WHO SPEAKS, WHO LISTENS, WHO ACTS: A NEW MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING NARRATIVE

DISSertation

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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.
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Perhaps the best place to start is, logically enough, at the beginning. This study originated with my interest in second-person narration. To put it plainly, I enjoyed reading second-person fiction: it seemed to broaden the possibilities of narrative fiction in provocative ways, eliciting from me an engagement very different from what I experience with first- and third-person narratives. When I went to discuss my interest with colleagues, however, I was met (almost uniformly) with one of two responses: Colleague A hadn’t read any second-person and wanted me to refer some to him, whereas Colleague B began discussing a text that wasn’t really second-person (such as works whose “you” refers merely to a narratee rather than to a protagonist as well). Likewise, published criticism had little to say about second-person: I was able to locate only a handful of articles dealing specifically with second-person, nearly half of which are collected in a single “special issue” of Style. Despite my frustrations, I found myself in a fortunate predicament as an academic: I had an interest in a literary phenomenon that has to date received surprisingly little attention. Consequently, I set out to create a much needed poetics of second-person narration.

It was relatively early into the project when I noticed a striking aspect of second-person criticism that was to redefine the study: nearly all who dealt with second-person
characterized it as a point-of-view parallel to first- and third-person. (This is consistent with the lay-person’s understanding of narrative modes, an understanding that organizes narration according to grammatical person: first-, second-, or third-person narration.) Yet it was clear to me that second-person narration was not defined by a narrator’s point of view but by a joint narratee/protagonist’s point of reception; not by who is speaking, but by who is listening. In fact, I realized that all examples of second-person narration are also examples of either first- or third-person narration. For some reason, we have been positioning second-person narration inaccurately in one of our most basic and foundational taxonomies of narrative. I then began to wonder if the responses I encountered in colleagues and the relative neglect I found in criticism were somehow related to this inaccurate positioning, and that if I were to even think about a poetics of second-person narration, I would first have to create a taxonomy of narration that would more accurately arrange different narrative modes and more adequately account for the very evident rhetorical and thematic differences we encounter in these different modes.

My primary objective throughout this study is to do just that: to develop a more adequate and useful approach to narration (recognizing that organization is oftentimes the springboard to interpretation). I discuss in the introduction the ways in which current models of narration, which are based solely on voice, fail to accommodate all narratives adequately, the most obvious ill-fit being second-person narration; I then propose a new model that does. This model differs from traditional models in that it examines the relationship among three intradiegetic components – narrator, narratee, and protagonist – without privileging any single component. I identify three general ways these functions
can relate to one another: the three can either all be discrete, a mode I term non-coincident narration; all can be conflated, completely-coincident narration; or two can be conflated and the third discrete, partially coincident-narration, of which there are three different forms. I examine these five modes in the five main chapters, using close readings of texts to discuss general rhetorical qualities particular to each mode. These analyses also demonstrate my larger argument, that the type and level of reader engagement with a text is determined more 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. Although I devote a significant amount of time to specific narratives, hopefully providing insight into those individual texts, my larger goal is comprehensive – to construct a model that will accommodate all narratives. My choice of texts is at times based on the texts’ ability to demonstrate something exemplary about the form, at other times on my personal taste. I intend for the active reader of this study, my hypothetical authorial audience, to consider narratives in addition to those I have chosen, identify the modes to which they belong, and then explore how my commentary on the modes applies to them.
INTRODUCTION

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. ¹ 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).

Before I go into detail of the problem, I want to suggest why this problem exists.
Despite Booth’s historically-dated claim in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* that “efforts to use the
second person have never been very successful [...] it is astonishing how little real
difference even this choice makes” (150n3),² second-person narration produces very

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¹ This is not the first time an argument has addressed the status of voice in narrative
theory. In *Toward a Postmodern Theory of Narrative* (1996), Andrew Gibson critiques
narratology’s privileging of voice. My project is quite distinct from Gibson’s, however,
in substantial ways: as a deconstructionist, Gibson argues that the centrality of a single
voice in narrative theory suggests a false-sense of textual harmony, facetiously stating
that “voice is the secure foundation that assures the coherence of narrative geometry
itself” (145); as a rhetorical narratologist, I argue against the primacy of voice not on any
a priori grounds but because these models have become obsolete and cannot account for
the diverse range of narrative modes that exist. Moreover, the alternatives we propose
differ: Gibson argues for a Bakhtinian-type analysis of the text’s multiple voices whereas
I argue for a multiple-variable analysis. Unlike Gibson’s, my discussion revises the very
principles of narrative categorization.

² In defense of Booth: when he made this comment the accepted definition of second-
person narration was simply that of a narrator using a you address. As Genette has shown
with his response to first- and third-person grammar, considering only the grammar of
distinctive rhetorical effects. Even with its limitations, Bruce Morrissette’s early analysis of second-person (“Narrative ‘You’ in Contemporary Literature” (1965)) distinguishes the potential effects of second-person from those available to first- and third-person:

Far from constituting a technical “trick” (though it may degenerate into exactly that, as certain recent examples would indicate), narrative “you,” although of comparatively late development, appears as a mode of curiously varied psychological resonances, capable, in the proper hands, of producing effects in the fictional field that are unobtainable by other modes or persons. (2)

Jay McInerney’s *Bright Lights, Big City*, for instance, uses second-person narration to underscore thematic concerns. McInerney’s story of a man jaded from his job, failed marriage, and life in general uses the *you* address to its protagonist to emphasize an existence dictated from the outside, an appropriate and effective narrative mode considering the novel’s critique of the consumer culture of the 1980’s. At one point, the narrator (in voice) and protagonist (in focalization) recognize the extent to which the protagonist (and, more generally, all who inhabit this society) is a product of his culture: “you are the stuff of which consumer profiles – the American Dream: Educated Middle-Class Model -- are made. *When you’re staying at the Plaza with your beautiful wife, doesn’t it make sense to order the best Scotch that money can buy before you go to the theatre in your private limousine?*” (151, italics in original). For inhabitants of the “educated middle-class,” the experience of the 80’s is one imposed from the outside, an ambiguous presence of media/culture prescribing your desires and expectations; the novel narrative address will, in fact, reveal “little real difference” in narrative technique and effect.
exposes that in the 80's free-choice was illusory. Second-person narration exemplifies this cultural climate, for it manifests in narrative technique the notion that someone or something outside of yourself dictates your thoughts and actions. To underscore this point, the above passage merges the narrative voice we’ve encountered throughout the text with a generic commercialist voice indicated by italics. Both address the protagonist as you, though the you of the second sentence is not a personalized one; rather it is a stand-in for a generic citizen of the 80's, who more or less shares in the plight of this particular protagonist. The inclusiveness of the you pronoun lumps readers and protagonist together, just as the consumer culture of the 80's worked to homogenize an entire society.

We see in Bright Lights, Big City thematic implications of using second-person narration; in Bill Manhire’s “The Brain of Katherine Mansfield” we see rhetorical implications of its use. Manhire’s story (and other choose-your-own-adventure stories) is so critically interesting because it directly addresses two distinct audiences (one internal to the events, the other external) and thus its narrator very smoothly moves back and forth between two distinct locations, one internal and one external to the events, though never at the same time. Manhire’s story begins:

1
You are just an ordinary New Zealander. You have strength, intelligence and luck, though you are not particularly good at languages. Your family and friends like you, and there is one special friend who really thinks you’re swell. Yours is a well-rounded personality; your horoscope is usually good; your school report says ‘satisfactory.’ But somehow you are
restless. Your life is missing challenge and excitement. You want to make things happen. Go to 2. (177)

The majority of the above passage explicitly addresses an intradiegetic you, the story’s protagonist. However, because of its construction as choose-your-own-adventure, the story shifts address in the final sentence of the passage. With “Go to 2.” we have a narrator narrating from a different location than in the preceding sentences: the address of “Go to 2.” shifts from intradiegetic to extradiegetic, explicitly communicating to an implied reader (and flesh-and-blood reader) whose responsibility it is to flip the page. As readers, we oscillate in complex ways between being participants in the fictional world and in the literary world. The relationships in “The Brain of Katherine Mansfield” between the reader and the narratee and the narrator offer only a glimpse of the rhetorical effects open to second-person narration. What is important to see is that both Bright Lights, Big City and “The Brain of Katherine Mansfield” would lose their principal rhetorical effects if they were written in either first- or third-person narration; thus, we recognize a need to distinguish second-person narration from first- and third-person. However, the attempts to account for these thematic and rhetorical effects have been inadequate, for they have erroneously made second-person a category of narration that is parallel to first- and third-person. To understand this lack of success, we need to examine second-person criticism.
As Monika Fludernik comments in her introduction to a special issue of *Style* dedicated to second-person narration,3 “one of the major handicaps to an adequate treatment of second-person narrative has been the lack of an unequivocal definition of what exactly is a second-person text” (“Introduction” 284). This lack of consensus has not only hindered the analysis of second-person narration but it also has corrupted our understanding of how the narrative modes relate to one another (as we will see below). The definitions of *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* (1997), Gerald Prince, Brian Richardson, and Fludernik herself illustrate the ways second-person narration has been defined:

In a narrative told from the second-person point of view, the narrator addresses a “you”; thus, a narrative that reads “If you really want to know New Orleans, you need to walk Bourbon Street at midnight…” would be an example of second-person narrative. *(Bedford 292)*

[Second-person narrative is] a narrative the NARRATEE of which is the PROTAGONIST in the story s/he is told. (Prince 84)

Second person narrative may be defined as any narration that designates its protagonist by a second person pronoun. The protagonist will usually be the sole focalizer, and is generally the work’s narratee as well. (Richardson, “Poetics and Politics” 311)

I will propose a preliminary definition of second-person narrative as narrative whose (main) protagonist is referred to by means of an

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3 See *Style* 28:3 (1994) for a number of useful analyses of second-person narration addressing a wide range of second-person texts. One consequence of my new model of narration is to recognize the different types of second-person texts discussed even within that issue.
address pronoun (usually you) and add that second-person texts frequently also have an explicit communicative level on which a narrator (speaker) tells the story of the “you” to (sometimes) the “you” protagonist’s present day absent or dead, wiser, self. (Fludernik, “Introduction” 288)

Bedford’s definition is the least precise, for it uses merely the presence of you as its main criterion. This type of definition accommodates a too diverse range of texts in which the you could be either a referenced narratee whose role is purely audience (as in the openings of Walker Percy’s Lancelot or J.D. Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye) or an active participant/protagonist within the story world (as in Italo Calvino’s If on a winter’s night a traveler or Jay McInerney’s Bright Lights, Big City). This type of definition is inadequate for the same reason that Genette critiqued and ultimately revised the pronoun-preservation criterion of first- and third-person narration: just as any narrator can say I, any narrator can elect to address his/her audience as you. In other words, this type of definition does not account for the rhetorical differences between works such as Lancelot and works considered ‘real’ second-person texts (Fludernik “Introduction” 284) such as Bright Lights, Big City.

The other three definitions differ markedly from Bedford’s and avoid this type of imprecision by limiting their category to include only texts whose narratee you is a/the protagonist within the story world: their definitions would appropriately exclude works such as Lancelot or The Catcher in the Rye. However, their agreement is not complete: although the three share in the recognition that the you must be a protagonist, they place different levels of emphasis on other aspects of narrative transmission. As Fludernik points out, “Richardson’s definition differs from Prince’s [...] in that Prince makes the
protagonist’s narrateehood the principal criterion of second-person fiction; Richardson, by contrast, sees reference to the protagonist as central and makes narrateehood a secondary criterion” (“Introduction” 286). Fludernik’s own definition builds upon Prince’s and Richardson’s and incorporates – albeit secondarily – the narrator and its function.

Although Prince, Richardson, and Fludernik have honed the definition of second-person narration to a more useful form, it still warrants revision, in particular regarding the relationship among narrator, narratee, and story world. Prince’s, Richardson’s, and Fludernik’s definitions all fail to account adequately for hypothetical or conditional second-person narration, a popular manifestation found in such works as Lorrie Moore’s “How” and Junot Diaz’s “How to Date a Blackgirl, Browngirl, Whitegirl or Halfie.” In both of these stories, we don’t encounter a protagonist (or a story) in the traditional sense because these narratives are directed toward hypothetical actants in hypothetical (and sometimes shifting) scenarios. Yet, Prince’s, Richardson’s, and Fludernik’s definitions suggest a definable and singular narratee-protagonist. Thus, we need to modify Fludernik’s definition to account for these narratives that still maintain the principal criterion of second-person narration, the coincidence of narratee and protagonist. I

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4 Although Richardson’s and Fludernik’s definitions do not accommodate what I term as how-to narration, their analyses of second-person narration do recognize and address this form. However, their analyses, like their definitions, seem to short-change how-to narration: Richardson devotes little more than a page to what he calls subjunctive narration (“Poetics and Politics” 319-20) in comparison to the over-eight pages he spends on standard second-person narration. Similarly, Monika Fludernik’s “Second-Person
propose the following more comprehensive definition: second-person narration is a narrative mode in which a narrator tells a story to a (sometimes undefined, shifting, and/or hypothetical) narratee - delineated by you - who is also the (sometimes undefined, shifting, and/or hypothetical) principal actant in that story. It is important to note that Genette’s critique of the pronoun-presence criterion of first- and third-person narrations does not apply with second-person because the you of second-person narration (unlike the presence or absence of a narrational I) carries extradiegetic effects for the reader.

Moving beyond the issue of definition, we can see other problems in the history of commentary on the technique. The earliest second-person criticism considered this narrative technique an alternate point of view parallel to first- and third-person. Working with only a handful of second-person narratives (most influentially Michel Butor’s La Modification), Bruce Morrissette in his 1965 article “Narrative ‘You’ in Contemporary Literature” aligns the you of second-person narrative with the narrator, making the narrative technique analogous to first-person, the only difference being that the I is substituted with you: he claims that “‘you’ forms [...] invite the reader to imagine himself in the narrator’s place” and that descriptions of the you are “specific past action[s] of the speaker” (10). Morrissette’s analysis is limited in that it doesn’t account for narratives in which the you narratee is distinct from the narrator. (Manifestations of second-person in which the narrator and narratee-protagonist are distinct have become considerably more popular since Morrissette’s initial article.) Because he references only texts in which the
"you" is self-address, Morrissette erroneously classifies second-person as a point of view. However, as we’ll see in detail below, second-person narrative by definition is a point of reception, not a point of seeing or speaking.

Morrissette’s influence on later second-person criticism has been substantial. Mary Frances Hopkins and Leon Perkins, in their entry “Second-Person Point of View” in Critical Survey of Short Fiction (1981), claim to “extend” Morrissette’s analysis and continue to refer to second-person as a point of view although they identify and analyze a number of narratives in which the you is distinct from the narrator and his/her perspective. They even include an analysis of Red Beach, a novel in which the you narratee-protagonist dies and continues to be addressed/directed by the narrator, indicating a significant distance between the narrator’s point of view and the you narratee-protagonist’s point of reception. Similarly, Brian Richardson establishes impenetrable “boundaries” between second-person and both first- and third-person narratives (“Poetics of Multipersoned” 324), suggesting that second-person is distinct and parallel to first and third-person.

