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FICTIONAL RELIABILITY AS A COMMUNICATIVE PROBLEM*

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There can be little doubt about the importance of the problem of reliability in narrative and in literature as a whole. It arises with respect to every speaking and reflecting participant in the literary act of communication, from the interlocutors in dialogue scenes to the overall narrator to the author himself; and its resolution determines not our view of the speaker alone but also of the reality evoked and the norms implied in and through his message. And the problem is (predictably) as complex and (unfortunately) as ill-defined as it is important. Are reliability and unreliability value-judgments or descriptions? Data or conjectures? Gradable or ungradable contrasts? Autonomous features or products of fixed combinations of other features? Such, in telegraphic style, are the cruxes that the theory of fiction for the most part either neglects or inadequately treats, for reasons that will emerge in due course. I would like to start by outlining what I believe to be the appropriate theoretical framework for the problem of reliability, and then to develop some of the implications that such placing has for the understanding and the analysis of this issue.

The most relevant framework seems to be that of the resolution of textual tensions, above all on the level of fictive reality. Why do Shakespeare's plays diverge from historical factuality? What is one to make of the shift in Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* from the logic of a parodistic world to that of a comic world? How can we account for the improbability of Günter Grass's world by the standards of any normal reality-model? How can Sutpen appear in *Absalom, Absalom!* as both a villain and a tragic figure? Whenever he comes up against referential difficulties, incongruities or

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(self-)contradictions of these kinds, whether external or internal, the reader has at his disposal a wide variety of reconciling and integrating measures. In the last analysis, this variety falls under five distinct principles: (1) the genetic; (2) the generic; (3) the existential; (4) the functional; (5) the perspectival.¹

I

1. The *genetic principle* resolves fictive oddities and inconsistencies in terms of the causal factors that produced the text without coming to form part of it: the creative process, the history of the finished product, and above all the situation and tendencies of the historical producer, including the environmental as well as psychological pressures that operated on him.

This principle has innumerable manifestations. Among other things, it is often employed — rightly or wrongly, exhaustively or in combination with others — to explain the peculiarity or deviance of the world-view that characterizes a certain work, author or corpus. Thus, in the face of interpersonal relationships that are reduced to sex and aggression — as in the works of the Marquis de Sade — the reader may, and probably will, attribute at least part of the incongruity with his own experience of human behavior to the creator's morbid imagination. But this kind of hypothesis does not apply only to such extreme cases. As Thackeray puts it in his preface to *Pendennis*: "The perpetual speaker must of necessity lay bare his own weaknesses, vanities, peculiarities." In *Humphrey Clinker*, for instance, Tobias Smollett lays bare his partiality to his native country in his defiance of probability: a short and uneventful vacation in Scotland is enough to transform a middle-aged hypochondriac and misanthrope into a robust lover of mankind. The shifting of the idiosyncrasy from the fictive to the authorial context thus makes it more intelligible, though not necessarily more credible.

The same holds true for the shift to the transmissional history of the work, whose abuse in scholarship has made Mr. Interpolator one of the most prolific writers of all time. And what is more, the creative process, in the widest sense, likewise serves as a context of genetic synthesis. Thus, the first ten chapters of *Joseph Andrews* establish a ridiculously improbable fictive world, where a handsome footman manages to defend his chastity against the rapacious hands of both his lady and her maid. The explicit connections with characters and situations in Richardson's *Pamela* — as well as the implicit correspondence between the modern Joseph and his Biblical namesake — canalize the improbability into the normative grooves of the burlesque. But in chapter 11 the hero's conduct is all of a sudden psychologically motivated. Not a parodistic analogy to his sister Pamela, it

¹ The development of this general scheme (and some of the terminology used) owes much to Meir Sternberg's work on motivation and integration: see, for instance, Sternberg, 1978 and 1979, and further references there. For a different approach to the problem see Culler, 1975: 131–160.

now turns out, but faithfulness to his beloved (and hitherto unmentioned) Fanny accounts for Joseph's heroic resistance. And after this explanatory retrospect the progression of the plot conforms to a comic but probable world picture. So the narratorial explanation itself produces an unexplained tension between the goals and reality-model of the first ten chapters (burlesque) and those of the rest of the book (comic novel).

