

WHO SPEAKS, WHO LISTENS, WHO ACTS: AN INNOVATIVE MODEL FOR THOUGHTFUL AND UNDERSTANDING NARRATIVE

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally we have examined narrative structures primarily in terms of voice (who is speaking). Although a number of critics have revised how we think of voice, for example by making the distinction between who speaks (voice) and who perceives (focalization), our understanding of narrative remains incomplete if we focus so exclusively on this one variable. For instance, second-person narration, which is defined not by who is speaking but by who is listening (the narratee), does not adequately fit into a model of narration that centers around voice or narrator. To account for different narrative structures more adequately, I propose a new model of narration that examines three variables: narrator, narratee, and protagonist. The model is made up of five categories based on the possible ways these three variables can relate to one another: complete coincident narration, non-coincident narration, and three forms of partial coincident narration. My dissertation introduces, defines, and explores each of these categories by analyzing specific texts that exemplify these narrative structures. These analyses demonstrate my larger argument, that the type and level of reader engagement with a text is determined more so by the relationships among these three variables than simply by the type of narrator. In other words, my model offers us a new understanding of the rhetorical dynamics of narrative discourse, a fresh account of both narration itself and its consequences for reader response.

WHY YOU CAN'T SPEAK

Exactly how does second-person narration relate to the more commonly employed and more frequently discussed modes of first- and third-person narrations? The very term *second-person* suggests a distinct and exclusive narrative category from both first- and third-person narrations. Yet even a cursory analysis of second-person narration exposes a very different relationship between it and the traditional modes of first- and third-person: we encounter an inevitable overlap of second-person with either first- or third-person because second-person is always also either first- or third-person. This overlap occurs because these modes are defined along different axes: whereas first- and third-person narrations (as well as Genette's categories of homo- and heterodiegesis) are defined along the axis of narrator, second-person narration is defined along the axis of narratee - more precisely, by the coincidence of narratee and protagonist. However, second-person narration deserves its own place in typologies of narration because of its particular rhetorical effects. This problem of categorization is actually a problem with reigning models of narration, which are based solely on the status of voice. Second-person narration, which is defined not by who is speaking but

by who is listening (the narratee), does not adequately fit into a model of narration that centers around voice or narrator. In this introduction, I use an analysis of second-person narration to expose the inadequacy of voice-based models of narration, and then I propose a new model that utilizes multiple variables of narrative transmission - namely, the relationships formed by the triad of narrator, protagonist, and narratee. Not only does this new model account for second-person narration, it also enhances our understanding of texts currently defined as first- and third-person (as well as homo- and heterodiegetic).

COINCIDENCE OF NARRATEE AND PROTAGONIST: THE CASES OF *IF ON A WINTER'S NIGHT A TRAVELER*, "THE BRAIN OF KATHERINE MANSFIELD," AND HOW-TO NARRATION

Brian Richardson's "The Politics and Poetics of Second-Person Narration" has been an influential study of second-person narration largely because it recognized that there are different types of second-person narratives and proposes a useful, but not fully adequate, taxonomy. In this article, Richardson identifies three categories of second-person narration: "standard" second-person, defined as "a story told, usually in the present tense, about a single protagonist who is referred to in the second person; the 'you' also designates the narrator and the narratee as well" (311); "subjunctive" second-person, characterized by "the consistent use of the imperative, the frequent employment of the future tense, and the strong distinction between the narrator and the narratee" (319); and "autotelic" second-person, defined as "the direct address to a 'you' that is at times the actual reader of the text and whose story is juxtaposed to, and can merge with, the characters of the fiction" (320). Although Richardson's categories are useful and suggest - quite importantly - that second-person narration is not uniform, ultimately his distinctions among kinds of second-person narration are not fully adequate because they are not based on consistent variables: standard and subjunctive are characterized by their tense and their relationships among narrator, narratee, and protagonist (intradiegetic elements), whereas autotelic is defined by the relationship between the narratee and reader (incorporating an extradiegetic element - the reader). From my perspective, what Richardson calls standard, I call completely-coincident narration (which I will address in chapter four) whereas what he calls subjunctive and autotelic, I call partially-coincident narration along the axis of narratee/protagonist. The primary difference between the two groupings is the relationship between the narrator and the narratee/protagonist (i.e. whether the narrator is discrete from the narratee-protagonist - as in partial coincidence - or not - as in complete coincidence). In the present chapter I want to test the utility of this triadic model and this category of partially-coincident narration by examining variations within this category. That is, once we recognize the basic structure of a discrete narrator and a joint narratee/protagonist, we need to examine the exact nature of this relationship between narrator and narratee/protagonist to understand further its particular effects.