However, we can readily see that these critics have inaccurately positioned second-person in relation to first- and third-person narrations once we realize that second-person narration is also always already either first- or third-person. Much of the confusion regarding the definition and positioning of second-person narration results

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5 M.H. Abrams’s influential A Glossary of Literary Terms also lists second-person as a “point-of-view” parallel to and distinct from first-and third-person (234).
from our inadequate terminology. As is perhaps clear from this discussion, the term *second-person* is misleading for two main reasons: (1) it encourages identification based merely on the presence of the second-person pronoun *you*; and (2) it suggests a category of narration distinct and exclusive from both first- and third-person narrations. The second problem goes beyond terminological inadequacy and concerns the way in which we categorize narratives and view their relations to one another. Take in illustration the following four examples of second-person narration:

And you’re dead scared of time, of those gaps in eternity when we might talk to one another, aren’t you? Perhaps you are sitting in the room that’s neat and tidy now; you’re listening to some Bach fugues, and you’re trying to listen so hard, aren’t you? Only nowadays you cannot listen to them, not even just one, all the way through without your mind starting to wander, trying to seek me out. And then you become more frightened, but terrified of the vast gap in eternity that may be just about to open up and leave you so very much alone, and with me only [...] But don’t worry, for I shall be with you at all times, and I am waiting for you to come through that gap to join me, should you ever let it open. (Butlin, “The Tilting Room” 61-2)

So many things begin and perhaps end as a game, I suppose that it amused you to find the sketch besides yours, you attributed it to chance or a whim and only the second time did you realize that I was intentional and then you looked at it slowly, you even came back later to look at it again, taking the usual precautions. (Cortazar, “Graffiti” 33)

When he says, “Skins or blankets?” it will take you a moment to realize that he’s asking which you want to sleep under. And in your hesitation he’ll decide that he wants to see your skin wrapped in the big black moosehide. (Houston, “How to Talk to a Hunter” 98)

Then Doreen, who comes in the afternoons to help, brings out a visitor; voice and footsteps; Mother has to get up but you hang your head and go on knitting. Voices creaking and rustling and a sigh. The visitor has sat down. Presently she whispers to Mother, “What is her name?” (Godden, “You Need to Go Upstairs” 144)
Notice that the presence of *I* makes “The Tilting Room” and “Graffiti” examples not just of second-person but also of first-person narration, and the absence of *I* makes “How to Talk to a Hunter” and “You Need to Go Upstairs” also examples of third-person narration.

We encounter similar instances of overlap if we turn to Genette’s taxonomy that rejects the grammatical divisions of first- and third-person and adopts the categories of homodiegesis and heterodiegesis because Genette’s categories are also defined by voice/narrator. Although Genette glosses over second-person narration as “a rare but very simple case,” he appropriately recognizes its subsumption by another category of narration and consigns it to heterodiegesis (Narrative Discourse Revisited 133). Yet, as Fludernik points out, Genette’s claim “ignores the overwhelming number of second-persons texts in which the narrator as well as the narratee participate in the actions recounted on the *histoire* level” (“Second Person” 446). One could in fact argue that all second-person narration is actually homodiegesis considering that a narrator must be on the same plane as his/her narratee-protagonist (and thus be on the plane of the story world) in order to communicate directly with that narratee-protagonist. But even this rule has an exception in choose-your-own-adventure stories such as Manhire’s “The Brain of Katherine Mansfield,” in which the address of the narrator oscillates between an intradiegetic narratee and an extradiegetic implied reader.

As we see with this categorical overlap, current models of narration, which are based exclusively on voice/narrator, cannot adequately accommodate modes of narration
in which voice is not the central-defining feature (such as second-person narration). In order to account more accurately for the variety of narrative modes, we need to explore a model of narration that analyzes (without a priori privilege) the relationships among multiple variables in the narrative transmission. I propose a model based on the triad of narrator, protagonist, and narratee (these three corresponding to the elements of the traditional rhetorical model: speaker, text, and audience). Although I have structured my model on intradiegetic components, my analyses will at times implicitly or explicitly bring in the implied author and its role in the rhetoric of narrative. However, I will for the most part focus my analysis to the narrator, narratee, and protagonist (and not on extradiegetic concerns such as history, cultural codes, author biography, intertextuality) in order to demonstrate the extent that these three internal structural components affect reader response. This model would better account for rhetorical differences among narrative modes, distinguishing within and among what are now considered first-, second-, and third-person narrations in ways that a model based solely on voice (or any single variable) does not. Before we apply this model to actual texts, it might be helpful to diagram different manifestations of this triad. We have five basic configurations:

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6 Although he does not articulate a specific model of narration that would include the narratee, Gerald Prince does maintains that any model of narration must consider the narratee. In defense of his original analysis of the narratee, Prince reasserts in “The Narratee Revisited” that “the narratee, regardless of it hermeneutic implications, is a necessary feature of any model of narrative, allowing for a more balanced and precise characterization of the possibilities of narrative discourse and the structure of narrative transmission and for a specification of the notion ‘narrative situation’” (299).

7 My triangular figures bear a close physical resemblance to those Genette uses in “Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative” to chart relationships among different types of
fictional and factual texts (766). However, this physical resemblance might be misleading, for our projects differ significantly. Most noticeably, Genette’s concern includes an extradiegetic agent – the author – and how this agent relates to the narrator and character. I focus exclusively on variables within the fictional narrative, already assuming a distinction between author and narrator. Moreover, my intradiegetic rhetorical concerns include the influence of the narratee (intradiegetic audience) on the narrative transmission; this attention is represented in my figures. Genette does not involve audience (either narratee or reader) in his analysis.
Figure 5: Partially-Coincident Narration (of Narratee/Protagonist)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Narrator} \\
\% \\
\text{Narratee} = \text{Protagonist}
\end{array}
\]

Ex. Lorrie Moore’s “How,” Italo Calvino’s If
on a winter’s night a traveler, Bill Manhire’s
“The Brain on Katherine Mansfield”

Figure 5

Figure one depicts a narrative in which the narrator, narratee, and protagonist functions are all discrete; I term this type non-coincident narration. I include examples of homodiegesis as well as heterodiegesis because although the narrator and the protagonist of non-coincident narration might be the same individual (e.g. the autodiegesis of Invisible Man or Lolita), the narrator and protagonist exist on different diegetic planes and, thus, have distinct functions. On the other end of the spectrum is narration represented by figure two, which depicts self-address autodiegesis: narrator, protagonist, and narratee are all the same and exist on the same diegetic plane; I term this completely-coincident narration. The other three figures represent different forms of partially-coincident narration: Figure three depicts a coincidence of narrator and protagonist functions but a distinct narratee; in these narratives, most commonly simultaneous
present-tense, a narrator speaks about him/herself to someone else. Figure four depicts narratives in which the narrator and narratee are the same but distinct from the protagonist: a narrator narrates to him/herself the story of someone else. And figure five depicts narratives in which we encounter a coincidence of narratee and protagonist but a distinct narrator: a narrator speaks to an external narratee who is also the main actor.

This model differs from Genette’s influential taxonomy of homo- and heterodiegesis because it foregrounds narrative functions and diegetic planes rather than ontological worlds. The relationship between discourse and story worlds (ontology) – that is, whether or not the narrator exists in the same ontological world as his/her characters – defines Genette’s categories. My categories, however, consider diegetic relation. With complete coincidence, for instance, all three variables exist on the same diegetic plane: the story of narrating (narrator) and listening (narratee) is not distinct from the story of acting (protagonist). Focusing on functions and diegetic planes rather than ontological worlds accounts for the rhetorical similarities between certain homodiegetic and heterodiegetic texts: for example, the temporal and moral distance between Humbert the narrator and Humbert the protagonist, created because these two functions exist on different diegetic planes, resembles heterodiegesis more so than it resembles homodiegetic narratives in which the narrator and protagonist reside on the same diegetic plane (as in simultaneous present tense narratives such as J.M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Bright Lights, Big City*) in large part because of the potential to narrate and evaluate retrospectively.
If we return to the four examples of second-person narration that I referenced above to illustrate the problems with current models of narration, we see how this new triadic model allows us to distinguish among them and, thus, account for their different rhetorical effects. Since all four stories have in common the coincidence of narratee and protagonist (this is what defines them as second-person and distinguishes them from other narratives in which the narratee and protagonist are distinct), we need to compare their relationships between narrator and narratee-protagonist in order to articulate the connection between technique and thematics.

The narrative situation of Butlin’s “The Tilting Room” is that of a character’s consciousness speaking to himself about himself; thus, it belongs to the category of completely-coincident narration (figure 2). Butlin’s story depicts a character’s consciousness complaining to the character himself that he is losing his identity and independence and neglecting himself now that he has a significant other in his life (we never learn the exact nature of the relationship). This complaint becomes even more poignant during an intradiegetic story (also in second-person) in which the protagonist’s significant other reveals to a crowd of strangers that she is pregnant. The you self-address underscores the division between the part of the protagonist’s consciousness that wants to maintain independence (represented in the narrator) and the part that is involved in the relationship (represented in the protagonist-narratee). We recognize in the following passage a tension between a sense of division and a sense of union: “Talk to me! I’m not really bothered what we talk about, but you’re the only person who can
really talk to me just as I’m the only person who can really talk to you. So talk to me” (60). Considering the story’s thematics, it is appropriate that Butlin uses second-person narration because it creates grammatical and rhetorical distance between narrator and narratee that parallels the protagonist’s increasing sense (though a sense that he attempts to displace) of his dwindling autonomy. Unlike with other examples of second-person narration in which the you is external to the narrator, the you self-address of “The Tilting Room” ultimately insulates itself from the reader.

We encounter a very different relationship between narrator and narratee-protagonist in Cortazar’s “Graffiti”: we recognize only in the last few paragraphs that the narrator is actually distinct from her narratee-protagonist (figure 5), a delay that reinforces the characters’ emotional union. The story recounts the female narrator’s and male narratee’s attempts to communicate through the banned art of graffiti. We realize that the narrator and narratee will never actually meet, and thus this narrative will never be transmitted, but the intimate communication that the two artists share through their graffiti makes it possible and fulfilling for the female narrator to imagine that she can speak to her narratee – the other artist. By telling him (through the second-person narration) what he is doing and thinking though she has never met, let alone seen, him, the narrator commends their ability to communicate through their art and at the same time laments that she will no longer be able to “talk” to him because the repressive government under which they live has banned graffiti. As Kacandes writes of the story, “the structure of enunciation of the main diegetic level, then, is that of a speaker who
addresses someone she cannot talk to directly, someone who is not only ‘absent,’ but whom she apparently has never really met. This situation does not seem to preclude a sense of intimacy between the characters: I would go so far as to say it promotes it” (339-40). The second-person narration is at once the illusion of direct communication (an illusion because she is unable to speak to him literally) and also a stand-in for the communication-through-artistic expression that they have already experienced. As with “The Tilting Room,” in “Graffiti” we ultimately distance ourselves from the narratee/protagonist once we piece together the exact rhetorical situation; yet whereas the second-person narration of “The Tilting Room” is actually self-address, the second-person narration of “Graffiti” is external address to a definite narratee.8 We “overhear” the narrative in the same way that a member of their fictive world might witness the narrator and narratee-protagonist’s artistic communication; we occupy the position of narrative audience rather than that of narratee.

The relationship between narrator and narratee-protagonist in Pam Houston’s “How to Talk to a Hunter” is consistent with the relationships found in other “how-to” stories: a narrator admonishes action in the future tense to a hypothetical actant (figure 5). This type of relationship between narrator and narratee-protagonist is distinct from those we find in our other three examples and creates an even more complex relation between the reader and the narratee-protagonist. As Phelan notes, when we read how-to

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8 See Joyce Carol Oates’s “You” for another example of a second-person narrative in which we initially read the you as self-address but ultimately recognize it as external address.
narratives, our associations oscillate between the narratee (also the ideal narrative audience) and the narrative audience depending on the level and type of narratee characterization (146): that is, depending on how much the narratee is characterized and on how closely a flesh-and-blood reader shares characteristics with the narratee (has she ever even met a hunter?), that reader might or might not be pulled into the narratee position and feel addressed. Moreover, the hypothetical and shifting nature of the narratee-protagonist suggests a sense of inevitability of events: regardless of exactly who is experiencing these events (i.e. acting as the narratee), the outcome will be the same. This type of relationship between narrator and narratee/protagonist also influences how we interpret the concepts of story, character, and time in how-to narratives (ultimately influencing how we as readers relate to the story). “How to Talk to a Hunter,” for example, does not have a story in the traditional sense: the entire action consists of discourse because the prescribed events are hypothetical/conditional; nothing has actually happened. Instances in which we are provided with multiple options for action reinforce the seeming “storylessness” of these narratives: “If you can, let him sleep alone for at least one night. If you can’t, invite him over to finish trimming your Christmas tree” (103). This passage also points to the fluidity of character even within the deep structure fabula of events: different potential actants may do one thing or another, yet the basic progression and outcome of events will remain unchanged (a point I’ll explore in more detail in chapter one). We experience time differently in these types of narrative, for without an actual story there exists no real storytime: as Hopkins and Perkins note, how-
to narrative “is prediction, not reported action, and not within any kind of fictional time” (123).

In Rumer Godden’s “You Need to Go Upstairs,” the narrator is external to the narratee-protagonist but still maintains the focalization of the narratee-protagonist (figure 5). Thus, we are told and experience what you is doing without the intimacy of self-address: it is crucial to the effect of the story that we as readers are not distanced from the narratee-protagonist you or the events by the self-containment of autodiegetic address (as we find in “The Tilting Room”). Likewise, it is important that we are not distanced in the way we are in “Graffiti”: once the narrator of “Graffiti” acknowledges that she cannot reach her intended narratee, given that we are able to read the story, we feel distinct from the you. Godden’s short story recounts a young blind girl’s trials in the everyday task of going upstairs to use the lavatory. The story’s present-tense second-person narration invites the reader to adopt the focalization of the blind girl not in order to align the reader with the protagonist, but to distance the reader from the protagonist by forcing us to see exactly what we are not:

You are not at all afraid of the stairs. Why? Because Mother has put signals there for you, under the rail where no one can find them, and they guide you all the way up; now your legs go up the stairs as quickly as notes up a piano -- almost. At the top is a wooden heart for you to feel with your fingers; when you reach it, it is like a message and your heart goes steady. It is not quite steady up the stairs. (147)

All who can read the story (excepting its potential braille version) are drawn into being the girl, paradoxically, in order to show us how different we are from her. This is quite
distinct from the implied universality of experience that we encounter in how-to narration.

More than merely providing a way to account for second-person narration, however, this triadic analysis also influences how we categorize and enhances how we understand texts currently defined as first- and third-person narratives. For instance, two texts currently defined as first-person (or homodiegesis) might now occupy different categories because of their different narratee relations: “The Yellow Wallpaper,” whose narrator is also her own narratee (figure 2) and *Invisible Man*, whose narratee is apart from its narrator (figure 1). The difference in narratee position influences how we read and relate to the two stories: compare “(I would not say this to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind)” (41) from “The Yellow Wall-paper” with “who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you” (439) from *Invisible Man*. Likewise, because we are moving beyond just voice, it is possible to group a first-person narrative with a third-person narrative: figures 1, 4, and 5 all have the potential for both first- and third-person narratives. For instance, Willa Cather’s *My Antonia* (grammatically first-person) and John Barth’s “Lost in the Funhouse” (grammatically third-person) both depict narrators narrating to themselves as they try to understand another character. Thus, both narratives belong to the category of partially-coincident narration on the axis of narrator/narratee (figure 4). Most significantly, this model considers not only the relationship between narrator and protagonist or story world (something the old models based on voice foreground), it also considers the relationships
between narrator and narratee and between narratee and protagonist and draws specific attention to ways in which narratee status influences how we relate to and understand narratives of all modes.

In the chapters that follow I examine these narrative modes in detail, analyzing how the different relationships among the narrator, narratee, and protagonist influence reader response. I start with the coincidence of narratee and protagonist, the mode that most explicitly challenges current models of narration. I then turn to the other two forms of partially-coincident narration, continuing to use close readings of specific texts to get at the general rhetorical qualities of the narrative modes. The final two chapters look at completely-coincident narration and non-coincident narration, culminating in a brief discussion of how the implied author, an extradiegetic concern, affects how we interpret the relationship among our three intradiegetic components.
I want to begin by looking at the coincidence of narratee and protagonist, those narratives in which a narrator addresses a narratee who is also the story’s main character. Narratives in this mode involve telling “you” what “you” are doing, have done, or might do in the future.\footnote{Although all of the narratives in this mode will be second-person narratives, not all second-person narratives belong to this category. As we will see in Chapter 4, dealing with completely-coincident narration, texts such as McInerney’s \textit{Bright Lights, Big City} and Butor’s \textit{La Modification} (second-person novels) are examples of completely-coincident narration because their narrators are not discrete from the narratee/protagonist.} I start with this mode because, as I argued in the introduction, it contains narratives that pose the most obvious challenge to models of narrative based on voice; hence, a model that claims to be comprehensive should be able to accommodate these narratives adequately. Although we cannot disregard the role of the narrator, the joint role of narratee/protagonist not only defines this category, it also affects reader
response more significantly than does the narrator’s role. As will be the case with each of the remaining chapters, here I discuss the general rhetorical qualities of the narrative mode by examining specific texts that exemplify the mode. In the present chapter, I discuss Calvino’s *If on a winter’s night a traveler*, Manhire’s “The Brain of Katherine Mansfield,” and multiple examples of how-to narration, three different types of this form of partial coincident narration. Throughout the chapter I will be concerned with three main questions: What are the effects of having a narratee who is also the protagonist? What types of relationships do we find between narrators and these joint narratee/protagonists? And, how do these relationships influence the reader’s relation to the narrative?