Now the fact that the line of demarcation comes at such an early stage in the novel reminds us of the historical circumstances of its writing. Richardson's *Pamela [Andrews]* was published in November 1740; *Shamela*, Fielding's hilarious parody on Richardson's best-seller, in April 1741. And *Joseph Andrews* was published less than a year later (22 February 1742). The chronological proximity, coupled with the thematic and compositional similarity, suggests that the shift of generic gears within *Joseph Andrews* parallels (and betrays) a shift in the author's intentions. At first Fielding was still under the influence of *Shamela*. Only after ten chapters did Fielding manage to free himself from parodistic tendentiousness and reference, and hence from the model of reality, that characterized his earlier work.

2. The last example brings us straight to the *generic principle*. For its problematics not only indicates the link between actional probability and generic logic but may also be resolved in generic no less than genetic terms: for instance, through the hypothesis that *Joseph Andrews*, professedly a *new* species of writing, forms a generic mixture with greater latitude than either of its components. In general, it goes without saying that every genre shows — in its special manner and for its special effects — a certain simplification of reality. This means that a generic framework dictates or makes possible certain rules of referential stylization, the employment of which usually results in a set of divergences from what is generally accepted as the principles governing actual reality. The plot-structure of comedy, for instance, imposes on the fictive world the constraints of progressive complication from the start and of the happy ending toward the end. The more intricate or seemingly hopeless the entanglement and the greater the final reversal of fortune, the sharper the comic effects — but also the clash with our everyday canons of probability. This tension results in a generic compromise. In the interests of its functional demands, comedy institutionalizes a relaxation (rather than a suspension) of the norms of actional probability, compared with tragedy or the realistic novel. And this affords an opening for a variety of integrative operations of the reader's part.

Still, the comic model of reality allows for some deviance and incongruity mainly in the delimited area of plot stylization. It thus exemplifies a stable, established and hence easily discountable tension between internal and external probability. But there are generic frameworks that extend the area of institutionalized deviance (or from the reader's viewpoint, resolution) even to internal inconsistency. In this, for instance, comedy differs from

satire. The irrelevance of novelistic demands for internal coherence to a satiric work was demonstrated by Sheldon Sacks in *Fiction and the Shape of Belief*. In *Gulliver's Travels*, for example, we find it difficult to construct an integrated, consistent image of the protagonist. The indignant Gulliver who debunks the Liliputian Wars of the Eggs, and the militant Gulliver who defends his own country's use of terrible weapons — can they be one and the same person? Hardly in psychological, realistic terms. But however essential to works concerned to project a fictive world that parallels and approximates to extraliterary reality, such psychological coherence lies outside and indeed interferes with the concerns of satire. For the informing principle of satire, the effective exposure of objects in the real world, calls for a multi-directional use of every agent and situation. Like the rest of the *dramatis personae*, in other words, Gulliver becomes more useful once the constraints of realistic consistency have been loosened. Behind a façade of biographical continuity and peripheral details that somehow sustains the illusion of a coherent figure, Gulliver serves as the satiric object and the satiric voice at once. The generic legitimization of inner tensions and discontinuities within the represented reality promotes the economy and the effectiveness of the many-sided attack on outer reality.

3. The *existential principle* stands out in strong relief against the two previous mechanisms of integration. What is common to them all is that the heterogeneous or incongruous elements which the text seems to divorce from normal referentiality or to yoke by some violence together always belong to the level of the fictive world.² As with *Joseph Andrews* (the genetic principle) and *Gulliver's Travels* (the generic principle), however, these elements are not always explained or reconciled in terms of the fictive (or any other) world. And those reconciling explanations derived from reality are themselves widely variable. Thus, they may draw on features associated with a generic or a period world-view and/or actual life with all its anomalies (like the reality of concentration camps). However different, these three are all ready-made models of unity, established outside and prior to the individual text invoking them. But the existential principle — the linkage and resolution in terms of the world — indeed includes but is not limited to institutionalized models. Neither actual reality nor any established stylization of it dictates (and accounts for) Gregor Samsa's startling appearance as a giant insect. To say that Kafka's "Metamorphosis" postulates a world accommodating the transformation of the human into the