COINCIDENCE OF NARRATOR AND NARRATEE: THE CASES OF "DOC'S STORY" AND "LOST IN THE FUNHOUSE"

One of the first things we recognize about this category of narrative is how few naturally-occurring occasions exist when we might tell ourselves a detailed story about someone else. Arguably, it is a matter of human nature, the self-interested impulse to focus on oneself rather than someone else. Perhaps the most common occasion occurs when we are deliberately analyzing an external story, such as when we ponder a work of literature: as I sit here and write about text x, I am narrating to myself - or have narrated to myself during my pre-writing preparation - that story. As we'll see with Barth's and Wideman's stories, this mode does lend itself to metafiction, metaphors for our reading and writing experiences. In addition to this notion of "unnaturalness," there are structural and formal considerations that affect the frequency of this mode. By definition, heterodiegesis is about someone other than the narrator, so there will always be a distinction between the narrator and protagonist, half of the criteria for this category. However, heterodiegesis is rarely self-address (the other criterion) simply because the features of a narrator (observation/reporting, and at times commentary and evaluation) seem more appropriately directed at an external audience. The stake heterodiegetic narrators have is usually only as storytellers since they don't exist on the same ontological plane as do the characters (unlike homodiegetic narrators, whose stake is usually beyond just that as storytellers because of their potential to interact - or to have interacted - with characters of their stories). As such, heterodiegetic narrators rely as storytellers in large part on an external audience.

COINCIDENCE OF NARRATOR AND PROTAGONIST: THE CASES OF *INDEPENDENCE DAY* AND *WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS*

The conflation of the narrator and protagonist functions defines our final mode of partially-coincident narration. In this mode, a narrator tells of his/her experiences to an external narratee as he/she lives them. To put it another way, the temporal and diegetic distinctions we typically experience between story and discourse collapse, breaking the traditional narrative axiom of "live now, tell later." All examples of this form of partially-coincident narration are simultaneous present-tense narration, in which the narrator narrates as he/she experiences the events. In this chapter, I examine the general rhetorical effects that result from simultaneous present-tense narration and a coincidence of narrator and protagonist functions and then turn specifically to two examples of this mode, Richard Ford's *Independence Day* and J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, to examine thematic implications of present tense narration. In both of these texts we see the simultaneous present tense narration creating a complex relationship between the narrators and their pasts. Frank Bascombe, narrator of *Independence Day*, uses present tense narration to describe his entrance into the Existence Period, a phase of his life marked by severed ties to others and, more importantly, to his past. However, just as he eventually recognizes that the Existence Period is a flawed and unreliable philosophy, so too do we recognize the unreliability (a concept I'll clarify below) of his present tense narration, which inaccurately suggests that he is "in the moment." Unlike

Independence Day, Waiting for the Barbarians shifts its tense, at times employing the simultaneous present and at other times using the historical present. Coetzee's switches between the two tenses, I will argue, out of necessity: whereas the simultaneous present enhances the immediacy of action and the connection between authorial reader and complicit narrator, the historical present permits Coetzee to provide summary, jump in time, and manipulate the duration of discourse, all of which are necessary to depict a year's time span within the one hundred and fifty page novel. My analyses of these two novels - and of simultaneous present tense in general - will lead us to a larger point about how we read literature. More specifically, the overwhelming artificiality of this mode of narrative, coupled with the immediacy of its action, exaggerates the double-consciousness we use when reading: we recognize the fictionality of literature at the same time that we simultaneously suspend our disbelief in order to "enter into" the fiction.

COMPLETELY-COINCIDENT NARRATION: THE CASES OF *BRIGHT LIGHTS*, *BIG CITY*, *LA MODIFICATION*, AND "THE YELLOW-WALLPAPER"

Completely-coincident narration merges the three coincidences that we have been discussing thus far, mingling qualities and characteristics of each. For instance, it resembles the partial coincidence we discussed in the previous chapter (coincidence of narrator and protagonist), because it too depicts concurrent narrating and experiencing and is typically simultaneous present tense. Thus, much of what we said generally in the beginning of the previous chapter applies to completely-coincident narration as well. (Likewise, certain observations we made about the coincidence of narratee and protagonist in chapter one and the coincidence of narrator and narratee in chapter two also apply here.) In the present chapter, I want to build upon my earlier discussion of simultaneous present tense narration, exploring how self-address affects the narrative's progression both for the narrator and for the reader. Whereas in the previous chapter my examples highlighted how narrative tense, specifically simultaneous present-tense, influences a narrator's relationship to his/her story as well as the reader's engagement with that story, in the present chapter I will focus on the inherent tensions that result when functions coincide. In this chapter, I look at two simultaneous present tense narratives that are examples of completely-coincident narration - Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* and Michel Butor's *La Modification* - to examine a difference in how the narrators' and protagonists' functions overlap: typically one of the functions will be foregrounded (in the same way that two colors can be combined into a mixture that is dominated by one of the original colors). In McInerney's novel the protagonist function subsumes the narrator function whereas in Butor's the narrator function subsumes the protagonist function. In my analysis of the two novels, I will clarify this seemingly subtle difference and discuss the impact it has on how we understand the narratives. Completely-coincident narration also occurs in texts that are not as clearly marked as simultaneous narration, as we will see in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," whose episodic diary entries tend to confuse the tense. Although initially there is temporal distance between the events and their narration, Gilman's story progresses toward an overlap of