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 (intradicastic 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.

Calvino’s *If on a winter’s night a traveler* employs a joint narratee/protagonist and a discrete narrator, but what distinguishes it from other examples of this type of partially-
coincident narration is the specific metafictional relationship between the narrator and the narratee/protagonist. Given the larger issues of this study, our concern in this section will be principally with this specific relationship. Most of the criticism on *If on a winter’s night a traveler* addresses the status and identity of the Reader, the “you,” and how authorial and flesh-and-blood readers relate to this “you.” Clearly these relations are important to anyone reading the novel and will be something to which we’ll return. However, our triadic analysis invites us to direct critical attention to the narrator’s status as well; most criticism of the novel shortchanges the narrator’s status by privileging (almost exclusively) the narratee/reader relation.

The novel’s opening sentence, “You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino’s new novel *If on a winter’s night a traveler*” (3), distinguishes the novel from other metafictional texts and begins establishing the relationship between narrator and narratee/protagonist. In most instances of metafiction, the narrator authors the text he is presenting; these narratives comment both on reading and writing. The narrator of *If on a winter’s night* does not author the intradiegetic text(s) or create the characters; rather he reports on them, seemingly without the ability to influence them. Calvino’s novel isn’t so much about writing as it is about reading; one of its principal effects is to elicit our examination of our reading process. The opening sentence might have easily been, but is not, “You are about to begin reading my new novel.” Compare Calvino’s start with a section from John Barth’s “Life Story,” a second-person metafictional narrative in which the narrator is the narrative’s (quite self-deprecating) writer and the narratee is the reader:
The reader! You, dogged, uninsultable, print-oriented bastard, it’s you I’m addressing, who else, from inside this monstrous fiction. You’ve read me this far, then? Even this far? For what discreditable motive? How is it you don’t go to a movie, watch TV, stare at a wall, play tennis with a friend, make amorous advances to the person who comes to your mind when I speak of amorous advances? Can nothing surfeit, saturate you, turn you off? Where’s your shame? (123)

Rather than a metafictional writer or intradiegetic stand-in for Calvino (as the narrator of “Life Story” is a stand-in for Barth), the narrator of If on a winter’s night is a guide of sorts, a reporter who – using present tense – informs the “you” reader what he (the “you”) is doing. Take the start of Chapter 2: “You have now read about thirty pages and you’re becoming caught up in the story. At a certain point you remark: ‘This sentence sounds somehow familiar. In fact, this whole passage reads like something I’ve read before’” (25). The narrator makes two types of observations: one, of the narratee/protagonist’s actions (as in the passage quoted above from page 25); and two, of the narratee/protagonist’s personality and character. We see the second type later in a passage about the Reader’s reading habits, a passage that observes for the “you” certain “conclusions” (i.e. conscious thoughts) that the “you” has already made:

You are the sort of person who, on principle, no longer expects anything of anything. There are plenty, younger than you or less young, who live in the expectation of extraordinary experiences: from books, from people, from journeys, from events, from what tomorrow has in store. But not you. You know that the best you can expect is to avoid the worst. This is the conclusion you have reached, in your personal life and also in general matters, even international affairs. (4)

The present-tense “you” address reveals a motivation that is different from typical narrator’s motivations; we are no longer in the world of Harry Bailey’s “sentence and
solas.” Rather than instruct or entertain, the narrator of *If on a winter’s night a traveler* observes and informs. If the narrative were in past tense we might identify the motivation as reminder or retrospective analysis. If the narrative were in future tense (as in the how-to narratives I’ll address later in the chapter) we would identify its motivation as admonition or prediction. In both past and future tenses the narrator would more likely be telling the narratee something that he wouldn’t already know (or, at least, not have at the surface of his consciousness in the case of past tense).

With the present tense, however, we encounter a narrative that is nearly completely redundant telling. James Phelan notes that

> redundant telling occurs when a narrator gives an unmotivated report of information to a narratee that the narratee already possesses. The motive for ‘redundant telling’ belongs not to the narrator but to the author, who needs to convey the information to the authorial audience. Indeed, the full, though more cumbersome, label for the technique is ‘redundant telling, necessary disclosure’.” (“Redundant Telling” 210)

Phelan goes on to recognize that “some instances of second person narration may consist entirely of redundant telling” (210). In this regard, Calvino’s novel (and other such present tense second-person) exposes its own artifice and synthetic nature more readily than other modes of narration in which redundant telling is not as pervasive. However, the relaxation of mimesis and exposure of the synthetic is not by necessity a detriment, though many readers consider a lapse of mimesis as an artistic flaw. In the case of *If on a winter’s night a traveler* the reader’s recognition of the novel’s artifice is crucial to an understanding of the novel, whose “foregrounding of the synthetic leads Calvino’s audience to a wonderfully complicated self-consciousness about its own reading activity”
The redundant telling that dominates the novel also influences how flesh-and-blood readers and the authorial audience relate to the narratee/protagonist “you.” Because the narrative is comprised almost exclusively of redundant telling – of the authorial audience needing something the “you” already knows – we as real readers experience an epistomological distance from the “you” Reader. Speaking more generally of the power of “you,” Irene Kacandes writes, “consciously or unconsciously, the audience-readers may respond to the second person as the pronoun of both direct address and apostrophe, swinging between the dialogic and apostrophic poles, alternately feeling themselves called to participate in a conversation or overhearing and recognizing vous as the call to another” (“Narrative Apostrophe” 337).

There are a number of other definite and deliberate ways that Calvino’s novel draws us into the role of “you,” the Reader. Besides experiencing the obvious and effective self-referentiality and readerly address of the novel’s first sentence, we also encounter an initial overlap of sorts between our activities as real readers and the “you”’s activities as protagonist. The opening chapter offers multiple options (such as we’ll see below with how-to narration) for our reading experience in an attempt to address a wide range of flesh-and-blood readers: “Perhaps you started leafing through the book already in the shop. Or were you unable to, because it was wrapped in its cocoon of cellophane? […] Or perhaps the bookseller didn’t wrap the volume; he gave it to you in a bag” (7).

Even if we did not come to the novel in any of these ways, we still feel addressed because the inclusion of multiple options seems to suggest even further options, one of which
applies to us. Moreover, with the introduction of the first intradiegetic novel we read almost exactly what the Reader reads, further sharing in his activities, in this case his frustration with the premature ending.

However, as the novel progresses our associations with the “you” Reader begin to loosen. This is in part a result of the extended second-person narration in which more specific story details limit our overlap with the narratee/protagonist. For instance, we encounter fewer and fewer multiple options (such as the “perhaps” of the previously cited passage). To a similar effect, as the novel progresses we encounter fewer instances of “you” and more instances of “Reader,” the proper noun making the reference singular and thus providing more definition and less opportunity for real readers to associate with the narratee/protagonist. More importantly, however, as the novel progresses our focus diverges from the Reader’s: namely, we experience different narrative instabilities. The Reader’s actions are motivated obstensibly by his desire for resolution in the stories he begins but cannot complete. We, on the other hand, sense fairly early on that he will never find this resolution – that by the fifth intradiegetic novel or so we recognize Calvino’s device – and thus are interested in the resolution of the Reader’s story (i.e. his courtship of Ludmilla) rather than the completion of the intradiegetic novels. Our eventual distancing from the “you” Reader helps objectify the metafictional theme of examining our reading habits, a theme we will address below.

We need to return to the novel’s opening sentence to address another aspect of our reading as authorial and flesh-and-blood readers: the “literary performative” nature of the
narrative. In her analysis of the novel, Irene Kacandes discusses the way in which we as real readers “perform what one reads” (“Are You in the Text?” 141). Her own example of the literary performative is, “you are proceeding through this sentence nicely” (141). This type of performance enacting the narrative is possible only in texts whose subject is some sort of discourse and seems to be the extreme of Fish’s “Affective Stylistics.” However, in the strictest sense we don’t perform Calvino’s text as we do Kacandes’s own example. If we were to actually perform the novel’s opening, for instance, the first sentence would have to be “you are beginning to read Italo Calvino’s new novel” or “you have just begun to read Italo Calvino’s new novel.” Phelan identifies with this opening sentence the rhetorical effect of Calvino inviting yet simultaneously distancing us from actually performing the text: “the addressed ‘you’ is about to begin reading the novel, while we are already reading it. In this way, Calvino’s first sentence asks the authorial audience to take its first step toward self-reflexiveness, and that step seems to reinforce the distinction between authorial and narrative audiences” (Reading People 134).

Just as the Reader’s status shifts (i.e. from a generalized “you” to a specified character), so too does the status of the narrator seem to shift. At the start of the novel (the one we as flesh-and-blood readers are reading), the narrator is homodiegetic – existing on the fictional plane, addressing the protagonist directly. He maintains this identity at the beginning of the chapter entitled “If on a winter’s night a traveler,” describing through summary what the Reader is reading: “The novel begins in a railway
station, a locomotive huffs, steam from a piston covers the opening of the chapter, a cloud of smoke hides part of the first paragraph” (10). However, the narrator’s status seems to modulate as the narrative shifts from summary of the intradiegetic text to an actual reproduction of that text. After giving a brief introduction to this intradiegetic novel during which the narrator speaks of the novel as an external entity to his own narrative, the narrator seamlessly adopts the “I” of the intradiegetic novel, now becoming an intradiegetic autodiegetic narrator: “I am the man who comes and goes between the bar and the telephone booth. Or, rather: that man is called ‘I’ and you know nothing else about him, just as the station is called only ‘station’ and beyond it there exists nothing except the unanswered signal of a telephone ringing in a dark room of a dark city” (11).

The first sentence of this passage directly reprints what the “you” is reading, whereas the second is the narrator’s self-reflexive statement about how he reads the same text the “you” is reading. With this shift in identity from homodiegetic in relation to the Reader to autodiegetic in relation to the text the Reader begins, the narrator models the type of shift the “you” – and more importantly the authorial audience and flesh-and-blood readers – will make throughout the novel: the “you” reader is expected to internalize the stories he begins but never finishes (just as the narrator takes on the “I” in the passage above). In similar ways, we as authorial and flesh-and-blood readers need to adopt the “you” address at the same time we recognize our distinction from this “you.” The narrator’s shifting identity (and shifting relation to the narratee/protagonist) is another invitation for us to be self-reflexive about our reading activity.
When we do examine our own reading (in large part accessible through our analysis of the Reader’s activity), we recognize ways in which our real-world desire for closure and unity affects how we read. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne Booth identifies three general expectations that readers have of literature: intellectual, cognitive, and practical. Booth claims that readers maintain “a strong intellectual curiosity about facts,” “a strong desire to see any pattern or form completed,” and “a strong desire for the success or failure of those [characters] we love or hate, admire or detest” (125). Echoing the first two of Booth’s three readerly expectations (the two formal expectations), the “you” of Calvino’s novel states his investment in reading:

> Gentleman, first I must say that in books I like to read only what is written, and to connect the details with the whole, and to consider certain readings as definitive; and I like to keep one book distinct from the other, each for what it has that is different and new; and I especially like books to be read from beginning to end. (256-7)

Clearly, the Reader desires narrative closure and unity; the explicit statement we receive here at the end of the work seems unnecessary considering the reader’s mode of reading that we have experienced for over two hundred pages. Yet because of its fragmentary narrative structure, Calvino’s novel denies him either unity or closure. The Reader laments, “for a while now, everything has been going wrong for me: it seems to me that in the world there now exists only stories that remain suspended or get lost along the way” (257). Because of its infused interest and expectation in literary unity and closure
and the subsequent refusal of these expectations, *If on a winter’s night a traveler* serves as a poignant critique of the psychology of reading.¹

The work’s fragmentary narrative structure disrupts any expectation the internal “you” (or the authorial and flesh-and-blood readers) has for narrative unity and closure. That the intradiegetic novels provide only beginnings frustrates our process of reading and exposes the Reader’s powerful desire for closure: “you fling the book on the floor, you would hurl it out of the window, even out of the closed window, through the slats of the Venetian blinds; let them shred its incongruous quires let sentences, words, morphemes, phonemes gush forth, beyond recomposition into discourse” (26). Here the “you” Reader serves as a model for our response to this lack of closure, for just like him, we have grown interested in the incomplete stories of the ten novel beginnings. Moreover, the ten novel-beginnings, seemingly unrelated to one another, deny the Reader literary unity by lacking cohesion. Likewise, because the reader within the novel encounters only fragmentary narratives, his investment in the characters (Booth’s

¹ Readers’ frustrations with *If on a winter’s night a traveler* parallel the responses many of my students have to Tim O’Brien’s *In the Lake of the Woods*, another novel that exposes and critiques our desires for closure both in life and literature. Almost invariably the students are disappointed with the lack of closure in O’Brien’s novel; many times this disappointment is so strong that it “ruins” the entire novel for them. It is particularly interesting, especially considering my discussion of psychological expectations for literature above, that students are surprised when they reach the end of the novel to find no resolution, for early on in O’Brien’s novel, we learn that we will not achieve answers: “In any case, Kathy Wade is forever missing, and if you require solutions, you will have to look beyond these pages. Or read a different book” (narrator’s footnote 21, page 30). Their desire for closure and answers is so strong that these students disregard (or psychologically seem to forget) this passage warning them of the novel’s lack of resolution.
practical expectation) is teased but not realized; he seems to be more frustrated with
being cheated by the publishers than with the abrupt interruptions of the actual stories he
is reading. Eventually, his preoccupation with a character of whom he knows something
and, thus, can become engaged with (the Other Reader), supplements his interest in the
literary characters he encounters in the intradiegetic novel beginnings:

your mind is occupied with two simultaneous concerns: the interior one,
with your reading, and the other, with Ludmilla, who is late for your
appointment. You concentrate on your reading, trying to shift your
concern from her to the book, as if hoping to see her come toward you
from the pages. But you’re no longer able to read, the novel has stalled on
the page before your eyes, as if only Ludmilla’s arrival could set the chain
of events in motion again. (140)

He even seems to begin to hope for an incomplete narrative in order for him to continue
to justify relations with the Other Reader. In slightly different ways, we too shift our
interest from the incomplete intradiegetic novels to the progression of the Reader’s
courtship with Ludmilla.

In order to recognize fully the effect of Calvino’s frustration of the expectations
Booth ascribes to readers, we need to explore the reasons why we as readers harbor such
expectations and the purposes they serve. Although Booth does not explicitly address
why we have these three expectations, he implies that we do because of literary
convention. To risk oversimplification of his analysis, we have encountered unity and
closure, facts, and character development to such a degree that we have grown
accustomed to expecting these facets of a narrative. However, there is a “larger” reason
for readers to desire these aspects of a narrative: psychological comfort. Readers’ desire
for closure and unity within a text points to a larger need for psychological closure and
unity within their actual lives, a need that Calvino attempts to critique in the novel.
Throughout the work, he makes explicit comparison between the act of reading and the
way in which we live our lives; after realizing his desires for literature, the Reader
ponders his comparable desires for his own life:

the thing that most exasperates you is to find yourself at the mercy of the
fortuitous, the aleatory, the random, in things and in human actions--
carelessness, approximation, imprecision, whether your own or others’. In
such instances your dominant passion is the impatience to erase the
disturbing effects of that arbitrariness or distraction, to re-establish the
normal course of events. (254)

Beyond critiquing the way we read, the novel critiques the manner in which we live,
suggesting in that in this postmodern world, it is not fruitful to expect, even worse to
desire, closure or unity or facts.

Yet the novel’s critique of individuals’ psychological desire for closure in the real
world (analogous to their desire for unity and closure within literature) is a problematic
one. So far, we have focused our analysis of If on a winter’s night a traveler on the
Reader and his failure to find the facts, his desire for unity and closure, and his
investment in characters during his experience of reading; however, the novel offers
another level of reading: ours as the flesh-and-blood readers. The work’s second-person
narration contributes to a foregrounding of metaliterary reading as well as the more
common level of actual reading done by an actual reader. Just as we analyze the internal
reader’s experiences, we must analyze our own. We must question how well the internal
critique of the psychology of reading relates to our experience reading this novel: are our expectations frustrated in the same manner as the Reader’s are?