² For lack of space, I have imposed on myself throughout the double restriction of dealing mainly with referential (rather than, say, stylistic) elements and with instances of clash and incongruity (rather than the kinds of tension exemplified by looseness). However, the principle remains much the same, as demonstrated in the study in progress (*Reliability in Narrative*) of which this paper is part. For some further discussion of various objects and forms of existential (and other) resolution, with particular reference to modern poetry, see Yacobi, 1976; Yacobi and Sternberg, 1976.

nonhuman is to devise an organizing principle that is both referential and predominantly intra-textual: it derives more from the peculiar structure of reality the reader attributes to the work than from any pre-existent constraints or legitimations.

The existential principle thus manifests itself wherever the loose or divergent finds its place in an appropriate referential framework — generic or historical, institutionalized or individual, verisimilar or fantastic. It is important to note this point because, as we have seen, it often combines with one or more of the other integrating principles. It is sufficient to mention the generic explanation of the structure of reality in science fiction; the genetic in de Sade; the generico-thematic (social satire) in Marcel Aymé's *The Green Mare*.

4. The generic — as opposed to the genetic — has already been characterized as a *functional principle*. Whether (as in comedy) or not (as in satire) it imposes order on the divergent and discontinuous in existential terms, it always does so in terms of the *ends* requiring that divergence and discontinuity. But just as the functional principle does not exhaust the generic system, so does the generic system form only a special case, distinguished by its institutionalization, of the functional principle.

The work's aesthetic, thematic and persuasive goals invariably operate as a major guideline to making sense of its peculiarities as well as its more regular features. Among other things, because the opposite is also true; such peculiarities serve as a pointer, if not as a key, to the work's functional design. Hence the busy interplay between world and purpose throughout the reading-process. Hence also the basic difference between the functional and the existential principle. The existential operation more or less plausibly relates the experienced anomaly (e.g., inconsistent behavior) to some referential feature or law (e.g., psychological complexity) and thus turns it into an integral or even natural part of the fictive reality, whereas the aesthetic or formal operation explains the function of that anomaly within the structure of the text (e.g., satiric flexibility) without necessarily integrating it with the world of the text.

The two principles converge, for instance, where the establishment of a world that is in some way unusual serves thematic and normative ends. A firm thematic position may thus dictate a divergent reality-model or account for the centrality of a certain area or dimension of existence at the expense of others that are usually placed above it in conventional scales of significance. One of the innumerable cases in point is the relative weight given by D.H. Lawrence to the interaction of body and spirit in the human soul, in the relations between man and man, man and woman, etc. The structure of the world then reflects a vision of the world. In Günter Grass, on the other hand, the functional predominates over the existential as an integrative mechanism. The mixture of the historical, the probable, the improbable and the fantastic in this corpus produces a whole network of

tensions and deviations. It is not only that the reader is confronted by Oscar's control of his growth (in *The Tin Drum*), Amsel's miraculous rescue in the snow (*Dog Years*), Mahlke's clownish feats (*Cat and Mouse*). But Grass has no hesitation in distorting familiar historical facts: in *Dog Years* the last stand of the Third Reich assumes the form of a grandiose search for the Führer's runaway dog. Such external improbabilities and internal clashes can be neither ignored nor explained away. As a model of reality, Grass's world remains heterogeneous and incongruous. But the underlying thematic purposiveness and the authorial desire to subject the reader to a series of shocks combine with the inclusive logic of the grotesque to give the pieces more than the show of a functional whole.

5. Finally I want to turn to the *perspectival principle*, which brings divergent as well as otherwise unrelated elements into pattern by attributing them, in whole or in part, to the peculiarities and circumstances of the observer through whom the world is taken to be refracted.

