as well: "Leaving aside literature itself (such distinctions really becoming invalid) . . ." (1977: 144–45). Only two years earlier (in "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative"), Barthes had seemingly limited the absence of the author to fiction, merely explaining that "the (material) author . . . is in no way to be confused with the narrator," since "narrator and characters . . . are essentially 'paper beings'" (1977: 111).

30. Sternberg (1983: 176) refers to "the built-in discrepancy between speaker and author" in fiction and, on this basis, explains what he calls the "bi-dimensionality of motivation that distinguishes it from all discourse with no inherent tensions between formal speaker(s) and covert manipulator" (ibid.: 179–80).

31. The vocal distinction between author and narrator serves as a starting point for Yacobi's expansion of her earlier article (1981) on fictional unreliability: "The maker of fictions must in principle speak through the voices of others . . . from the primary speaker or narrator down" (1987: 335).

32. For Paul Ricoeur the author/narrator distinction provides a rationale for the standard use of past tense to render the "present" experience of characters in

heteroglossia,[33] the special characteristics of a particular period,[34] an individual novelist, or an individual novel.

Among these scattered occasions, I have also found one (and only one) where the author/narrator distinction is explicitly applied to the question that concerns me in this paper—Paul Hernadi's proposal that it might serve as a basic criterion for segregating fictional from historical narrative: "I submit that a workable theoretical distinction between historical and fictional narratives can be based on the different relationships they prompt us to postulate between the author implied by a given text and the *persona* of the narrator emerging from it. . . . Fictional narratives demand, historical narratives preclude, a distinction between the narrator and the implied author" (1976: 252). The thesis is clear and ("implied" aside) aptly stated. (I particularly appreciate the phrase "prompt us to postulate," which prompts *us* to accept the mutual interdependence between text- and reader-oriented approaches to this problem.) Unfortunately, Hernadi's separatist proposal was made only in passing, in an article that deals mainly with historiography per se. It asks to be both narratologically qualified and theoretically fortified, in ways that may also help to consolidate a unified model of fictionality.

First of all (as previously mentioned), there is a world of difference between the two vocal domains of fiction with respect to the explicitness of the author/narrator distinction. For in homodiegetic fiction the unified vocal existence of the historical author-narrator is clearly and literally equivocated, most clearly of all in fictional, as compared to real, autobiography. Philip Pirrip, Humbert Humbert, and Felix Krull are the narrators of their own lives; they are also the principal characters of novels authored by Dickens, Nabokov, and Mann. The nominal differentiation between narrators and authors of fictional autobiographies is, as Philippe Lejeune (1984) has extensively demonstrated, a decisive signal for the reader's recognition of their novelistic status. By the same token, nameless self-narrators (unless they inscribe their title pages with a generic subtitle) produce what Lejeune calls

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third-person fiction: "The key, it seems, is to be sought in the distinction made between the real author and the narrator, who is fictive" (1985: 66).

33. Bakhtin proposes a "posited author" as a possible device for "refracting of authorial intentions" in novels: "Behind the narrator's story we read a second story, the author's story. . . . We acutely sense two levels at each moment of the story; one, the level of the narrator . . . , and the other the level of the author" (1981: 314).

34. J. Hillis Miller, using a metaphor reminiscent of Kayser's, quoted earlier, writes of the Victorian novel: "The narrator . . . is a role the novelist plays, an invented personality who is often granted within the looking glass world of the novel certain unique powers, powers of ubiquity in space and time, powers of direct access to other minds" (1968: 2–3).

"indeterminate" autobiographical texts (e.g., Nerval's *Aurélia*). Conversely (and inevitably), among the "ontological boundary violations" (McHale 1987: 203) committed by postmodern writers, one finds crossbreeds that present themselves as "novels," even though their narrators bear their authors' names—works that figure as "contradictory" texts in Lejeune's typology.[35]

These exceptions to the onomastic distinction between narrator and author, no less than this distinction itself, prove the rule: homodiegetic fiction is determined by the presence of an imaginary speaker incarnated as a character within the fictional world. This "embodied self," as Stanzel calls it (1984: 90), is brought to life by a discourse that mimics the language of a real speaker telling of his past experiences. It is therefore easy to visualize the structure of a fictional autobiography as an imaginary discourse directly quoted by the author, implicitly preceded by an inquit-phrase.[36] In this sense all homodiegetic novels can be imaged as being "*inset* within a surrounding *frame* of discourse" (Yacobi 1987: 335), even though they are in fact surrounded by nothing but silence: the silence that allows for the "secret communion of the author and reader behind the narrator's back" (Booth 1961: 300).