The answer is a vexed one, for we are left wondering how the implied author intends for us to interpret the closure at the end of the novel. Thematically, the story finds closure: we witness the two readers’ affair consummated in marriage. Although the plots and characters of the intradiegetic novel beginnings never get realized, we can feel a sense of closure and unity within the story of the two readers. But the second-person narration makes the formal ending ambiguous: “And you say, ‘just a moment, I’ve almost finished If on winter’s night a traveler by Italo Calvino’” (260). The use of “almost” complicates the notion of an ending, especially considering the reading options that the novel has modeled for us earlier in the library scene, in particular that mode of reading that does not end when the work “ends.” More literally, the Reader (and the flesh-and-blood reader) actually finishes the novel with the completion of this sentence: “almost” introduces a semantic and mimetic complication similar to what we encounter with the novel’s opening sentence. Still, Calvino’s novel offers us a sense of literary closure not experienced by the internal reader in his reading experience.

What the internal reader does experience is a sense of closure in his life. He undergoes an epiphany of sorts when he contemplates the reduction that all stories are about life and death: he is asked, “do you believe that every story must have a beginning and an end…the ultimate meaning to which all stories refer has two faces: the continuity of life, the inevitability of death”; to which he thinks, “you stop for a moment and reflect
on these words. Then, in a flash, you decide you want to marry Ludmilla” (259). But is this sense of closure faulty or sincere? Are we to interpret that the protagonist agrees that all stories are reduced to tales about life and death and, thus, his decision to marry is somehow a reaction against the incomplete narratives he has read? Or are we to interpret that the protagonist now recognizes his futility in seeking completion and, thus, his decision to marry as a response to this recognition? Likewise, are we to conclude that his reaction to the seeming dualism of narratives is a reliable one or not?

Whereas the novel succeeds in critiquing the process of reading through the depiction of the internal reader, its dual layering (internal reader and external flesh-and-blood reader) undermines the consistency of that critique. Unlike the internal reader, we experience a fairly stable sense of closure and unity. Thus, although the internal reader is able to make some connection between his desire for unity in literature and his desire for unity in life, our own needs for psychological closure aren’t challenged: not only do we experience literary closure despite threatening non-closure, we also witness closure in the marriage between the readers. While the novel posits strong critiques of the process of reading on the level of intradiegesis, it ultimately conforms to impulses for unity and closure on the level of extradiegetic reading and reaffirms our psychological desires within the real-world.

More commonly, however, examples of this type of partial coincident narration do not specify the narratee/protagonist as a reader, and therefore we do not respond to the “you”
in the same way we do in an autotelic text such as Calvino’s. For instance, we are
drawn into the narratee/protagonist role in Rumer Godden’s “You Need to Go Upstairs”
(a story we looked at briefly in the introduction) only to expose the ways in which we
differ from that protagonist: we are invited to share in the blind girl’s everyday
experience of using the lavatory in order to show us first-hand how different it is from
our own. Charles Johnson’s “Moving Pictures,” a narrative in the second-person
describing the experience of going to the theatre and watching a movie, employs a
narrator who seems to address a real, singular narratee/protagonist (as opposed to the
hypothetical or potential narratee/protagonist we’ll see in how-to narration below) about
whom the narrator seems to at times know very little (“if you have written this film,
which is possible”) and at others know a detailed history. It is this oscillation within the
relationship between narrator and narratee/protagonist that dictates the reader’s
engagement with the story.

Johnson’s story begins by telling “you” in present-tense about sitting in the
“Neptune Theatre waiting for the thin, overhead lights to dim with a sense of respect,
even reverence” (115). Although the narrator provides the detail of a specific theatre, the
story quickly counters this detail with a generalizing of the narratee/protagonist. Later in
the first paragraph, we get

Perhaps you have written this movie. Perhaps not. Regardless, you come
to it as everyone does, as a seeker groping in the darkness for light, hoping
something magical will be beamed from above, and no matter how bad
this matinee is, or silly, something deep and maybe even too dangerous to
talk loudly about will indeed happen to you and the others before this
drama reels to its last transparent frame. (115-6)
Here the narrator seems to negate the specificity of the opening sentence, suggesting that he does not really know whom he is addressing (or the situation of that address). This move does two things rhetorically. One, shifting the narrator’s level of knowledge exposes the artifice and synthetic nature of the story. (The synthetic also surfaces with some redundant telling later in the story: “You won’t forget the evening he asked you to his home for a long conference” (119); if this is something the narratee/protagonist won’t forget, why remind him of it here?) Two, the shift to a generalized and unspecified narratee/protagonist works to universalize the experience of movie watching, drawing the reader into the role of “you.” A statement like, “you come to it as everyone does,” infuses the “you” with thematic qualities: here the “you” is situated in a common experience and becomes a generic stand-in for all movie audiences. It is important to the story’s over-all impact that we are pulled into the role of “you” early on. This is especially true considering that the narrator soon moves back into a detailed description of a specific movie-goer, foregrounding the mimetic:

Outside, across town, you have put away for ninety minutes the tedious, repetitive job that is, obviously, beneath your talents, sensitivity, and education (a degree in English), the once beautiful woman – or wife – a former model (local), college dancer or semiprofessional actress named Megan or Daphne, who has grown tired of you, or you of her, and talks now of legal separation and finding herself, the children from a former, frighteningly brief marriage whom you don’t want to lose, the mortgage, the alimony, IRS audit, the aging, gin-fattened face that once favored a rock star’s but now frowns back at you in the bathroom mirror […]. (116)

This oscillation between generic thematizing and specific mimesis allows Johnson to ground the experience in specificity and at the same time speak generally about the
movie-going experience in order to draw us in. But lest Johnson risk losing the engagement of the flesh-and-blood reader, he has the narrator highlight the thematic (“no matter whether the film is yours or not, it pulls you in, reels your perception like a trout”) before he offers the story’s concluding comment about the illusion of escape and eventual return to reality: “you climb inside [your car], sit, furiously cranking the starter, then swear and lower your forehead to the steering wheel, which is, as anyone in Hollywood can tell you, conduct unbecoming a triple-threat talent like yourself: the producer, star, and director in the longest, most fabulous show of all” (124). Clearly, the “most fabulous show of all” is the protagonist’s own life. The experience of watching a movie, living vicariously through its characters, also serves as a metaphor for our experience reading literature, especially second-person narration. A metafictional piece, Johnson’s story parallels the protagonist’s escape into cinema with our own relation to literature. “Moving Pictures” exemplifies through both form and content the ways in which we enter into literature (and cinema), and it ultimately suggests – quite pessimistically – that usually (and here the second-person narration helps thematize the experience) the temporary escape only highlights our real-world frustrations and disappointments. As Johnson’s story ends so does our engagement as the “you,” leaving us to our own lives: “life, it’s a messy thing,” speaks the narrator, “hardly as orderly as art” (116).

In the introduction, I looked briefly at Bill Manhire’s “The Brain of Katherine Mansfield” as evidence of rhetorical effects distinct to second-person narration. In that brief
analysis, we identified a complex relationship among the narrator, the implied author figure, narratee, and reader. I want to return to that discussion here, as we examine another manifestation of this type of partial coincident narration – choose-your-own-adventure stories. “The Brain of Katherine Mansfield” (and other such choose-your-own-adventure stories) employs a joint narratee/protagonist and a discrete narrator. However, these types of stories differ from other types in this category of partial coincident narration because of a distinct intradiegetic reference to the flesh-and-blood reader that complicates the relationship between the narrator and the narratee/protagonist.

Let us look again at the story’s opening section:

1

You are just an ordinary New Zealander. You have strength, intelligence and luck, though you are not particularly good at languages. Your family and friends like you, and there is one special friend who really thinks you’re swell. Yours is a well-rounded personality; your horoscope is usually good; your school report says ‘satisfactory.’ But somehow you are restless. Your life is missing challenge and excitement. You want to make things happen. Go to 2. (177)

All but the paragraph’s final sentence is consistent with the narrative mode we find in Calvino’s and Johnson’s texts: a discrete narrator reports to a joint narratee/protagonist what that narratee/protagonist is doing. However, with the final sentence (“Go to 2.”) the story shifts its address to the flesh-and-blood reader who will turn the actual page.² The immediate question is, To whom do we attribute that final sentence?

² Most choose-your-own-adventure stories expose this shift even more explicitly, typically directing the reader to turn to an actual page. Here is a typical direction, taken from Crash Landing!, a volume from the popular adolescent TwistAPlot series: “If
The easiest answer would be that the same narrator addresses two separate audiences. But because the two addresses are so different rhetorically, we would want to separate their functions, something that a single-narrator theory would not encourage. Perhaps, then, we have two different narrators, one intradiegetic and the other extra- or meta-diegetic (to borrow Genette’s terms\(^3\)). There are two problems with this option: one, we should refrain from calling whoever speaks “Go to 2.” a narrator simply because “Go to 2.” (and other such directions) does not constitute a narrative act. And two, because it addresses a flesh-and-blood reader, “Go to 2.” doesn’t seem to conform to a narrator function; that is, because of the engagement with the flesh-and-blood reader, this direction doesn’t reside on either the story or discourse plane, where we expect to find narrators. Narrators don’t have the ability to transcend ontological planes and address extradiegetic readers. Rather, “Go to 2.” resides on the literary plane, where we locate implied and actual authors (and authorial and flesh-and-blood readers). But this address doesn’t seem to be made by an implied author since it is explicit rather than implied.\(^4\) Once the implied author makes itself explicitly present – and therefore no longer implied, which runs counter to Booth’s notion of an implied author – it no longer carries the same function as a truly implied author. “The Brain of Katherine Mansfield” (and other such

\(^3\) For definitions of these terms, refer to Genette’s *Narrative Discourse*, page 228.
choose-your-own-adventure stories) seems to necessitate an additional link in the standard chain of narrative transmission (i.e. flesh-and-blood author – implied author – narrator – narratee – implied/authorial reader – flesh-and-blood reader), something that resides between narrator and implied author. Considering its function is primarily to direct the flesh-and-blood reader, I shall call this new link in the rhetorical chain an “extradiegetic director,” something that seems particular to choose-your-own-adventure stories.

In typical postmodern fashion, Manhire plays with these slippery roles and functions, further complicating how we organize different voices within the narrative. In section two, he elides the intradiegetic narrator’s function with the function of the extradiegetic director. Before we get our directions as flesh-and-blood readers to turn to a particular page, the intradiegetic narrator, addressing us as the narratee/protagonist, bleeds together our dual roles of protagonist and reader:

> It is getting late. The dark clouds of a winter afternoon swoop down over the familiar hills and houses. You shiver. The time of your first decision is upon you. Do you dare to turn the pages of adventure?

> If you decide to accompany the old man, go to 5.
> If you decide to go home and think it over, go to 11. (178)

Manhire employs deliberate word choice here, using “turn the page” during the intradiegetic section. Moreover, he uses ambiguous direction in the extradiegetic section: although we read the last two sentences as direct address to the flesh-and-blood reader

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4 Moreover, we would hesitate to attribute this statement to an implied author because oftentimes (e.g. the direction quoted from *Crash Landing!* in note 2 above) the voice of
(i.e. “if you decide to have the protagonist accompany the old man, go to 5.”), the line break reinforcing a shift of address, Manhire makes it possible in semantics that the sentence refers directly to the protagonist, even though the protagonist resides on an ontological plane that doesn’t involve “going to 5.” Even more so than other types of second-person narration, choose-your-own-adventures stories unite our readerly functions (such as turning the page) with protagonist/character functions (such as choosing how to act within a story world) by destabilizing the distinction between fictional and literary planes.

We also find the coincidence of narratee and protagonist in a class of second-person narratives that I will term how-to narration. How-to narration has three defining characteristics: (1) a narratee who is also the story’s protagonist and who oscillates between being a defined character and a general, hypothetical actant; (2) the use of the doxastic modality (narrator predicts something may occur) and deontic modality (narrator instructs character to do something that will enable other events to occur in the narrative world) to depict and direct potential posterior events rather than actual anterior or concurrent events; and (3) an effaced narrator who, through direct address, describes what typically does or may happen to the addressee in a given situation and directs corresponding action. The following short passage from Junot Diaz’s “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie” gives a taste of this mode:

these directions seem distinct from what we imagine is the implied author’s.
The directions were in your best handwriting, so her parents won’t think you’re an idiot. Get up from the couch and check the parking lot. Nothing. If the girl’s local, don’t sweat it. She’ll flow over when she’s good and ready. Sometimes she’ll run into her other friends and a whole crowd will show up at your apartment and even though that means you ain’t getting shit it will be fun anyway and you’ll wish these people would come over more often. Sometimes the girl won’t flow over at all and the next day in school she’ll say sorry, smile and you’ll be stupid enough to believe her and ask her out again. (144)

In this final section of the chapter, I want to explore the features of how-to narration, working toward a poetics of the mode. I give special attention to a narratological phenomenon particular to how-to narration – conditional narration, narration of events that might possibly occur sometime in the future, which as we will see confuses the ontological status of how-to narration and significantly influences reader response.

There exists very little criticism specific to how-to narration. Typically second-person criticism either glosses over the how-to form, neglects it entirely, or umbrellas it under the general category of second-person. Bruce Morrissette’s 1965 essay “Narrative ‘You’ in Contemporary Literature,” one of the earliest and most foundational examinations of second-person narration, all but dismisses how-to narration: “leaving aside the imperative or command uses of ‘you,’ which appear to have little relation to the mode in question” (2). Later essays continue this relative neglect: Uri Margolin’s “Narrative ‘You’ Revisited” (1990), a proposed sequel to Morrissette, passes over “cases where no actual addressee could be literally included in the reference class” as “metaphorical usage[s] of ‘you’” (428). Brian Richardson’s “The Poetics and Politics of Second Person Narrative” (1991) is one of the first essays to distinguish how-to narration
from other forms of second-person narration; however, he devotes little more than a
page to how-to (what he calls “subjunctive”) narration in comparison to the over-eight
pages he spends on “standard” second-person narration. Similarly, Monika Fludernik’s
“Second-Person Narrative as a Test Case for Narratology: The Limits of Realism” allots
only two paragraphs to how-to narration. Since Richardson, there have been a handful of
essays to address how-to narration specifically (e.g. Uri Margolin’s “Story Modalised, or
the Grammar of Virtuality” and James Phelan’s “Narratee, Narrative Audience, and
Second-Person Narration,” to which we’ll return later), but these have been the
exception.

One thing these critics share is an impulse to naturalize how-to narration with
“real-world” texts. Richardson, for instance, links how-to narration to “the pseudo-
narrative forms of the cookbook, the travel guide, and the self-help manual. (“Poetics”
313). Morrissette, the father of second-person criticism, also invokes non-fictional
modes of writing to describe this branch of second-person, though he doesn’t explicitly
sub-divide as Richardson does. Hopkins and Perkins sum up Morrissette’s tendency to
naturalize:

Morrissette discusses the ‘guidebook you’ (‘You see the Cabildo on your
left and the Presbytery on your right’), the ‘advertisement’ you (‘You will
love your new car’), and the ‘cookbook’ you (‘You add four eggs, then the
flour mixture’). Later he alludes to the ‘courtroom’ you (‘You went to his
house, found him alone, and shot him’)… Morrissette denigrates the
‘journalistic’ you.” (122)

Texts such as Moore’s *Self-Help* (which pokes fun at sincere self-help literature)
encourage this naturalization. However, their tendency to naturalize seems to be one of
the principal ways in which critics gloss over how-to narration. Their analogies (coupled with their nominal critical attention) imply that how-to narration is but a playful fictionalizing of non-serious literatures such as cookbooks and user manuals, a literary form that doesn’t warrant much attention.