When all the evidence points to one person as the thief while his own actions argue in his favor (Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*); when Thomas Sutpen in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* is first presented as a cruel demon, next as the sport of fortune, and last as a tragic figure responsible for his ruin; when both the genius and the suffering of the brilliant composer Adrian Leverkühn are attributed, alternately and simultaneously, to the syphilis contracted in his youth and to a deal with the devil (Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*) — in all these instances the inferred source of the tensions and hence the mechanism of their reconciliation takes on a perspectival form: the form of a limited figure who observes (narrates, experiences, evaluates) the represented world.

Thus, in *The Moonstone* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, we make sense of the manifold contradiction in relation to the fact that a central character is refracted through a number of variously fallible and subjective perspectives, while, in Thomas Mann, Zeitblom's personality renders him both the most appropriate and the most inappropriate narrator for a Faustian tale. His liberal, humanistic position indeed enables him, on the one hand, to convey his friend's peculiarities without judging them; but, on the other hand, it leads to a blurring of the story's demonic tonality. As a result, the causal system governing the world he portrays remains ambiguous.

In each of these representative instances, the coherent organization of the narrative is made possible once the reader recognizes the character's interference with the facts or their significance. Sometimes, the perspectival factor having been identified and its interference corrected and discounted, the reader can more or less make out what really happened (for instance, that Lazarillo de Tormes's wife is, despite his rationalizing statements, the priest's mistress). Elsewhere, especially in modern fiction, the refracted object is so hopelessly distorted as to become irretrievable. But even then the hypothesis grounded in perspectival unreliability serves as an organizing

measure, since the center of gravity then shifts, for example, from the object to the technique of observation, notably including the observer himself.

II

In all that regards the text's fictive level, we have then a set of five comprehensive and variously combinable principles of resolution. As a set, their diversity stamps them (to use Meir Sternberg's terms) as mechanisms of integration rather than motivation, since most of them can be employed (and the first is typically employed) without the reader's interrelating world and function.³ Still, the collocation of the five, apart from any intrinsic interest it may have, also illuminates by way of opposition each of the collocated alternatives. This includes the compositional and interpretive resource with which I am now most concerned: the technique of unreliability, whose perspectival basis enables us to define it as an inference that explains and eliminates tensions, incongruities, contradictions and other infelicities the work may show by attributing them to a source of transmission.⁴ And to exemplify this mutually illuminating effect, of all possible oppositions I shall concentrate here on the least promising one: between the hypotheses of unreliability and genesis.

The problem of reliability is commonly placed in a context far removed from that outlined here — not within the reader's organizing activity but within a quasi-human model of a narrator (and/or a "quasi-Olympian" model of the author). In that framework, both reliability and unreliability are taken as one of many features inherent in the narrator (or author or character). The fixed

³ The basic difference between these two modes of textual organization emerges from a juxtaposition of the two following excerpts from Sternberg's "Mimesis and Motivation" (1979):

"Within a theory of *integration* the clear-cut antithesis between referentially mediated and unmediated patterning gives place to a criss-cross of equipollent and variously overlapping divisions, not necessarily marked by a functional logic. For what informs the activity I have called integration is not so much a sense of purpose as a rage for order. If such a theory (or activity) always works with an opposition, in other words, it is with the all-inclusive one directing the whole process of reading: between the coherent and the opaque, the fragmentary, the incongruous. So any mechanism that serves to establish or undermine, initiate or terminate, reveal or conceal, resolve or ambiguate a pattern deserves equal consideration, though its integrative role will of course vary in particular cases" (p. 20).

"The protagonists of *motivation* are fiction and function rather than part and whole in general; its antagonist, the internal tensions between the two modes rather than simply looseness and incongruity; its arena, confined to the text's network of designed relationships rather than enlarged to encompass genetic contexts and symptomatic mechanisms as well; and its conflicts, always resolved and always by way of teleological explanation rather than of synthesis *per se*" (p. 22).