narrator and protagonist functions, paralleling the union between the narrator and the woman behind the wallpaper. These three analyses will lead to a larger argument about the rhetorical effects of completely-coincident narration, namely the way in which it objectifies the narrative situation and events, creating distance between narrative and authorial reader.

NON-COINCIDENT NARRATION: THE CASES OF *LOLITA*, "HAPPY ENDINGS," AND *A LOST LADY*

Grouping homodiegesis (e.g. *Lolita*) and heterodiegesis (e.g. "Happy Endings") in the same narrative category might seem counterintuitive. However, the grounds on which Genette establishes his categories of homo- and heterodiegesis are different from those I use to group my five categories; my focus on narrator, protagonist, and narratee relations creates a much more rhetorically-based model than Genette's. Genette's categories of homo- and heterodiegesis define narratives based on whether or not the narrator exists in the same world as the protagonist and other characters. However, in the current study we are concerned with whether or not the narrator and protagonist exist on the same diegetic plane. For instance, Humbert the narrator exists in the same world as Humbert the protagonist - after all, they are the same person - but they do not exist on the same diegetic plane: most noticeably, the narrator function occurs on a diegetic plane temporally distanced from the diegetic plane on which the protagonist acts, resulting in distinct narrator and protagonist functions; likewise, the diegesis of Humbert's activity with Dolores is distinct from the diegesis of Humbert's narrating. The narrator of "Happy Endings" also exists on a different diegetic plane from its protagonist because they reside in different worlds: the narrator is unable to interact directly with the characters, for instance passing them on the street or meeting them for a drink, because of impassable ontological barriers. Conversely, in completely-coincident narration (chapter four), most commonly simultaneous present-tense narration, the action of the protagonist and the discourse of the narrator occur in the same diegetic plane; thus, the functions are both temporally and ontologically coincident.

CONCLUSION

It would be difficult to overstate the extent that Genette's work has influenced narrative theory. He dismissed the categories of first- and third-person narration, recognizing the futility of their grammar-based criterion, and by doing so he revolutionized how we understand narration. Most significantly, his model, which considers the narrator's relationship to the story world, allows us to handle narratives that resist classification under the template of first- and third-person narratives. Prior to Genette, we really didn't know what to do with a text such as James's "The Beast in the Jungle," which contains a single instance of the narrator using "I," midway through the novella, long after we have "identified" the work as third-person. We were confronted by a sticky question: does one "I" (and a few instances of "we" and "our") within a text that in all other occasions is third-person make for a first-person text? After Genette, this becomes a moot point: we identify the narrator of "The Beast in the Jungle" as heterodiegetic, separate from the ontology of his characters, and

can exert our critical energies investigating relationship between the narrator and his objects of study, John Marcher and Mary Bartram. I want to suggest with this brief example that Genette's reconceptualization of narrative organization demonstrates its value not only as a better taxonomy but also for its invitation to move beyond grammar and toward rhetorical effect. I have relied on Genette's distinction between homodiegesis and heterodiegesis for these very reasons.

Genette's model has proven itself as far as it goes, but - as I argue throughout this study - it does not go far enough. Genette's concern for the narrator's relationship to the story world comprises only a part of a narrative's structure and, thus, only part of its rhetoric (captured in my model by the attention to the relationship between narrator and protagonist); the relationship between the narrator and the narratee and the relationship between the narratee and the protagonist also contribute to how narration "works." The effort to go further than Genette, what I have undertaken in this study, however, requires that we do more than expand his model or supplement it. We might try a shorthand, and rather than create a new model, establish sub-categories within homodiegesis and heterodiegesis; this is in part what Genette himself has done with his sub-category of *autodiegeis* -homodiegesis in which the narrator is not only part of the story world but also the main character of the narrative. However, sub-categories by definition submit to the hierarchy of the over-riding category, and any attempt to subdivide homo- and heterodiegesis to account for the narratee's role would implicitly (if not explicitly) consign the narratee to a secondary status. Yet as my analysis of second- person narration in the introduction demonstrates, the narrator's role is not always the defining component of narration, nor is it always the component that most significantly influences the reader's engagement with a text.

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