Looking at how second-person narration was first written also helps explain critics’ neglect of how-to narration. Rex Stout’s 1929 *How Like a God*, considered by most to be the first “true second-person” novel, opens with a one-page heterodiegetic description (entirely in italics) of the protagonist preparing to mount a set of stairs. Here is the last section of the first page:

*A vast intricacy of reasons, arguments, proofs -- you are timid and vengeless, you are cautious and would be sage, you would be lost even if safe, you are futile, silly, evil, petty, absurd -- he could not have spoken in all his years the limitless network of appeals, facts, memories, that darted at him and through him as his foot sought the third step.*

*He heard them all...* (3)

The italics then give way to standard type, beginning a section of second-person narrative that starts, “you are timid and vengeless” (4). This opening transition is particularly significant because it cues us into reading the second-person narrative sections (which make up most of the novel) as a narrator speaking to himself – that is, as first-person internal monologue. Considering the innovation of second-person narration at the time, it is not surprising that Stout’s novel would include such explicit direction for reading: it is important (in Stout’s mind at least) for readers encountering second-person narrative for the first time to be able to contextualize it with traditional first- or third-person narrative. Stout’s literary strategy anticipates how critics respond to how-to narration. Critics’
relative neglect suggests that (1) critics and readers tend to privilege works that can be assimilated to traditional first- and third-person narration opting for second-person texts that more closely resemble first- or third-person narrations (witness Richardson’s category of “standard” second-person), and (2) how-to narration resists the critical strategies that we typically apply to other, more traditional modes of narration. It is this second issue that I want to address here by building a poetics of how-to narration, distinct from that of more traditional narrative modes, that will allow for analysis particular to how-to.

Despite its brevity, Richardson’s analysis of how-to (“subjunctive”) narration serves as a good springboard for my analysis of “how-to.” Richardson begins his brief analysis by identifying what he sees as the three defining features of how-to narration: “the consistent use of the imperative, the frequent employment of the future tense, and the strong distinction between the narrator and the narratee” (“Poetics” 319). Although his first two characteristics are not inaccurate, they do, however, fail to account for the complexity of mood and tense (as well as modality) that we find in how-to. First off, how-to is not explicitly command, the most common manifestation of the imperative mood. Rather than reading how-to as “do x or else,” we recognize the inherent (and sometimes explicit) sense of admonition and instruction: if you wanted to learn how to do x, this is what you would do. Other instances in how-to suggest a sense of predestination: if you put yourself in position x, y will occur. In other words, how-to typically does not maintain a consistent grammatical mood (or, for that matter, a consistent tense). The
opening of Moore’s “How” illustrates this well: “Begin by meeting him in a class, in a bar, at a rummage sale. Maybe he teaches sixth grade. Manages a hardware store. Foreman at a carton factory” and later, “When sad or confused, walk uptown to the movies. Buy popcorn” (55). Moore’s opening employs both conditional and imperative grammar: “Maybe he teaches sixth grade” is conditional; “buy popcorn” is imperative. Later on the same page, we encounter the indicative: “A week, a month, a year, and he has become your family.” Rather than try to confine how-to narration to a single mood, imperative, it is more useful to think of how-to in terms of modalities, a move Uri Margolin makes in his 1997 “Story Modalised, or the Grammar of Virtuality.” Margolin contends that “prospective (future-oriented)” narratives – of which how-to is an example are dominated by one of four modalities: the doxastic (speaker’s belief that something may take place); the hypothetical (a claim that certain possibilities of action exist if some prerequisite condition is fulfilled); the optative (speaker’s wish that such and such should befall his addressee); and the deontic (the speaker’s instructing his addressee to perform certain actions so that some other events could take place in the narrated domain). (49)

How-to oscillates among these four modalities, though it is most often a mixture of the doxastic and the deontic: the narrator, through direct address, describes what typically does or may happen to the addressee in a given situation and instructs/directs corresponding action. Behind this complicated terminology is our actual reading experience, which maintains a fairly consistent effect: we engage with the entire narrative (regardless of any shift in grammatical mood or modality) as admonition rather than command, possibility and prediction rather than report. The effect overrides the grammar
in large part because we as readers understand that we are not in the actual dramatic situation, that we (as “you”) are hypothetical actants and not committed to any course of action. Likewise, even though every clause is not prefaced by “if,” there is an encompassing, assumed conditional that an addressee acknowledges when he/she chooses to read the story: if you wanted to know how to do x, you would do y and may undergo these experiences.

Richardson’s third characteristic (“the strong distinction between the narrator and the narratee”) also needs some elaboration. Most noticeably, because the narrator presumes to be instructing the narratee, we experience a cognitive distance between the narrator and the narratee/protagonist: the narrator assumes to know more than the narratee does, at least when it comes to the “lesson” of the story, thus creating an (assumed) position of authority. In this sense, Richardson is correct when he identifies a “strong distinction between the narrator and narratee.” However, Richardson’s articulation is somewhat misleading, for although there exists a literal distance in “how-to” narratives (i.e. the narrator and narratee are different individuals with different levels of knowledge and experience), there also exists a presumed similarity between the narrator and the (hypothetical) narratee: in nearly all instances, we get the impression that the narrator transfers attributes of him/herself onto his/her hypothetical narratee. Just as Gerald Prince observed that a narrator’s discourse will reveal traits about the narratee,⁵ we gain an insight into the how-to narrator by his/her instructions for the hypothetical
narratee/protagonist. It is also important to keep in mind that the hypothetical narratee is a construct of the narrator; thus, we can also gain insight into the narrator by analyzing how he/she constructs the narratee. For instance, when we look at the passage from “How” above, we are invited to form ideas about the personality of a narrator who would advise combating loneliness and sadness with a movie and popcorn. That is, although the narrator is not explicitly describing herself (it is a safe assumption that this narrator is female), her admonitions characterize her well (though sometimes unwittingly); this is typical of “how-to” narrators. Importantly, one gets the impression that the how-to narrator speaks from some sort of experience, and we wonder whether or not a how-to narrator has lived this experience before. More generally, we must ask where the narrator’s assumed authority comes from. On one hand, our real-world analogies to cookbooks or user manuals serve us well: perhaps we encounter a narrator who is akin to a cook-book author, whom we assume has prepared the recipe before; or maybe we encounter a narrator analogous to authors of certain self-help manuals, whose authority does not necessarily result from first-hand personal experience. On the other hand, however, these analogies don’t work perfectly because the complex (and at times, cynical) relationship between author and audience in how-to does not mirror the sincere relationship between author and audience we find in real-world parallels.

Not all how-to narrators associate with their narrative material and narratee in the same way. Although there will always be some connection between the narrator’s past

5 See Prince’s “Introduction to the Study of the Narratee” in Jane Tompkins’s Reader-
and the prescribed future of the narratee, we do encounter different degrees of
association. For instance, the narrator of Junot Diaz’s “How to Date a Browngirl,
Blackgirl, Whitegirl, of Halfie” seems to speak much more from personal experience than
does the narrator of John Updike’s “How to Love America and Leave it at the Same
Time.” If we look specifically at how language use relates to the content of the
instruction (between the narrator’s discourse and his/her material), we sense two different
associations:

Wait for your brother and your mother to leave the apartment.
You’ve already told them that you’re feeling too sick to go to Union City
to visit that tia who likes to squeeze your nuts. (He’s gotten big, she’ll
say.) And even though your moms know you ain’t sick you stuck to your
story until finally she said, Go ahead and stay, malcriado. (Diaz 143)

Perhaps the kids win, and you sit there looking out through the
window thinking, This is America, a hamburger kingdom, one cuisine,
under God, indivisible, with pickles and potato chips for all. (Updike 45)

The narrator’s voice in the Diaz passage conforms to society’s expectations of how
someone who has experience with the prescribed actions would speak; that is, we would
not expect to have a narrator who is speaking with authority on the issue of coaxing a
date into “giving it up” (147) to narrate in heightened diction or highly structured
sentences. Thus, we are invited to assume a close association between the narrator and
the detailed material and, thus, between the narrator and his hypothetical narratee.
Throughout the story, in fact, Diaz utilizes this ethnically-charged diction to characterize
the narrator and paradoxically assert and deny his authority. Yet when we turn to the

Response Criticism (1980).
Updike passage, we identify a much looser connection between the narrator and the prescribed action (and, in turn, between the narrator and the hypothetical narratee). The language of Updike’s narrator is most clearly jaded, far too cynical to be associated with the focalization and attitude of the protagonist throughout the story. Unlike “How to Date,” “How to Love America” distinguishes between the narrator’s voice and the hypothetical narratee’s focalization: we sense that the narrator, despite prescribing actions and thoughts to the narratee, is still more enlightened (and in this case more jaded) than his narratee; the narrator does not seem confident that a potential narratee/protagonist will internalize the “lesson” about America to the extent that the narrator has. This points to a potential unreliability in the narrator’s views: if he were able to see his instruction carried out, with the limited success that he seems to predict, he would presumably ask himself – If I am the only one this jaded about America, could I be wrong?

Unlike narrators of more traditional narrative modes, whose characterizations result from their discourse or self-description, how-to narrators characterize themselves (nearly always unwittingly) through their constructions and characterizations of their hypothetical narratee/protagonist: these narratees are the audiences that the narrators imagine they will reach. In a sense, then, we characterize the how-to narrator in the same way that we construct an implied author. In both instances, our characterizations are based on what the characterized figure creates, whether it be a text (as in the case of the implied author) or a narratee (as in the case of the how-to narrator). John Capecci
recognizes how our concerns about the identities of the narrative agents shift with
second-person narration: “As a performer initiates the familiar dramatic analysis of a text,
questioning usually begins with “Who is speaking?” For second-person address,
however, it is more beneficial to ignore that question momentarily, and jump to the more
pressing concern, “To Whom is the speaker speaking?” or “Who is You?” (44). Yet
Capecci does not recognize the close relation between the two questions: to ask “to whom
is the speaker speaking?” is not that different from asking “who is speaking?” as well,
considering that our only way to access the how-to narrator is through his/her
construction and characterization of the narratee.

Most noticeably, narratees in how-to narration oscillate between being
characterized and remaining hypothetical and generic. Because the narratee/protagonist
is not actual but hypothetical, it is important to distinguish these “characters” from
traditional characters in nomenclature and in traits. However, the “character” (quotation
marks to express terminological discontent) of how-to narration doesn’t seem to possess
the exact qualities of traditional characters because the how-to “character” doesn’t have
an existence even on the fictional plane; it is merely the narrator’s design or projection.
That is, our sense of character in how-to differs from our idea of character in other forms
of fiction in that the how-to character is potential rather than actual and definite. Perkins
and Hopkins intuit without explanation a similar lack of character: referencing Gerald
Manley Hopkin’s “Spring and Fall,” they note that “Margaret does not qualify as a
protagonist” (123). Rather than calling the narratee/protagonist a “character,” it is more
useful to call this joint function an “actant,” a term that implies a sense of generality – whereas we think of character as describing a singular individual. And because they typically possess a certain generic quality, all how-to actants simultaneously embody the three components of character outlined by Phelan in Reading People, Reading Plots: a mimetic dimension, a synthetic dimension, and a thematic dimension. How-to actants possess a mimetic quality because although they are not actual in the narrator’s mind (i.e. they are how-to narrators’ projections), they are intended to represent the actual narratee who might experience the narrative. They also possess a synthetic quality, not because they expose their own artificiality as fictional constructs, but because they are artificial as creations of a narrator. And they also possess thematic qualities because, by definition, they represent generic and multiple narratees.

Moreover, these how-to actants shift their relations between narratee and protagonist during instances of the narratives that provide for multiple options for behavior or action. Take for instance the following sentences from “How to Talk to a Hunter”: “If you can, let him sleep alone for at least one night. If you can’t, invite him over to finish trimming your Christmas tree” (103). Prior to these sentences (i.e. the inclusion of options) the narratee has overlapped consistently with the potential protagonist – both marked as “you.” That is, the narratee serves directly as the protagonist (albeit one with a conditional, hypothetical status). However, with these options the narratee splits from the potential protagonist, because the protagonist performs one or the other of the options. That is, the narratee “you” will be
actant/protagonist of option one or of option two while still being the narratee of both options. This is a temporary split (lasting only as long as the narrative offers multiple options). As readers we relate to the options and the split between narratee and protagonist in two seemingly contradictory ways. On the one hand, such options tend to destabilize details of the narratee provided throughout the story – details that might distinguish us as flesh-and-blood readers from the narratee, particularly if a particular option is one that we as flesh-and-blood readers would be inclined to choose. In this respect, the introduction of options can tighten the connection between narratee and flesh-and-blood reader. On the other hand, the presence of multiple options implies that actually we are neither of the potential actant/protagonists and remind us that, likewise, we are not the intended addressee/narratee as well. That is, we register the options, imagine them as plausible for the now split protagonist, and, therefore, register ourselves as distinct from the “you.”

When we turn to the issue or reader engagement in how-to, we are struck with the question, Does a story that utilizes a hypothetical, implied, minimally-characterized narratee/protagonist addressed as “you” draw us into the roles of narratee and protagonist more actively than stories with more specified narratees? James Phelan addresses this very question in “Narratee, Narrative Audience, and Second-Person Narration: How I – and You? – Read Lorrie Moore’s ‘How’.” The degree to which we as readers adopt the roles of narratee and protagonist varies depending on how specifically the narration characterizes the narratee/protagonist. That is, we oscillate between merely being a
member of the narrative audience and being the actual narratee based on the details of
the narratee: “the more fully the narratee is characterized, the greater the distance
between narratee and narrative audience; similarly, the less the narratee is characterized,
the greater the coincidence between the two” (Phelan 146). For instance, the
narratee/protagonist of “How” is clearly a woman, yet the narrator deliberately limits the
details of the narratee so as to allow more overlap between a reader and the narratee. Yet
even when more specific details are provided (“How to be an Other Woman” names its
narratee/protagonist “Charlene”), the narrator can destabilize these details by positing
multiple options for the narratee/protagonist: that is, “He will have a nephew named
Bradley Bob. Or perhaps a niece named Emily who is always dressed in pink and smells
of milk and powder and dirty diapers, though she is already three” (“How” 57) not only
limits the characterization of the man’s family, it also destabilizes other details that are
not accompanied by explicit alternatives. Lorrie Moore’s “How to be an Other Woman”
and W.S. Merwin’s “The Second Person,” both in part metaphors for reading second-
person narration, seem to address the relation between readers and the
narratee/protagonist. Moore’s story describes the process of becoming a mistress,
adopting a temporary and false role analogous to the process of a reader adopting a “you”
that is also temporary and false; the narrator likens the experience of being an “other
woman” to “constantly having a book out from the library” (5). More explicitly,
Merwin’s story parallels how we read second-person:

You are the second person. The words come to you as though they
were birds that knew you and had found you at last, but they do not look
at you and you never saw them before, you have nowhere to keep them, you have nothing to feed them, they will interfere with your life, you cannot hear yourself, the little claws, meaning no harm, never leave you alone, so tame so confiding. But you know they are not yours. You know they are no one else’s either. (116)

Moreover, how-to narratives, especially considering that their narratee/protagonists are generic and multiple, suggest a temporal distance between the narrator and the narratee. That is, we imagine the actual narratee experiencing the narrative at a temporal distance from when the narrator addresses his projected narratee/protagonist; we see a similar phenomenon in epistolary narratives. In many ways, this temporal distance further draws the reader into the role of narratee/protagonist because it more accurately represents how authorial and flesh-and-blood readers process narratives: we read a text some time after it was written.