⁴ Though anything like a systematic analysis and comparison of critical approaches to reliability is beyond the scope of this paper, I do want to point out the important role played by Booth, 1961. Apart from ventilating the problem after a long period of silence, he lays stress on three points that have special relevance to my argument: the reader as an integral component of the rhetoric of fiction; the distinction between narrator and implied author; and the varieties of "distance" between them.

anthropomorphic categorization of the possessor of the trait determines or influences its conception as a component of a portrait that is marked by statistical, logical and psychological probability. Accordingly, the semantic feature of plus-reliability automatically goes together with omniscience, veracity, existence outside the fictive world and (sometimes) explicit commentary. And minus-reliability as “properly” belongs with limited range of knowledge, intentional mendacity and unintentional distortion, and existence within the fictive world. These two clusters are not only statistically prevalent (in the old and the new novel respectively; Steinmann, 1967) but also probable from the logical-psychological standpoint. Existence outside the fictive world, for instance, naturally links up with reliability (i.e., “objectivity” resulting from distance and lack of involvement) as well as with omniscience (the range of knowledge which exceeds that inherent in the human condition). The supernatural (“Olympian”) cast of one feature seems to imply and call for a corresponding supernaturalness in another, just as the show of limitation in one respect matches further limitations in others.

These implicit assumptions have tempted many scholars into automatic linkages between the various features of narrator and narration, thus producing some typology of narratorial “portraits.” Often, especially among the followers of Henry James, the classification is even informed by a normative attitude, manifesting itself in the rejection of mismatched qualities and improper collocations. Kathleen Tillotson (1959:12), for instance, asserts:

We can clearly see the first-person narrator misused, or the ejected author-narrator returning in disguise as a character transparently representative of the author (usually a clever young man or a wise old woman, sometimes a psychiatrist), who observes and reflects upon the action: the semi-omniscience and mock modesty of such personages are irritating, and they would do better if allowed to be frankly author-narrators.

Similar procedures characterise the work not only of obvious portraitists like Norman Friedman (1955) or Scholes and Kellogg (1966) but also that of Franz Stanzel and Wayne Booth, whose approach is generally less normative. Stanzel does indeed admit variations with regard to the narrator’s manner of existence. But reliability again properly goes with the Olympian distance of omniscience: hence the claim that normative reliability does not suit an internal narrator like Ishmael in Melville’s *Moby Dick* except in those passages where he lays aside his other human attributes as well (Stanzel, 1971: 49, 75, 76). Much the same is true of Booth (1961), who has done more than anyone else to explode one of the most harmful prejudices (“showing-telling”) about narration and who professes (in chapter 6) to cut across the conventional groupings of narrators. For him too the omniscient narrator, as well as existing outside fictive reality, is invariably reliable: “The commentator... claims *omniscience* and reveals *stupidity* and prejudice ... In the tradition of the intruding narrator, omniscient *or* unreliable” (p. 221).

In this as in other regards, Boris Uspensky's promising approach turns out to be especially unrewarding and inconsistent. Its promise here lies in the fact that, having subordinated the participants of the narrative act of communication to his four-plane point of view, for him the problem of "authorial knowledge," which properly belongs to the text's *psychological* plane, "does not seem to be important... for" the normative (*ideological*) plane. However, this lack of interest in relating the narrator's range of knowledge to his reliability incurs a price one is hardly prepared to pay. On the one hand, his general policy of refraining from functional linkage precludes the unjustified collocation of these narrative features. But it does so for the wrong reasons, by way of arbitrary isolation, thus disregarding both fact and effect: the logic behind their frequent coincidence and the functions performed by their dissonance. Stranger still, elsewhere Uspensky seems to swing to the other extreme (perhaps under the influence of Scholes and Kellogg, whom he mentions in this context), firmly connecting the limited knowledge of a narrator with his dubious reliability (1973: 99, 168).

This is not the place for an empirical refutation of this *apriorism*, which would have us infer unreliability from other, supposedly concomitant features of narration. What I want to emphasize here is its theoretical rigidity and unfruitfulness, as well as its evaluative arbitrariness, compared with an approach that turns the axiomatic rule into one of several interpretive hypotheses. As soon as confronted by the tensions or contradictory elements within the fictive world, we bring into play an interpretive procedure that is both inclusive and specific, well-defined and flexible. It requires the reader to marshal all the available (external and internal) evidence in order to determine which — or what combination — of the five alternative hypotheses forms the most suitable instrument of reconciliation. But considerations of validity and special interest apart, each (and innumerable combinations) of the five equally applies.