The duplicate vocal origin of fiction—and the corollary conception of fiction as embedded discourse—becomes far more controversial when we pass from homo- to heterodiegesis, from embodied to disembodied narrators. Here most theorists who insist *on principle* that fictional narrators are never to be identified with their authors tend to collapse the distance that separates them and to speak of a "zero sign of unrealized potential" (Sternberg 1983: 186). In critical *practice,* at any rate, the separateness of authors and narrators has been demonstrated almost exclusively where it is most readily visible to the naked eye, namely, where the narrator-figure is a physical and nominal presence, central or peripheral, in the fictional world.

Yet the disjunction of the narrator from the author can hardly constitute a valid touchstone of fictionality unless it is theoretically validated (and shown to be more than a mere virtuality) for heterodiegetic fiction as well. For it is only here that the disjunctive model (as I will call it) runs up against rival conceptions of "who narrates the novel," most obviously against the common assumption—seemingly never questioned by eighteenth- or nineteenth-century novelists (let

35. Lejeune (1984) discusses a particularly interesting "case" of this kind, Serge Doubrovsky's *Fils* (labeled "autofiction" by its author). For other works of this type, see McHale (1987: 202–5) and Wilson (1988).

36. Mutatis mutandis, this structure applies, likewise, to diary novels and epistolary novels as well as to dramatic monologues—all fictional genres that follow Glowinski's "formal mimetics."

alone by their readers)[37]—that a novel is, quite simply, narrated by its author. This assumption, though swathed in linguistic and philosophical qualifications, is still found alive and kicking in the works of speech-act theorists. A clear case in point is the essay by Searle, cited earlier, where he argues that "in the standard third-person narrative . . . *the author pretends* to perform illocutionary acts. . . . *Murdoch* . . . tells us a story; in order to do that, *she pretends* to make a series of assertions about people in Dublin in 1916" (1975: 327–28 [my emphases]).

The shortfall of this way of visualizing the novelistic text as the pretended discourse of its author has been forcefully demonstrated by Martínez-Bonati (1980), in an article published just prior to the English version of his *Fictive Discourse and the Structures of Literature* (1981). In the latter work, where he presents a full-fledged version of the principles that inspire his argument against Searle, he constructs a rigorous philosophical foundation for the disjunctive model. He thereby provides the systematic grounds for its axiomatic and sporadic acceptance by the theorists mentioned above, including Hernadi.[38] The decisive shape Martínez-Bonati gives this model itself may be gauged from the following passages: "Between the author and the language of the work there is no immediate relationship, as there *is* between a speaker and what he says" (1981: 81). "The author, a real being, is not and cannot be part of an imaginary situation. Author and work are separated by the abyss that separates the real from the imaginary. Consequently, the author of works of narrative is not the narrator of these works" (ibid.: 85). Fortunately for those of us interested in theory primarily for the light it can shed on the characteristic features of fictional language, Martínez-Bonati devotes major portions of his book to exploring the discursive implications of his systematic conclusions. In this respect the yield of his book is comparable to that of Käte Hamburger's equally phenomenologically grounded *Logic of Literature*, from which, however, its theoretical proposals diverge on a number of crucial points. The most important of these, in the present context, is that Hamburger argues against the disjunctive model no less vigorously than Martínez-Bonati argues for it, presenting in its stead a narratorless model for third-person fiction that seems to me a far more challenging alternative than the author-pretense model of the speech-act theorists (see esp. Hamburger 1968: 111–41).[39]

37. See Fergusson (1979: 232–33) and Hancher (1977: 1093).

38. I do not intend (and am not equipped) to survey Martínez-Bonati's closely paced phenomenological argument. For a carefully calibrated presentation and critical assessment of his work, see Ryan (1984).