How-to narration poses unique problems for fabula construction, the attempt to abstract and chart a chronological series of events from a given representation, a sjuzhet. Traditional function analysis tells us that behind the infinite number of possible representations, there is a single series of events; whether or not we can determine those events from a given representation is another story. How-to narration, however, operates on a different principle because it includes multiple scenarios for a given situation, such as we saw in the Diaz passage above. These fabulas remain in a free-play that helps direct readers’ attention to the discourse of how-to narration, which raises questions about the ethics of both granting and using a perhaps presumed expertise.
One of the first things we notice in how-to narratives is that they are not made up of story-events in the way that most narrative is. As many critics have already noted, the standard case for narrative has always been that of telling of past events. However, as Margolin notes, “narration can also be prospective, dealing with posterior events, with that which has not yet occurred at speech time” (“Story” 53). With how-to, we do not encounter scenes and summaries of past action through a retrospective eye. Instead these narratives depict potential action presumably to be carried out in the future. (Here we recognize the parallel to real-world analogues such as cookbooks, user manuals, and self-help books.) The most basic ramification of this temporal relationship is that whereas the retrospective narrator has no control over the events of the story he tells (other than how he can affect their reception through his discourse), the prospective narrator has the opportunity to influence the potentially-future action. Take, for instance, the following passage from Diaz’s “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie”:

You have choices. If the girl’s from around the way, take her to El Cibao for dinner. Order everything in your busted-up Spanish. Let her correct you if she’s Latina and amaze her if she’s black. If she’s not from around the way, Wendy’s will do. (145)

Because this passage (like nearly all how-to) uses conditional future-tense, the events have not yet occurred. Explicitly, the narrator is speaking about events that will presumably take place later. The discourse influences how the story might potentially play out; this allows for a number of mutually-exclusive events to be possible – as we saw in the dinner scene of “How to Love America.”
How-to narration further complicates the ontology of event by offering multiple options for a single situation, such as we saw in the Diaz passage and we also see in the following passage from Pam Houston’s “How to Talk to a Hunter”:

If you can, let him sleep alone for at least one night. If you can’t, invite him over to finish trimming your Christmas tree. When he asks how you are, tell him you think it’s a good idea to keep your sense of humor during the holidays. (103)

These instances prevent us from abstracting a single series of events. Take for example the fabula function C’, which in Emma Kafalenos’s function analysis represents a character’s attempt to alleviate the story’s disruptive event. In the Houston example we just looked at, the disruption to be resolved is the wandering affections of the hunter. When we read the first sentence of the passage, we mark the C’ function as “let the hunter sleep alone.” But when we get to the second sentence of the passage, we mark the same C’ function as “invite him over to finish trimming the tree.” The same thing occurs in the following passage from John Updike’s “How to Love America and Leave it at the Same Time”:

Perhaps the kids win, and you sit there looking out through the windows thinking, This is America, a hamburger kingdom, one cuisine, under God, indivisible, with pickles and potato chips for all […] Or perhaps you talk the kids into the Mexican restaurant, and as they sit in candlelight struggling with their tacos and enchiladas you sip your salt-rimmed Margarita and think, This is America, where we take everything in, tacos and chow mein and pizza and sauerkraut, because we are what we eat, we are whatever we say we are. (45)

Considering the story’s title and the narrator’s tired attitude toward American culture, this is an important passage thematically. It also addresses the issue of narrative causality.
The passage seems to suggest that all roads lead to America, that there is no true sense of causality because every cause leads to the same effect. This suggestion mirrors how-to narration, in which multiple options (notice the frequency of “perhaps”) lead to the same eventual conclusion (literally with them all ending on the same page). This is something we don’t encounter in standard choose-you-own-adventure stories in which different options (causes) lead to different ends (effects) – the exception being those that are self-parody, like Manhire’s. Not only do the “perhaps” (also “maybe”) clauses raise questions concerning cause-and-effect relationships, they also disrupt the temporal succession of events. That is, we experience a standard temporal progression of events until we encounter a phrase such as “perhaps” or “maybe,” which causes us to branch off the original fabula and begin another line. A reader might initially construct the following fabula for this scene:

A Family is hungry
C Family discusses where to eat
C’ Kids “win” and family decides to go to a hamburger joint
G Family arrives at hamburger joint
H Family eats burgers and potato chips
I (assumed) Family’s hunger is satiated

But when we get to the clause “or perhaps you talk the kids into the Mexican restaurant,” our fabula collapses: C’ now becomes “parents talk kids into the Mexican restaurant”; G
becomes “family arrives at Mexican restaurant”; H is now “family eats Mexican food”; and I remains the same. With this passage, there are two possible fabulas, one in which the family eats burgers, the other in which the family eats Mexican food. Other scenes in how-to involve more than just an either/or, explicitly including more than two possible fabulae and implying many others: the opening of Lorrie Moore’s “How,” for instance, includes multiple possible fabulae which involve meeting a man either in a class, in a bar, or at a rummage sale. These different mutually-exclusive fabulae remain in a free-play of sorts, subverting our ability to abstract a single chronological sequence of (even possible) events. These passages don’t even enjoy the ontological status of Gerald Prince’s disnarration, something that could have happened but did not, because we can’t rule out

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6 In Manhire’s “The Brain of Katherine Mansfield,” all options eventually result in “Close the book.”

7 This is different from a gap or suppression such as Kalafenos analyzes in Henry James’s fiction, which also cause us to retroactively adjust fabula, for these that occur in how-to reside on the plane of fabula rather than szuhjet: the temporal break/interruption is not in the presentation but in the actual events themselves. Gaps or suppressions in the szuhjet can be appropriated to construct a consistent (though at times implied) fabula. Likewise, these disruptions in the fabula are distinct from what Marie-Laure Ryan terms “embedded narratives”: Ryan’s “Embedded Narratives and Tellability” discusses predictions made by characters, “defining a road that may or may not be taken by actual events” (324). Because she is concerned with events that are principally conditional among actual events, whereas how-to is entirely conditional, her instances do not disrupt fabula in the ways that the “perhaps” clauses of how-to do: either these characters’ predictions remain hypothetical, in which case they do not become part of the actual fabula, or they are realized, in which case they become mutually exclusive and consistent with a finite chronology.

8 A similar narrative mode, choose-your-own-adventure, also seems at first glance to cause the same complication to fabula construction. However, with choose-your-own-adventure narratives, each reading of the narrative has a specific course of events and thus a specific fabula; it is just that the fabula has the potential to be different with each reading.
the events: what didn’t happen is defined by what did – we have neither in how-to because all included events are possible.

But Moore’s story, like other how-to narratives, doesn’t privilege one of the possible fabulae, and after describing the various locations where “you” might meet a man, the story progresses in a way that doesn’t matter how “you” meet. This progression results from a deep structure fabula underlying these multiple scenarios, one that glosses over the differences among these possible scenarios. We distinguish this deep structure fabula based on the ontological status of certain events. On the one hand, we have an uncertain ontological status for the multiple scenarios, and on the other hand we have certainty about other events that contribute to the deep structure fabula, which in “How” includes the following series of events: you meet a man, begin to fall in love, and move in with him with a bit of reluctance; after some time, you feel restless and consider leaving him, but suddenly his health turns south, so you can’t leave now, so you meet another man and start an affair until you fall completely out of love with the first man and have no choice but to leave; eventually your sadness for the failed relationship turns to indifference and the episode fades like a slow Hank William’s song. The deep structure typically assures us that the “you,” the narratee/protagonist is constant across the different surface options, whether those surface options are created by the possible actions of another character (the hunter in Houston) or the possibility of other characters filling essentially the same role in relation the narratee/protagonist (the date in Diaz) or
the possible actions taken by the narratee/protagonist him/herself (the different ways that “you” might begin in “How”).

Because of its ontological uncertainty, I have termed this narration, *conditional narration*, the depiction of possible events that might take place sometime in the future but cannot all take place within the same story world. Conditional narration has a number of sibling techniques that have been the topic of recent narratological studies – namely, subjunctive narration, hypothetical narration, and denarration. Martin Fitzpatrick defines *subjunctive narration* as narration “in which significant information is not epistemologically secure” (245); for example: “in the subjunctive, there are things that we as readers wish to know and cannot know. *The Crying of Lot 49*, for example, poses as urgent the question whether Oedipa Maas discovers an actual world of conspiracies and alternate postal systems or an elaborate hoax aimed at her. The novel also deliberately frustrates our attempts to resolve that question” (245).

Like subjunctive narration, hypothetical focalization raises questions concerning the epistemological status of narrated events. David Herman broadly defines hypothetical focalization as “the use of hypotheses, framed by the narrator or a character, about what might be or have been seen or perceived” (231). He goes on to distinguish between two general different forms of hypothetical focalization: direct hypothetical focalization, which “contains narratives that explicitly appeal to a hypothetical witness” (237); and indirect hypothetical focalization, which “covers those stretches of narrative discourse the interpretation of which requires that we infer the focalizing
activity of a merely hypothetical onlooker” (237). Both subjunctive narration and hypothetical focalization differ from conditional narration because they are concerned primarily with questions of epistemology, our ability to know what happened (in other words, our ability to access fabula); as I’ve mentioned already, conditional narration concerns itself primarily with ontology, with what has/will/will not happen rather than how/what we can know. In fact, hypothetical narration, specifically direct hypothetical narration, actually helps to construct fabula by indicating what a character could have seen but didn’t, thus further depicting the fictional landscape.

Conditional narration relates more closely to denarration, a narrative phenomenon Brian Richardson defines as “a kind of narrative negation in which a narrator denies significant aspects of her narrative that had earlier been presented as given” (168). Richardson recognizes the ontological implications of denarration: “we may also observe the ontological fragility of the status of much fictional discourse” (173). But his ontological concerns relate to a narrative’s productive process (i.e. a narrator’s ability to change the ontological landscape of his/her narrative) rather than the ontological actuality of event, which as future conditional cannot be secured in how-to and is independent of a narrator’s control. This difference surfaces in part because Richardson deals with past events, though denarration is not limited to past events by definition. Whereas denarration results in “a discourse without a retrievable story” (173), conditional narration results in a discourse with more than one mutually-exclusive retrievable story, none of which is privileged by the narrative.
This fabula free-play and its resulting effect on the story/discourse distinction creates a looseness of event that helps to foreground both the act of narrating within the narrative and narrating in Genette’s usage, the producing narrative action. As I’ve already mentioned, the narrator’s main role is to predict, report, and at times prescribe action: to put it plainly, the narrator tells the narratee, if “you” do x, then y is likely to or will follow. This structure assumes a degree of universality, for even with the divergent scenarios that I have already discussed, the how-to narrator presumes all will act in a predictable way and will, in turn, meet a similarly-predictable end. The how-to narrator taps into the universal, the deep structure that overshadows the various particulars of a given situation. Given the how-to frame, this expertise, this knowledge of the deep structure, is something the “you” narratee grants the narrator. We evaluate the ethics of how the narrator uses this expertise in relation to the “you” narratee. And here the multiple scenarios become important, for we respond differently to the narrator who incorporates a number of multiple scenarios within the deep structure than we do to the narrator who limits the options. The former uses his/her expertise in way that can apply more readily to the narratee. The how-to structure also invites us to step outside of the immediate narrative and speculate how this narrator has accrued this expertise, how the narrator translates his/her experience (and whether than experience is first-hand or otherwise) into a how-to narrative; that is, we are invited to hypothesize about what leads the narrator to produce this narrative. This speculation ultimately leads to a consideration
of the reliability of the narrator’s expertise: although the narratee implicitly grants the narrator this expertise, can we as authorial readers?

Although the how-to narratives I’ve been discussing here all playfully jab at sincere self-help literature, their potential to raise questions about the deep structure of human activities and our ability to understand and navigate those structures warrants closer critical attention than the mode has hitherto received.

As I hope my analyses throughout the chapter have shown, *If on a winter’s night a traveler*, “The Brain of Katherine Mansfield,” and how-to narration all display distinct features within their coincidence of narratee and protagonist. Yet taken together, all three exemplify one of the main defining rhetorical qualities of the coincidence of narratee and protagonist: more so than any of the other four, this narrative mode foregrounds story-level issues and engages the reader with those issues, specifically inviting the reader to adopt the experiences of the protagonist/narratee as his/her own. This is a sharp contrast to what we’ll see in chapter two, in which I argue that the coincidence of narrator and narratee foregrounds the discourse-level issues of telling and listening. This is not to say that narratives that employ other structures don’t engage the reader with story-level issues; it is to say that the coincidence of narratee and protagonist seems to specialize in this. The reader experiences this heightened engagement with the events primarily because of the mode’s use of direct address: all of the examples in this chapter employ a “you” address to invite the reader (with varying degrees of success) into the role of
narratee/protagonist. Calvino goes further and draws the authorial reader into the role
of narratee/protagonist by making that narratee/protagonist a reader (who, incidentally,
reads a novel called *If on a winter’s night a traveler*), at times directly connecting the
real-world activities of the authorial reader with those of the Reader within the fiction.
Manhire enhances the connection between authorial reader and protagonist through
different means, forcing the authorial reader to make choices coinciding with the actions
of the protagonist: turn to page x and this will happen to the protagonist. How-to
narration uses conditional narration to engage the reader with story-level events, allowing
for a number of possible fabulae depending on the particulars of a given narratee (and, by
default, a given authorial reader): if one scenario doesn’t apply to the authorial reader,
another might. Moreover, the conditional narration of how-to uses the future tense to
engage reader response: rather than the reader feeling distant to a past-tense protagonist
who has already experienced particular events, how-to invites the reader to imagine in
that he/she could potentially experience these events (perhaps at a later time). What is
crucial to recognize, especially as we move ahead and distinguish among the different
rhetorical qualities of the other four narrative modes, is that the coincidence of narratee
and protagonist highlights the invitation of a reader to vicariously experience the events
of the story.
CHAPTER 2

COINCIDENCE OF NARRATOR AND NARRATEE: THE CASES OF “DOC’S STORY” AND “LOST IN THE FUNHOUSE”

In this chapter, I explore another form of partially-coincident narration, that in which the narrator and narratee overlap but the protagonist remains distinct: to put it plainly, these are narratives in which a narrator tells him/herself a story about someone else. I begin my analysis by discussing the unusual nature of this mode. Then I examine in detail two examples of this form of coincidence, John Edgar Wideman’s “Doc’s Story,” which includes in the main narrative an intradiegetic story about Doc that the protagonist tells himself, and John Barth’s “Lost in the Funhouse,” which depicts with typical Barthian circularity and self-reflexivity a writer narrating to himself his failed attempt at writing a story. I will focus on how both stories use the coincidence of narrator and narratee to foreground the acts of narrating and listening, positioning themselves within the larger postmodern interest in discourse and language use. “Doc’s Story” is particularly interesting for the ways in which it addresses the ethical complexities involved when someone “adopts” another’s story both as teller and as audience, raising a particularly pertinent question for readers: how should one listen to, and engage with, someone else’s
story? “Lost in the Funhouse,” with its primary focus on the process of narrating, raises the related questions, What ethical responsibility does a narrator have to his/her story?, and, What ethical responsibility does a narrator have to his/her audience? The analyses of these two stories will bring us to a larger, more general argument about the coincidence of narrator and narratee: this narrative mode, because of the closed-circuit of narrator and narratee, foregrounds the discourse-level issues of narrating and listening and invites readers to engage in the ethics of these issues.

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.

Conversely, homodiegetic self-address is fairly common, most often with diary entries and internal monologues. But nearly always the content of the diary entries or the internal monologues concerns the narrator him/herself. By definition, homodiegetic narrators are part of the story world, and they typically play some part in the actual story as well.¹ In cases of homodiegesis with a discrete protagonist, there arises the question of how the narrator gained access to a story that he was not directly a part of, raising the potential for paralepsis. Genette christened the term “paralepsis” to describe a narrator “giving more [information] than is authorized in principle in the code of focalization governing the whole” (Narrative Discourse 195). We encounter paralepsis most often with homodiegetic narrators, though heterodiegetic narrators with limited focalization are also susceptible. A well-known example of homodiegetic paralepsis occurs in The Great Gatsby when Nick narrates a scene in which he was not present and gives no indication

¹ An exception well-known within narratology is Ring Lardner’s “Haircut,” in which Whitey the barber tells a story about Jim Kendall to an unnamed narrator. Yet even in
how he came to know of what transpired: “Now I want to go back a little and tell what happened at the garage after we left there the night before” (165). The further the distance between a homodiegetic narrator, who typically has limited focalization, and the protagonist, the more chance of paralepsis and, thus, the higher potential to defy standards of mimesis.

John Edgar Wideman’s “Doc’s Story” is one of the few examples of this form of coincidence. “Doc’s Story” tells of a nameless protagonist and his attempts to cope after his girlfriend leaves him. We learn throughout the course of the story that their relationship dissolves because of racial and ideological differences: he’s black, she’s white, and she dismisses his African-American lore as “pathology of the oppressed” (10). But at the heart of Wideman’s story lies Doc, an old-timer who used to frequent the basketball court where the protagonist now spends his summers and whose legend still surfaces in the stories the ballers exchange between games. The protagonist clings to one such story in which Doc, blind at the time, “holds his own” in a pick-up basketball game. Wideman’s story ends with the protagonist wondering if his ex-girlfriend would have looked at Doc’s story as he does: if a blind man can play basketball, “then anything’s possible. We’re possible” (11).