Thus, strange as it may seem, in a certain respect the perspectival principle is closely related to the genetic. For both resolve referential problems by attributing their occurrence to some source of report. The difference between these principles lies in the answer to the question: who is responsible, — the author or one of his fictional creations, whether dialogist, narrator or center of consciousness? In the first case, the lack of cohesion or coherence or probability (e.g., the deviant world-view in Sade or the tonal clash in Fielding) is placed and explained in a biographical-historical framework (Sade's personality, Fielding's development) that is discontinuous with the text's represented reality. In the second case, the rejection of the narrator (for instance) as a reliable reflector of the text's world and world-view not only presupposes the existence of a referential coherence beyond the narrator's reach; it also involves a further hypothesis, which substitutes another participant for the narrator as the agency responsible for this existential coherence. I refer of course to the hypothetical construct of the implied author, distinguished from the historical figure of the real author by his reconstitutive mode of existence and his variability from one work to another.

When we join the implied author and his mirror-image, the implied reader,⁵ to the other participants in the narrative act of communication, there emerges a communicative model composed of (at least) six (not always symmetrically paired) agents, four intra- and two extra-textual: Real Author/ Implied Author/ Narrator/ (Other) Characters/ Implied Reader/ Real Reader.⁶ A convenient way to bring out the relations between the perspectival and the genetic resources — and also between different patterns of unreliable narration — is to make use of the scheme proposed by D.M. MacKay (1972). Among other things, MacKay makes a suggestive distinction between communication and information. Information is defined (1972: 8) from the viewpoint of the receiver (addressee, hearer, reader):

Subjectively, we say that an event provides us with information when it causes us to know or believe something that we did not know or believe before. In other words, information-about-*X* determines the form of our readiness-to-reckon-with-*X* in appropriate circumstances. Objectively, information is said to be transmitted from *A* to *B* when the form of an event or structure at *B* is determined by the form of one at *A*, regardless of the source of the necessary energy. For example, if a heavy machine in a factory is suddenly switched on to a power line, the resulting flick of the ammeters back in the power station provides 'information' to the attendant...
...Information-for-an-organism is operationally definable as that which confirms or changes its internal representation of its world. (This clearly leaves open, as it should, the possibility that such information may be true, doubtful, false or even illusory.).

Communication, on the other hand, cannot be defined without reference to the viewpoint of the transmitter (speaker, author, sender). Unlike information, which may emerge regardless of or even against the transmitter's wishes and conscious intention, communication is a conscious, volitional and goal-directed action. The *act* of communication thus forms an interaction between the two participants: "In the act of communication, one organism can be thought of as wielding a tool (verbal or otherwise) in order to mould the representation of 'facts', 'skills' or 'priorities' in another" (p. 17).

Having seen the importance of intention and devised effect established anew from this angle, we can now return to our own concerns. The literary work raises interesting problems as regards its meaning and significance as a communicative act. Only rarely — as with posthumous publication, above all where expressly forbidden — is there any doubt about the very existence of communicative intent on the author's part. The doubt that always arises rather concerns the borderline between communication and information. Not only can some actual reader discover in the work what is not there to be found or put the work to uses undreamt of by the author — like reconstructing the sociological conceptions of a period or learning a foreign language. What is more, even the implied reader sometimes finds himself in a position where he cannot account for textual

⁵ For some early views of this protean creature see, for instance, Parkins, 1949; Gibson, 1950; Perry, 1968–9.

⁶ I have recently come across a similar interrelation in Bronzwaer (1978: 10).

weaknesses and incongruities except in purely informative terms. Thus, he may be forced to attribute them to the actual author's ignorance, social and cultural background, creative process, and other accidental or unconscious states and actions. This is indeed the logic underlying the genetic principle, which consists in an informative rather than a communicative mechanism of explanation. And here lies the major difference between the genetic and the perspectival procedures.