39. Regrettably, Martínez-Bonati (though one of his notes refers to a point of detail in Hamburger's work) does not himself take up the challenge. A compara-

This model—which may be better known to *Poetics Today* readers from its linguistically based version in Banfield's *Unspeakable Sentences* (1982) than from its original, philosophically based version in Hamburger's work—cannot, at any rate, be dismissed out of hand. When Genette (in response to Banfield) insists that, were he ever to encounter a tale told by "nobody," he would run for the nearest exit (1988: 101), he forgets that the attribution of a tale to a narrator, a vocal source one cannot help but conceive of in more or less anthropomorphic terms, assumes an equally spectral conceit: a "somebody" who is capable of looking through the skulls (or with the eyes) of other human beings. It is precisely because this "somebody" assumes optical and cognitive powers unavailable to a real person that we feel the need to dissociate the statements of a fictional text from its authorial source, even if we imagine them (on Searle's model) as merely "pretended" statements. Ultimately, we are compelled to accept that the language transmitted to us in heterodiegetic fiction cannot be imaged by analogy to *any* plausible real-world discourse situation, no matter whether we personalize or depersonalize its origin. This being the case, the best we can do is to conceptualize its origin in the manner that most functionally and flexibly accounts for the variable reality of our reading experience. It is on these pragmatic grounds that I find good reasons to resist the ejection of the narrator from the poetics of fiction and to agree with McHale's statement: "The thesis that narrative sentences have speakers explains more phenomena more adequately, with less violence to the reader's intuitions" (1983: 22). Two of these phenomena (closely interrelated) deserve particular attention in the context of this paper: first, the presence of normative language as a potentially integral component of heterodiegetic fiction; and second, the possibility of understanding this language as "unreliable."[40] The

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tive examination of these two important theories of fictionality—of the ways in which they coincide with, contradict, and complement each other—would seem to me an essential and potentially highly enlightening task.

40. Cf. Ryan (1981: 523), who, likewise, bases her rejection of the narratorless theory on general propositions included in a heterodiegetic text. Her example is the first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*, whose ironic meaning she considers unaccountable without "resorting to the concept of narrator." Later in the same article (ibid.: 529–34), however, she argues at length against the separation of the narrator from the author in an "impersonal" (read, heterodiegetic) fiction, maintaining that the impersonal narrator's "lack of personality protects him from any kind of fallibility. . . . [He] can only reflect the judgements and the personal style of the implied author" (ibid.: 534). Her argument, though highly differentiated, seems to me based on a fallacious insistence that ideological characterization cannot be achieved by way of a vocal presence alone (i.e., when such a presence is not supported by psychological characterization).

latter phenomenon particularly can, as we will see, bring the fiction/history borderline more clearly into view.

It may be granted, I think, that the narratorless conception of heterodiegetic fiction can account quite cogently for the reader's experience of those textual moments where the narrative discourse, whether internally focalized or not, is purely "reportive" and uninterrupted by any manner of commentary: those moments (sometimes extended over the entire length of a novel) when one gets the sense that the story "tells itself." The cogency of the narratorless model ends only if and when such moments are interrupted, as they frequently are in works whose narrative situation Stanzel calls "authorial."[41] To illustrate this point, here is a passage from *Death in Venice* (where the enamored Aschenbach reacts to news reports confirming his suspicion that the plague has broken out in the city):

> "It should be kept quiet," Aschenbach thought excitedly, tossing the papers back on the table. "It should not be talked about!" But at the same time his heart was filled with gratification at this adventure invading the outer world. *For passion, like crime, does not feel at ease in the secure order and welfare of everyday life and it must welcome all loosening of societal bonds, all manner of confusion and disaster that may befall the world, because it vaguely hopes to use them for its own advantage. Thus* Aschenbach felt a dark satisfaction at these goings-on in the unclean streets of Venice, under the cover of official secrecy. (Mann 1960: 500 [my translation])