Lardner’s tale the narrator plays a limited role in the story-level events because he has had direct contact with Kendall.
One of the interesting formal features of “Doc’s Story” is its temporal movement, or lack thereof. The story begins with a brief description of the protagonist’s girlfriend’s hands:

He thinks of her small, white hands, blue veined, gaunt, awkwardly knuckled. He’d teased her about the smallness of her hands, hers lost in the shadow of his when they pressed them together palm to palm to measure. (1)

Thematically, the opening highlights their physical and racial difference, which as we later realize, leads to their more significant ideological differences. Structurally, the opening sentence begins to establish the static dramatic situation of the story: the protagonist is thinking. The present tense (“thinks”) helps to distinguish story-now action from background summary provided by the narrator (“he’d teased her”). What follows in the next paragraph is wholly the narrator’s discourse, spoken to an uncharacterized narratee, summarizing how she left him and how he coped by hanging out at the court. To recognize the full effect of the illusory temporal movement of this paragraph, it is necessary to quote it in its entirety:

She’d left him in May, when the shadows and green of the park had started to deepen. Hanging out, becoming a regular at the basketball court across the street in Regent Park was how he’d coped. No questions asked. Just the circle of stories. If you didn’t want to miss anything good you came early and stayed late. He learned to wait, be patient. Long hours waiting were not time lost but time doing nothing because there was nothing better to do. Basking in sunshine on a stone bench, too beat to play any longer, nowhere to go but an empty apartment, he’d watch the afternoon traffic in Regent Park, dog strollers, baby carriages, winos, kids, gays, students with blankets they’d spread out on the grassy banks of the hollow and books they’d pretend to read, the black men from the neighborhood who’d search the park for braless young mothers and white
girls on blankets who didn’t care or didn’t know any better than to sit with their crotches exposed. When he’d sit for hours like that, cooking like that, he’d feel himself empty out, see himself seep away and hover in the air, a fine mist, a little flattened-out gray cloud of something wavering in the heat, a presence as visible as the steam on the window as he stares for hours at winter. (1-2)

This paragraph moves with striking ease from an iterative description of his summers at the court to the specific occasion of the story – him sitting at the window staring out at winter – the final sentence seamlessly merging the image of him melting away in the summer heat with the image of the steam on his winter windows; again, the present tense (“stares”) sets us in the story-now. In addition to offering us a general description of a summer day at Regent Park, this paragraph reinforces the dramatic situation we get in the very first sentence, adding to his action (thinking) his physical location (at the window) and his temporal location (winter). Still to this point, no action beyond thinking has occurred on the story-level. It will be important to the overall movement of the story that we focus on this dramatic situation.

The next paragraph again reminds us that the protagonist is thinking, this time indicating generally his actual thoughts: he reminisces about the courtside storytelling, acknowledging to himself that “he needs a story […] now to get him through this long winter because she’s gone and she won’t leave him alone” (2). After this brief paragraph, we leave him there, putting the protagonist and the story-level activity on ice as it were, and we will not return to them until the very end of Wideman’s text. What comprises the middle meat of “Doc’s Story,” then, is a discourse-level snapshot of what runs through
the protagonist’s mind, the majority of which is the story of Doc, which we’ll examine in
detail below: it is as if we pressed pause and entered with the narrator into the
protagonist’s consciousness. To help transition away from the protagonist and the story-
now, the narrator describes iterative events which have no true duration: for instance, “In
summer fine grit hangs in the air,” and “you can taste it some days, bitter in your spit” (2, 3).

The snapshot of the protagonist’s thoughts fully develops once the narrator shifts
from summarizing those thoughts to actually replicating those thoughts. The narrator
does this by adopting the voice and focalization that the protagonist replays when he tells
himself Doc’s story. Wideman marks this particular shift (both when he moves in and
when he moves out) with ellipses.

One of the fellows says, I wonder what happened to old Doc. I
always be thinking about Doc, wondering where the cat is, what he be
doing now…

Don’t nobody know why Doc’s eyes start to going bad. It just
happen. Doc never even wore glasses. Eyes good as anybody’s far as
anybody knew till one day he come round he got goggles on. Like
Kareem. And people start kinda joking, you know. Doc got him some
goggles. Watch out, youall. Doc be skyhooking youall to death today.
(5)

Significantly, this voice and focalization of Doc’s story remain anonymous, unlike the
proceeding tale about a North Philly gang told by Pooner. Additionally, the sense of
continuity between the two stories that we initially get (“He first heard Doc’s story late
one day […] Pooner was just finishing the one about gang warring”) is broken by the
ellipses: we are invited to ask if this is the actual story the protagonist heard that day, one
of the other two versions he has heard, an amalgamation of the three, or perhaps some other, generic version. That Doc’s story seems to lack both a specific teller and a definite occasion grants it a certain sense of autonomy: it exists outside of location and ownership. Like a hymnal attributed merely as “traditional,” it resides in public domain. More abstractly, Doc’s story takes on an ephemeral quality, similar to the steam on the winter window through which our protagonist stares. Rather than consign Doc’s being to a story,² which carries negative connotations, the story seems to ensure Doc a certain degree of immortality. More pointedly within Wideman’s text, Doc’s story is a modern day version of the stories the protagonist reads “about slavery days when Africans could fly, change themselves to cats and hummingbirds,” the stories his girlfriend would dismiss as “the pathology of the oppression” (10). Because Doc’s story belongs paradoxically to no one and to everyone (at least members of this community), the protagonist is able to adopt it, an ethically complicated move we’ll look at below.

Although the protagonist disappears for the entire middle of the narrative, during the telling of Doc’s story, he has not been completely inactive during his absence (or, our absence from him). When we left him, he was telling himself that he needed a story to get him through the long winter. When we return to him, he is still thinking, responding to Doc’s story, asking himself if knowing the story when he was still with his girlfriend, being able to tell her, would have changed the relationship’s outcome. Although the

² Adam Newton recognizes that one of the potential consequences of narrating someone’s life is to extinguish the “real” existence: “to ‘get’ someone’s story in this regard […] is
narrator never indicates explicitly that the protagonist has been thinking about Doc’s story, his transition from wanting a story to reacting to Doc’s story implies that he has been narrating to himself the same story of Doc that we have been reading in the interim. Moreover, we get the impression that this is not the first time he has rehearsed the story to himself. Strikingly, Wideman’s story never explicitly depicts the principal action, the protagonist telling himself Doc’s story.

The final paragraph returns to the present tense, bringing us back to the story-level activity of the protagonist and his dramatic situation: “he hears himself saying the words” (11). Although “the words” remains somewhat ambiguous, we get the impression that he has been rehearsing the words that make up Doc’s story, practicing for how he might have told his girlfriend the story. The story’s temporal movement is minimal but significant: the protagonist has transitioned from needing a story to retelling himself a story to wondering what he can now do with the story. Amidst the complex structure and temporality, the shifts in voice and focalization, we have an account of a man who tells himself a story in order to deal with his dissolved relationship; despite being framed by heterodiegesis, at its heart, “Doc’s Story” exemplifies a coincidence of narrator and narratee we have been dealing with throughout this chapter.

This paragraph-by-paragraph analysis of “Doc’s Story” is necessary, I hope, because it recognizes the static nature of the narrative. In fact, considering this lack of temporal movement, Wideman’s text acts more like a lyric in the vein of character analogous to the belief in certain cultures that photographing a person’s image in some
sketches than a more traditional narrative with prominent story-level movement. That is, the story doesn’t contain any activity besides the protagonist’s internal thoughts. Looking only at “stage time,” the protagonist is a mainly static agent throughout the text and serves, on the one hand, as a vehicle for the narrator to reveal Doc’s story to his narratee (uncharacterized) and by default to us. But Wideman’s story doesn’t stop with Doc’s story; instead, it also puts Doc’s story in service of the protagonist’s story, which takes shape only in the frames of Doc’s story. Doc’s story is about a blind man playing basketball. “Doc’s Story” is about a man who uses a story of someone else as therapy (albeit with questionable results) for his own situation. In this way, Wideman’s story coincides with other postmodern tales which foreground discourse and language use, something we will also see below with “Lost in the Funhouse.”

As I’ve suggested throughout this analysis, beyond just a narrative about interracial relationships, “Doc’s Story” is about the narrating process: it invites the questions, Why would someone narrate a story to himself about someone else?, and, What is the result of that narration? On the one hand, the protagonist gains a sense of hope from telling himself Doc’s story: someone else’s experience provides him a reason to believe that things could have been different in his relationship as well as an excuse to contemplate the limitlessness of possibility beyond just his relationship. Doc playing basketball at a point in his life when basketball seems impossible is analogous to what the way absconds with it” (20).

3 We will see something similar in Chapter Four with *La Modification*, a narrative comprised primarily of internal thought.
protagonist desires: to be back with his ex-girlfriend at a time when that reunion seems impossible. Moreover, Doc possesses the ability to negotiate in a white community, teaching at the University at Pennsylvania and living in an affluent white neighborhood. Yet Doc never loses his roots: he spends a good deal of time at the playground courts (a specifically African-American community within the story) and invites the players to his home to the dismay of his white neighbors. This ability to make an African-American existence work within in a white community is something that the protagonist longs for given that he was unable to sustain his relationship with his white girlfriend. But on the other hand, at the same time that it provides this hope, the story of Doc also forces the protagonist to question his ability to be like Doc. Of all the courtside stories, “the one about Doc had bothered him the most” (3) particularly because it exemplifies in Doc the confidence to salvage what seems to be a losing situation that the protagonist doesn’t possess: even blind, Doc can run game after someone dunked his air-ball, but the protagonist cannot confidently picture himself convincing his girlfriend things can work. The protagonist must also realize that regardless of this story’s potential power, he hears it too late for it to have an effect on his relationship, which by that time is already over. The “if”s that litter the last paragraph (“If he had known Doc’s story”) not only question how she might have reacted to Doc’s story; they also bring attention to the fact that what he knows now only could have helped him back then.

“Doc’s Story” not only considers the act of narrating to oneself, it also compares that act with the act of narrating to another, highlighting the impact different audiences
have on the same story. That is, not only do we concern ourselves with how the protagonist relates to the story, we also are asked to consider how the ex-girlfriend might have responded had the protagonist been able to tell her the story. The narrator asks, “If he had tried to tell her about Doc, would it have made a difference?” (10). However, we are left without answers for the narrator’s questions, only speculation and conjecture, in large part because we are given few details about their relationship: on the one hand she might dismiss Doc’s story as she did his other African myths; on the other hand, rather than depicting people who turn into animals and voodoo characters, this story might have the type of cultural qualifiers that might make sense to her. Ultimately, these remain open questions: we cannot say for sure how she would respond, whether it would have made a difference or not. Our inability to predict how the girlfriend would respond underscores a crucial difference between how the implied Wideman wants his authorial audience to react to the narrative and how we suspect the girlfriend will react to Doc’s story. Whereas we might not be certain if she will be moved by Doc’s story in the same way the protagonist is moved, we do know that her reaction will be based on whether or not she views Doc’s story as true or not; she will interpret the story with the same hard-headed practicality that led her to dismiss his African myths. However, the narrative never invites the reader to question the validity of a story about a blind man playing basketball. In fact, the implied Wideman seems to suggest that asking whether or not a blind man can or did play basketball should be a moot point for readers and to focus on
this question would be to respond to the story inappropriately.⁴ That she would be concerned with the story’s veracity and we as readers are not creates a distance between us and the girlfriend. This distance is especially crucial for white readers since it fosters their attempt to enter the authorial audience, an audience that appreciates the importance of storytelling for an African-American community.

What “Doc’s Story” doesn’t explicitly address but implicitly raises are questions concerning the ethics of listening, specifically the ethics of using someone else’s story.⁵ Is there something unethical about extending this story outside of its original community?⁶ If the protagonist were able to tell his girlfriend Doc’s story, should he? On the one hand, it seems that Doc’s story is best kept within the confines of an African-American community: considering what we learn of how his ex-girlfriend has responded to other stories that mattered to him, we as readers, I suspect, feel a sense of relief that he doesn’t have the opportunity to tell her Doc’s story. Likewise, we get the impression that

⁴ Concerning ourselves with whether the story of Doc is true or not is to mis-engage with the story just as focusing on whether Beloved is a ghost or not is to mis-engage with Morrison’s novel.
⁵ The very expression “someone else’s story,” in its linguistics, exemplifies the complexities of what it means to “own” a story: does the expression refer to a story about someone else? Or does it refer to a story owned by someone else? This linguistic ambiguity mirrors the ethical complications we as readers face when we consider the appropriateness of the protagonist’s use of Doc’s story.
⁶ This is a particularly poignant question considering the strong emphasis on the oral tradition within African-American culture, exemplified through the stories the ballers tell between games in “Doc’s Story.” Moreover, as we see in a novel such as Morrison’s Beloved, possession of one’s own story greatly influences notions of self-hood and identity. For instance, slave owners subtly took possession of slave narratives, denying the autonomy of the slave and his/her tale, by framing the narratives with commentary
whether or not she would have responded in the way he wants, the story would be
denigrated in the process because of her concern about its truthfulness. Yet, on the other
hand, Wideman himself has extended it outside of its original community by writing it
and publishing it to a racially-diverse audience, suggesting that with the right
presentation this story can belong to a much wider community. Wideman seems
confident that his audience will respond more appropriately to the story than the
protagonist’s girlfriend would, a confidence in large part based on Wideman’s ability to
shape his audience’s response. For instance, his use of standard diction and syntax in the
narrative’s frame and vernacular in the story of Doc helps to merge a multi-racial reading
populace into a unified authorial audience. Additionally, Wideman’s ability to navigate
black vernacular within a frame consisting of “standard” English parallels Doc’s ability
to negotiate a black existence in a white world. “Doc’s Story” also includes questions
even more specific to the ethics of listening, specifically, How should someone relate to
someone else’s story. At its most accessible level, “Doc’s Story” depicts a protagonist
seeking solace from stories. This is the basic reading that Keith Byerman forwards in one
of the only discussions of the work: “‘Doc’s Story’ carries on the quest for comfort
through story” (39). However, Byerman doesn’t recognize the potential for a harsher,
perhaps more complicated reading that finds the protagonist parasitic toward Doc’s story,

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7 This frame serves a very different purpose from those I reference in the previous
footnote, though the shifts from a dominant discourse to black vernacular might be
similar.
one that argues that the protagonist views Doc’s story only as a means to salvage (albeit retroactively) his relationship. To a certain extent, the protagonist has not allowed Doc’s story to exist for its own sake, but instead has turned it into something from which he can potentially profit, romanticizing it in the process.\(^8\)

The reader finds no help addressing these ethical issues from the narrator. When the narrator states, “if he’d known Doc’s story he would have said [it],” does he do so with condemnation (he shouldn’t be using this story for that reason), sympathy (all the poor sap has left is what-ifs), ridicule (doesn’t he know this wouldn’t have made any difference) or merely as an observation (this is how it would have been)? The absence of a definitive judgement by the narrator coincides with the other lyrical quality of “Doc’s Story” – its minimal temporal movement. As I’ve suggested throughout this analysis, “Doc’s Story” reads more or less as a snapshot in time that presents primarily a character’s state of mind. Additionally, this snapshot lacks definitive comment from the narrator. As Phelan argues in an essay distinguishing between lyrical and narrative qualities, “a crucial difference between narrative and lyric is that in narrative internal judgements of characters (and narrators) are required, while in lyric such judgements are suspended until we take the step of evaluation” (“Character and Judgement” 33; italics mine). Clearly, Wideman’s choice of an effaced, uncharacterized narrator forces our hand and places the responsibility of evaluation on the flesh-and-blood reader. Wideman’s

\(^8\) Alice Walker’s “Everyday Use” depicts a similar (albeit even more racialized) romanticizing: one of the story’s main characters, Dee (now Wangero), romanticizes her
narrator uses qualities we typically find in lyric (e.g. leaving the protagonist static, withholding narratorial judgement) and also provides sparse details about the ex-girlfriend and their relationship in order to foreground the abstract question, How should we relate to/use others’ stories?, over the more finite question, Would this particular story have helped this protagonist in this particular situation? That the protagonist didn’t know Doc’s story when they were still together also forces us to look at the question not as a choice of possible action but as an abstract concern.