The relations between implied author and reader are by definition functional and hence located within the framework of an act of communication. Therefore, when the reader infers an unreliable narrator (or any other fallible observer) who unconsciously reveals his eccentricities and distortions — an innocent child, Gogol's mad diarist, Lazarillo the self-deceiving cuckold — even this informative aspect of narration forms a part of the intentionality underlying the overall act of communication. To construct an hypothesis as to the unreliability of the narrator is then necessarily to assume the existence of an implied (and by definition reliable) author who manipulates his creature for his own purposes.

However, the invariability of this rule must not blind us to the wide variations, from work to work and from passage to passage within the same work, in all that concerns the modalities of the unreliable source(s) of narration vis-à-vis authorial communication. For apart from other possible and actual disparities (i.e., perspectively resolved tensions) in range of knowledge, normative position, aesthetic procedure, etc., the fictive observer and the implied creator may also variously differ in the goal-directedness of their discourse. All other things being equal, that is, the distance between the two turns on the questions of (1) the observer's *self-consciousness*, in the sense of awareness of facing an addressee or audience;⁷ (2) the identity of that addressee with the author's implied reader. And the combination of these variables enables us to make a set of necessary distinctions between literary speech-events in general and between narrative modes in particular. Here I can present only a bare outline of the overall picture.

The most comprehensive distinction is between speakers or reflectors who are and those who are not conscious of addressing an audience. On the one hand we have the completely unself-conscious interior monologist, whether the "first-person" Benjy, Quentin and Jason in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* or the "third-person" Septimus in *Mrs. Dalloway*. There is no framework within which any of these, however vital his role of transmission, may be described as being engaged in a communicative activity. Unlike even the most humble of dialogists, this monologist (with the possible exception of Bakhtin's monologic self-communer) is no speaker but the paradigm of the informant. And his purely informative status — with the consequent absence or shift of rhetoric, disregard for intelligibility, associative (dis)continuity, and unhampered self-revelation — makes him the diametric opposite of the invariably self-conscious author, a

⁷ The centrality of the neglected narrative feature of self-consciousness (in *this* sense) has been established in Sternberg, 1978: 254ff.

passive participant in the text's communicative process, and hence a conspicuous integrative resource.

As soon as the speaker himself is invested with self-consciousness, however, this sharp opposition between the rhetorical and the fictive context no longer holds. Instead, two communicative processes simultaneously arise and develop, the narratorial and the authorial, each with its own features, its own aims, and possibly (as in the epistolary novel, the frame story, the dialogue scene) its own addressee. Where the two processes are thus kept wholly distinct through the fictionalization of the internal one, the narrator and his narration are not only perceived by the nominal addressee but at the same time unwittingly exposed again to the contemplation of a covert addressee, the reader eavesdropping on them from his vantage point in the external frame. From the viewpoint of the author-reader relationship, then, the fictive speech-event is after all still informative; and this has significant implications for the discovery and validation of unreliability. The self-conscious narrator already wields rhetorical tools, takes care to cover his tracks, and shows some concern about his image: this may (and usually does) make his unreliability harder to detect than the unsuspecting monologist's. But since the speaker's tricks and dissimulations are directed toward his own audience, the uninvolved as well as uninvited reader still finds it easier to spot incongruity, improbability, self-contradiction, etc., than when he himself is the immediate target of such rhetoric.

In Browning's "My Last Duchess," for instance, the Duke admirably carries out his communicative goals with regard to the Count's envoy. His social position vis-à-vis his auditor, the temporal and spatial dimensions of the context of utterance, and the relation between the situation and the subject of his speech — all these are fully and elegantly exploited to transmit an implicit but unmistakable message. Contrary to prevalent opinion, I believe that Ralph Rader is right to claim that the Duke "reveals himself with deliberate calculation, for a specific purpose" (Yacobi, 1975: 3–5; Rader, 1976: 136), but with one qualification or perhaps clarification: the Duke's self-revelation is designed only for the envoy's eyes. In other words, the two communicative frameworks must be considered and distinguished.