Despite its segmented structure, the vocal continuity of this passage is strongly evident: the generalizing present-tense statement (my emphasis) is explicitly linked to the past-tense narrative language that it interrupts by the "For" introducing it and the "Thus" immediately following it. If we personalize the source of the weighty intervention as a "narrator," which, I think, the text prompts us to do, then it would be illogical not to attribute the purely narrative sentences to this same personalized source as well. Granted that its vocal presence fluctuates: fades away when it simply narrates, becomes obtrusive when it comments—at which moment it takes shape as a rather narrow and opinionated moralist who (all too?) readily compares lovers to criminals. Still, the positing of a narrator (in turns, covert and overt) is by far the most cogent way of accounting for the narrative situation of Mann's novella as a whole and for works similarly structured.[42] By

41. See Stanzel (1971: 38ff.). It was Stanzel himself who drew early attention to the discrepancy between Hamburger's narratorless model and the reading experience elicited by the authorial narrative situation (1965: 334–38).

42. The difficulties experienced by adherents of the narratorless model of fictionality in accounting for narratives interspersed with ideological commentary are variously displayed in their writings. Hamburger, to her credit, faces the problem

extension and analogy, seemingly narratorless fictions, that is, works narrated without normative commentary (say, *The Castle* or *A Portrait of the Artist*), can then be described as having covert narrators throughout.[43]

But the conceptual separation of author and narrator does far more than provide the most functional way for conceptualizing the vocal origin of heterodiegetic narration. As Martínez-Bonati has shown, it also provides the theoretical basis for proposing that a heterodiegetic narrator's norms need not coincide with the author's. Systematizing the distinction I have applied to the Mann passage, quoted above, Martínez-Bonati (1981: 34–36) differentiates between two different strata of fictional language: mimetic sentences, which create the image of the fictive world—its events, characters, and objects; and nonmimetic sentences, which create nothing more nor less than the image of the narrator's mind. Whereas mimetic statements are objective, "as though transparent," and unreservedly accepted by the reader as fictional truth, nonmimetic sentences are subjective, opaque, and received by the reader with the qualified credence one grants to the opinions of an individual speaker. On this basis, to produce an unreliable narrative, all that an author has to do is "to create a perceptible difference between the impression of the events derived by the reader solely from the mimetic moments of the basic narrator's discourse, and the view of the same events present in the non-mimetic components of the same discourse."[44]

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head-on (1968 [1957]: 133–38), but in the process strains her concept of a depersonalized "narrative function" (*Erzählfunktion*) to the point where she is repeatedly forced to use the term "narrator" herself. Banfield (1982) willfully ignores textual moments of this type altogether. Kuruda, in an article that develops Hamburger's theory on lines analogous to Banfield's, likewise keeps the narrator at bay—except for a bizarre final note, where we are told that "a story without a narrator . . . can still contain *local* narrators, who are responsible for certain sentences, or certain parts of sentences in a story" (1975: 293 [my translation]).

43. The opposition between overt and covert narration is developed by Chatman (1978: 196ff.). However, his covert heterodiegetic narration, particularly when it presents inside views of characters, is not sufficiently set clearly apart from the notion of "nonnarrated stories" (see esp. 181–94). Other theorists have used other terms for this opposition: see especially Genette's diegetic versus mimetic modes (1980: 162ff.) and Stanzel's narrator versus reflector modes (1984: 141ff.).

44. This purely *normative* unreliability of a fictional narrator, which corresponds to the unreliability concept as originally proposed by Wayne Booth (1961: 158f.), must be differentiated from the *factual* unreliability (or lack of "circumstantial credibility") that Martínez-Bonati discusses elsewhere (1981: 103–11). Unlike normative unreliability, factual unreliability (which will not concern me here) can normally be ascribed solely to *homo*diegetic narrators, and only under quite special circumstances. For a systematic investigation of the specific narrative situations that reduce a narrator's "authentication authority," see Doležel (1980).

This analysis opens the way to discovering unreliable narration in heterodiegetic (as well as homodiegetic) fictional texts, in works, that is, where a narrator, though not a character physically present in the fictional world, nonetheless takes on conspicuous mental presence by uttering nonmimetic, "opaque" sentences.[45] As can be seen from the passage quoted above, Thomas Mann's narrator in *Death in Venice*, with his obtrusively sententious and judgmental discourse, is a prime candidate for the charge of unreliability. And indeed, when one examines the novella as a whole with this virtuality in mind, one finds that the mimetic language that tells the story of Aschenbach's love and death in Venice creates responses that disagree (and ultimately even clash) with the narrator's evaluative commentary.[46] To be sure, one must agree with Yacobi (1981: 121) that a critic faced with this kind of incongruity is always free to attribute it to the author rather than to the narrator, to choose a "genetic" rather than a "perspectival" resolution. I would maintain, however, that the appeal of the latter must be greater for readers intent on salvaging the aesthetic and ideological integrity of the work in question. This may well be the reason why the discovery of unreliable narrators in heterodiegetic novels has, of late, been on the rise, fulfilling Booth's prediction that "the pervasive irony hunt" would ultimately reach "even the most obviously omniscient and reliable narrators" (1961: 369).

This is not the place to argue against Booth's deploring this critical tendency; nor even to ponder (as I began to do just now) the interpretive implications of the alternatives outlined above. More germane to the argument advanced in this final section of my essay is to stress the severance of normatively vocal narrators from their authors as an option that can be fully validated, both on theoretical and on discourse-narratological grounds, in hetero- no less than in homodiegetic fictions. And to conclude by proposing that this option is one of the factors that makes the reading of fictional narratives a qualitatively different experience from the reading of univocally authored

45. Although Yacobi argues persuasively against the "automatic linkages" of heterodiegesis and reliability on the one hand, homodiegesis and unreliability on the other (1981: 120), the former linkage is, if anything, further reinforced when she calls the omniscient narrator of *Tom Jones* "an all-round representative of the text's normative system" (ibid.: 125), without examining his credentials or proposing contrastive instances from other novels with narrators of this type.

46. For a detailed interpretation of Mann's novella on this basis, see Cohn (1983). *Death in Venice* is clearly a more appropriate Mann work to exemplify the virtuality of an unreliably narrated *hetero*diegetic fiction than is Martínez-Bonati's own illustration (1981: 112), *Doctor Faustus*, with its highly embodied narrator, Serenus Zeitblom.

narratives: that it burdens its performance with a uniquely stressful interpretive freedom.

In overall conclusion, these semiconclusive thoughts:

My case for the relevance of narratology to the fictionality debate is conditional: it depends on the discipline's awakening to what I consider its principal shortfall. By this I don't mean the imperfection of its categories (though it goes without saying that there is a perennial need for their revision and refinement), but its unawareness of the places where its findings are specific to the fictional domain and need to be modified before they can apply to neighboring narrative precincts. I have (without aiming for completeness) identified three such places: the synchronic bi-level (story/discourse) model, which cannot claim equally encompassing validity for texts positing their correspondence to events that have occurred prior to their narrative embodiment; the dependence of certain prominent narrative modes (notably for the presentation of consciousness) on the constitutional freedom of fiction from referential constraints; and the doubling of the narrative instance into author and narrator—a meaningful conception for the vocal origin (and an important option for the interpretation) of fictional narratives.

As I have tried to suggest throughout, these three signposts, even as they point to the differential nature of fiction, also point to each other. Their mutual consistency will, I hope, have come into view without my articulating it in a single sentence of causally connected clauses that could be permutated at will. The reason why I draw back from formulating this sentence conclusively in any of its virtual versions is that, without the qualifications modifying its clauses in all that precedes, it would take on an air of bold (and bald) finality quite out of keeping with the empirical-exploratory spirit of this essay and of the poetics on which it is based.

For to say that narratology can provide consistent criteria for distinguishing fiction from nonfiction is not to say that it can furnish a consistent, fully integrated theory of fictionality (even less, a simple definition of fiction). It is merely to propose that such a theory is in danger of losing some of its validity—and, for students of fictional form, much of its relevance—if its propositions remain too theoretical, if it loses touch with the touchstones, failing to take account of (and to account for) the distinctive features inscribed in the textual reality to which its inquiry is directed.

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