Within the internal act of communication, the Duke is responsible for everything — for the "how" as well as the "what" of presentation. It is he who exploits the late Duchess's picture as a quasi-mimetic pretext for an effective opening of the interview, and the statue depicting a taming scene, for a pregnant closure on a threatening note. It is he alone who savors the irony of "looking as if she were alive," at a point where his apparent admiration for the painting hides from the uninformed addressee the real macabre meaning of that comment, just as at a later stage, when he wants the addressee to share that private joke, he has no hesitation in repeating and driving home the piece of wit: "I gave commands / Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands / As if alive." Such manipulations cannot be exclusively attributed to the implied author.

But the Duke's responsibility starts and ends within the internal, fictive context. He cannot thus be blamed for the fact that the full meaning of the

dramatic situation (the Duke's new marital plans included) is sprung on the reader toward the end: why should he explain to his own listener what they both know? Browning, however, takes advantage of the motivated lack of contact between internal speaker and external addressee to plunge *in medias res*, thus giving rise to at least three effects: (a) the reader's curiosity is manipulated almost to the end; (b) his surprise is aroused at the end, with the retrospective illumination of what has gone before; and (c) the vantage point of the "eavesdropper" yields moral, psychological *and* artistic insight. It not only enables him to explore the moral code of the unrepentant Duke, nor only to observe the unfolding of his colorful figure. It also gives him at the same time an opportunity to enjoy the final ironic turn of the screw at the expense of the master of irony. The Duke's ambiguous "looking as if she were alive" (= praise for the painter's representational illusion vs. only the illusion of the real woman has survived) receives yet another meaning within the overall context of the poem, which has invested the Duke as well as the Duchess with the illusion of immortality. In short, the enclosedness of the internal act of communication brings out the similarity between the speaking and the authorial manipulator while enabling the reader to discover and explain the dissimilarity between fictive and overall design.

All this, in spite of innumerable variations, is common to all concentric structures. But this structural *symmetry* is replaced by assorted kinds of *overlapping* where the internal and the authorial transmitters face the same addressee — the external reader. The difference between symmetry and overlapping becomes a contrast when, as in Fielding's *Tom Jones*, the omniscient narrator establishes himself as such an all-round representative of the text's normative system that the two frameworks practically merge into a single one. Indeed, this limiting case is the paradigm of reliable narration: all textual problematics being accountable in terms other than perspectival fallibility, the ultimate rhetorical frame consisting in the relations between implied author and reader turns out to correspond at all points to the narrator-reader relationship.

Between the two patterns of double communication, the concentric and the (practically) overlapping, there lies a widespread intermediate. In Dostoevskij's *A Raw Youth* or Mann's *Felix Krull*, just as in *Tom Jones*, the narrator deliberately addresses and manipulates the reader. However, as in Browning's monologue, the surfacing of various forms and degrees of incongruity (informational, evaluative, stylistic) with the implied normative groundwork, invites us to construct an additional communicative framework (author → reader) behind the narrator's back. To achieve coherence, in other words, we reconstruct a distant or ironic implied author who covertly exposes and exploits the narrator for ends that are dissimilar, if not contrary, to those pursued by the narrator. Despite their consciousness of an external reader, Dostoevskij's raw and Mann's artful youth serve as unconscious agents for intelligibility, persuasion and semantic effect no less than Browning's completely internalized Duke.

What emerges is then a graded range of distance between the fictive and the rhetorical framework along this axis — flanked by the interior monologist and the Fieldingesque quasi-author, with the internally-directed and the externally-directed self-conscious speakers in between. But the feature common to all these structures of narration — naturally excluding the limiting case of total reliability — brings out the distinctiveness of the perspectival principle in general and the unreliability hypothesis in particular. From the moment that hypothesis arises as a means of resolving tensions in terms of unwitting self-revelation on the part of the fictive reflector — from that moment, the discourse assumes a double existence: what figures as information with regard to the internal context functions at the same time as communication within the implicit frame surrounding it.

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