Put in this context, “Doc’s Story” becomes a metafictional text that raises the issue of how flesh-and-blood readers respond to texts. The protagonist is a reader of sorts, and the story of Doc is his text, so he becomes a model (whether one finds him a positive or negative one) of our reading experience. Not only does the protagonist have the ethical responsibility as listener, which includes “using” Doc’s story in appropriate ways (though different readers might have different ideas about what constitutes an appropriate use), he as narrator has the complementary responsibility of how/when/where/how often/to whom of telling. It is also with this issue that the political and racial qualities of the story surface most readily. Clearly the protagonist’s race affects his ability to relate to Doc’s story, just as his ex-girlfriend’s race and ideas about race seem to prevent her from understanding the power of African myth. “Doc’s Story” broaches the sticky issue of who can access stories, what qualities and characteristics a reader needs to “read” a story, as well as the complementary – and equally sticky issue of heritage by wanting to transform her grandmother’s blankets into historical artifact rather
who can/should tell, vicariously adopt, someone else’s story. Alongside these political and racial issues are issues of narrating ethics, the two co-existing without necessarily being co-dependent. I hope my analysis of the particulars of “Doc’s Story” has suggested that to a certain extent, listeners have a responsibility to use the stories they hear in an ethical way that is oftentimes independent of the specific content of those stories.

To a certain extent John Barth’s “Lost in the Funhouse” is the flip-side to “Doc’s Story” given that it uses the coincidence of narrator and narratee to highlight the discourse-level issue of narrating more so than listening. In Barth’s story, a

9 I am not alone in separating narrative ethics (the responsibilities of telling and listening) from politics. Adam Newton also argues that ethics and politics might co-exist but they are not co-dependent: “While some recent attempts to conflate ethics with politics seek to establish for ethics a greater status by default (a kind of borrowed credibility), I am insisting instead on its own critical legitimacy. Political and historical contexts often write large the intersubjective details of narrative encounter and thus the ethical need not be consigned to a realm lying outside history and politics. Circumstances of narrative disclosure, their motives and their consequences, conduct, as I have said, to a set of ethical questions. These questions, however, remain distinct from (without supplanting) economic, cultural, or erotic power relations as analyzed, for example, by Roland Barthes, Fredric Jameson, Ross Chambers, and others. Again, I propose that as specifically ethical claims exacted by narrative relationships, these terms are less contractual than immanent/transcendental: the limiting intersubjective conditions of the narrative imagination” (27).

10 Perhaps nowhere else is the responsibility of listening preyed upon so blatantly than in David Mamet’s Glengarry Glen Ross. In one of the play’s more poignant scenes, the manipulative Dave Moss discusses with fellow employee George Aaronowhis plans to rob the office where they work. After George refuses to be part of the robbery, Moss threatens to incriminate him as an accessory to a crime. When George asks why he’d be responsible, Moss replies, “Because you listened” (46).
narrator/writer attempts to construct a coming-of-age story about an adolescent boy named Ambrose who travels with his family and his neighborhood crush to a theme park, where he wanders into the funhouse. However, Barth’s story ends up being the narrator/writer’s self-reflexive commentary on his own inabilities as writer, leaving the story of Ambrose fragmented and, for all practical purposes, incoherent. As we’ll see, Barth uses the narrator/writer’s self-address to expose the ethical responsibilities of narrating as well as postmodern problematics of narrating.

Almost immediately, “Lost in the Funhouse” disorients the reader, who through literary conditioning has certain expectations about narrative progression (something the writer will later remind himself of). The story starts,

For whom is the funhouse fun? Perhaps for lovers. For Ambrose it is a place of fear and confusion. He has come to the seashore with his family for the holiday, the occasion of their visit is Independence Day, the most important secular holiday of the United States of America. A single straight underline is the manuscript mark for italic type, which in turn is the printed equivalent to oral emphasis of words and phrases as well as the customary type for titles of complete works, not to mention. Italics are also employed, in fiction stories especially, for “outside,” intrusive, or artificial voices, such as radio announcements, the texts of telegrams and newspaper articles, et cetera. They should be used sparingly. If passages originally in roman type are italicized by someone repeating them, it’s customary to acknowledge the fact. Italics mine. (69).

The first few sentences read like a fairly standard heterodiegetic opening about someone named Ambrose. However, once the narrator begins to comment on his own use of italics, providing rules which he himself seems to break unwittingly, we are forced to reconsider how we read the opening two sentences. Whereas on first encounter these
sentences appear to be a narrator beginning a story to a narratee, after we see the self-reflection of the rest of the paragraph, we understand these sentences as a writer asking himself exploratory questions as he considers character design and plot development. That he leaves sentence fragments, something he will do routinely throughout the story, ending clauses before they are over ("not to mention.") suggests self-address: even a writer as unsuccessful as this one will prove to be would not show such explicit disregard for coherence with an external audience. It is crucial that we understand the narrative structure at work here, for it will contextualize the rest of Barth’s story. It is imperative that we recognize “Lost in the Funhouse” as self-addressed commentary and focus our interpretive attention on the narrator’s discourse rather than try to sort out the confused details of Ambrose’s story: we are meant to stumble through the story of Ambrose, for its false endings and irrelevant wanderings parallel the tricks of a funhouse and underscore the literary frustrations of the writer.

Unlike “Doc’s Story,” in which the coincidence of narrator and narratee occurs only in an intradiegetic narrative, “Lost in the Funhouse” maintains this coincidence throughout. It is clear when the narrator refers to rules of writing (as we saw in the story’s opening paragraph) that he is talking to himself, reminding himself of what he thinks comprises a successful story. He also slips into very straight-forward self-directed commentary, blatantly admitting to himself that “I’ll never be an author” (83). However, even during stretches of the narrative that depict the actual story of Ambrose, the narrator/writer narrates to himself. We recognize that these sections constitute a draft of
a story the writer is writing. For instance, at one point during a scene of Ambrose’s story, the narrator/writer includes two modifiers, one in Roman type, one in italics: “‘I swear,’ Magda said, in mock *in feigned* exasperation” (79). Here the narrator is leaving an implicit note-to-self; he will presumably go back and decide which of the two expressions he will use.

“Lost in the Funhouse” is comprised of two interspersed parts: the fragments of Ambrose’s story and the narrator’s self-reflexive commentary. Although the story of Ambrose lacks a number of basic building-blocks of narrative, it does contain some character development, a setting, and conflict: we learn that Ambrose is a thirteen-year old boy who travels to a Maryland theme park during World War II, fascinatingly confused and curious about sex. What his story lacks most noticeably is narrative progression, something the reader does not have to discover on his/her own but is confessed to by the narrator/writer: he laments, “There’s no point in going farther; this isn’t getting anybody anywhere” (80), and “This can’t go on much longer; it can go on forever” (90). Similarly, Ambrose’s story lacks a climax (figuratively related to his sexual frustrations) and attending denouement:

A long time ago we should have passed the apex of Freitag’s Triangle and made brief work of the denouement; the plot doesn’t rise by meaningful steps but winds upon itself, digresses, retreats, hesitates, sighs, collapses, expires. The climax of a story must be its protagonist’s discovery of a way to get through the funhouse. But he has found none, may have ceased to search. (92)
These passages not only reveal the writer’s expectations for effective narration, they also demonstrate his inability to fulfill those expectations: the protagonist’s (Ambrose) failure to get out of the funhouse mirrors the writer’s failure to get out of (i.e. complete) the fiction.

Clearly, the writer struggles with the details (“A thirteen year-old would never say that”), progression (“at this rate our protagonist will never get out of the funhouse”), and presentation (“I’ll never be an author”) of Ambrose’s story. However, he has other, more subtle frustrations as a writer. In addition to being poorly constructed, Ambrose’s story “has no theme” (74), as the narrator himself admits. This is not from lack of trying. Although the narrator attempts to insert politically-laden details (such as “Their mother declared she could do without fireworks: they reminded her too much of the real thing” [78]), he recognizes this is not enough political thematics given the setting. He comments,

In a short story about Ocean City, Maryland, during World War II, the author could make use of the image of sailors on leave in the penny arcades and shooting galleries, sighting through crosshairs of toy machine guns at swastika’d subs, while out in the black Atlantic a U-boat skipper squints through his periscope at real ships outlined by the glow of the penny arcades. (82)

This is an interesting passage because on one hand it recognizes what is not in Ambrose’s story but probably should be, and on the other hand it describes to the authorial reader (as opposed to this writer’s potential future audience) what’s omitted from Ambrose’s story, allowing us to see another unrealized possibility for Ambrose’s tale. The narrator’s
interest in theme suggests that, in addition to having a number of formal expectations for narrative, he also has thematic expectations; just as he is unable to structure a story, so too is he unable to thematize, explicitly asking himself, “What relevance does the war have to the story?” (92).

This writer/narrator is particularly incompetent, yet “Lost in the Funhouse” seems to suggest that although this writer may be an extreme case, he is not entirely atypical given his means of production. That is, this writer’s primary reason for failure is that he attempts to follow literary rules (such as engaging multiple senses simultaneously or using Freitag’s Triangle), expecting that if he strings together enough of these techniques, he will produce a successful story (though he never explicitly defines what a successful story would be). Rather than contend that literature can’t represent anything other than the act of representing, placing literature in an inescapable metafictional cage, which seems too strong even for this exemplary postmodern text, “Lost in the Funhouse” seems to suggest that we need to envision new ways to create literature, ones that don’t rely on the traditional “rules” of composition, which don’t work given the post-structuralist understanding of flawed signification as well as the make-up of postmodern culture. Still, as the narrator/writer of “Lost in the Funhouse” unwittingly demonstrates, the success of representing representation (metafiction) might be more likely than that of representing experience. Either way, “Lost in the Funhouse” recognizes explicitly what is true of much postmodern fiction: as Barth himself claims, besides a depiction of the human condition, literature is “always also about itself” (Friday Book 191).
As I’ve suggested throughout this analysis, the story of the narrator’s struggles as a writer greatly overshadows the story of Ambrose. However, the intradiegetic tale of Ambrose does relate thematically to the over-riding story of the narrator/writer. The idea that Ambrose loses himself in a funhouse parallels the disorienting experience of reading “Lost in a Funhouse.” Using a nearly-too-obvious metaphor, one that risks being a cliché, Barth is characterizing literature as a funhouse, a space where both linguistic signification (“there aren’t enough different ways to say that”) and narrative representation (witness the incomplete simile: “The brown hair on Ambrose’s mother’s forearm gleamed in the sun like.”) are oftentimes misdirections, skewed projections, for both author and reader. Moreover, that Ambrose fails to come-to-age during his experience at the funhouse mirrors the obviously-immature writer’s inability to come-to-age as a storyteller. In fact, the connection between the narrator and Ambrose might be closer than merely analogous failed experiences.

Throughout the story, there are suggestions that the writer is Ambrose at an older age. At one point, the narrator reminds himself of a literary rule-of-thumb concerning the association between an author and his/her fiction: “The more closely an author identifies with the narrator, literally or metaphorically, the less advisable it is, as a rule, to use the first-person narrative viewpoint” (74). That Barth’s writer/narrator uses the third-person in his story about Ambrose suggests, given this rule, that he as an author associates quite closely to Ambrose. Likewise, later in the story, during a scene in which Ambrose tries to “seduce” Magda into the funhouse, the narrator merges his own voice with that of
Ambrose’s:

“I warn you, I’ve never been through it before,” he [Ambrose] added, laughing easily; “but I reckon we can manage somehow. The important thing to remember, after all, is that it’s meant to be a funhouse; that is, a place of amusement. If people really got lost or injured or too badly frightened in it, the owner’d go out of business. There’d even be lawsuits. No character in a work of fiction can make a speech this long without interruption or acknowledgement from the other characters.” (87)

What’s particular interesting in this passage is the placement of quotation marks. This writer doesn’t insert the end quote at the end of Ambrose’s plea (“There’d even be lawsuits”) but after his own claim about the speech’s realism. Of course, this error might be just another sign of the writer’s clumsiness, but considering the other hints throughout the story of his association with Ambrose, it might be an unconscious association. Not only do we see the narrator/writer seem to connect himself with Ambrose, we also see Ambrose take on characteristics of the writer/narrator, making their possible connection a probable one. While lost in the funhouse, “Ambrose wandered, languished, dozed. Now and then he fell into the habit of rehearsing to himself the unadventurous story of his life, narrated from the third-person point of view, from his earliest memory parenthesis of maple leaves stirring in the summer breath of tidewater Maryland end of parenthesis to the present moment” (92). Given the connection between fiction and funhouses, Ambrose’s lost-in-the-funhouse-narrating parallels strikingly well this narrator’s lost-in-his-fiction-narrating.

The probability that the narrator is Ambrose has significant consequences on the
over-all impact of Barth’s story: assuming that Ambrose is the narrator, then not only
would the narrator fail at narrative representation; he would also fail to understand his
own life. That is, his inability to write a story already suggests a complementary inability
to understand the world, considering that articulation and understanding typically go
hand-in-hand. That the story he is unable to depict and understand is his own pushes
Barth’s comment on postmodernity even further and suggests that not only are there
definite challenges for representation, there are also definite challenges to forming the
necessary understanding of the world that precedes attempts at representation: we can’t
write not because we are bad writers necessarily, but because we can’t comprehend the
world about which we are supposed to write. As the narrator/writer laments, “people
don’t know what to make of him [Ambrose], he doesn’t even know what to make of
himself” (88).

Despite – even because of – all the confusion the reader encounters within the
narrative, Barth’s story succeeds. Perhaps most impressive of all is Barth’s ability to
maintain a necessary degree of disclosure to the authorial audience (we want to get
something out of Barth’s story) while restricting his narrator’s communication (the
narrator hasn’t really said anything). That is, the success of Barth’s story is contingent on
the failure of his narrator/writer’s story. What makes the work so enjoyable for us as
readers is its ability to communicate to us through the narrator’s voice even while that
voice is so incompetent to communicate on its own diegetic level (to himself as a narratee
and to his projected future readers). Thus, the more limitations the narrator experiences,
the more impressive Barth’s project becomes. Still, Barth manages to exaggerate the fumblings of the narrator while making those struggles seem earnest given that certain literary forms seem exhausted. He doesn’t comprise his character with mockery or ridicule for the sake of our readerly enjoyment.

Combined, these two examples highlight the main unifying feature of this narrative category: the coincidence of narrator and narratee, mainly because of its closed-circuit effect (narrator is narratee is narrator), foregrounds the discourse-level acts of narrating and listening, inviting the reader to engage with the ethics of those activities. (This is a contrast from what we saw in chapter one with the coincidence of narratee and protagonist, a mode that invites readers to engage with story-level experiences.)

In his book *Narrative Ethics*, Adam Newton sets out to examine the ethical dynamics of narrative, focusing his attention on the productive act of narrating (as opposed to the narrative product). On the side of listening, he identifies a two-fold ethical responsibility:

in part it means learning the paradoxical lesson that ‘getting’ someone else’s story is also a way of losing the person as ‘real,’ as ‘what he is’; it is a way of appropriating or allegorizing that endangers both intimacy and ethical duty. At the same time, however, one’s responsibility consists of responding to just this paradox. (19)

Newton identifies the following corresponding ethical dimensions for the telling, recognizing

an ethical mandate built into language use: vocative, interpellative, or dative impulses in utterance, we might say, which take narrative shape as address, command, plea, gift, and trust […] and which in the light of an
alternate narrative counter-text of secrecy, gossip, coercion, or control become even more palpable. (25)

“Doc’s Story” and “Lost in the Funhouse” embody narrating ethics distinct from but related to those Newton identifies. The protagonist of “Doc’s Story,” as we’ve seen, doesn’t necessarily have an ethical responsibility to Doc the person but to the story of Doc. This is in part because the protagonist has never met Doc and in larger part because the story of Doc has transcended Doc’s being. That is, rather than be concerned with “losing the real” Doc, a possibility Newton points out, the protagonist has a responsibility to the story itself, which he risks viewing as a commodity. To a certain extent, this raises the ethical stakes: if it were a matter of “losing” Doc, then only Doc (as a person) would be affected; but where the story is concerned, the entire community in which that story has power is affected.11

Likewise, the ethics of narrating that we identify through “Lost in the Funhouse” stray a bit from those Newton discusses. As my analysis of the story has exposed, I hope, the narrator/writer in “Lost in the Funhouse” recognizes two main ethical obligations. The first is to his characters, to reporting “how it is” without the literary manipulation that takes possession of characters. This writer seems to be of the sort that creates a character and then lets him/her do what he/she will, granting a (perhaps unrealistic) degree of autonomy. At one point, the writer complains, “The gypsy fortune-teller

11 Philip Roth’s The Ghostwriter takes up a similar issue. Written almost entirely in conditional narration, it asks “what if” Anne Frank didn’t die in the concentration camps and recognizes the extent to which the community that “possesses” her story would be affected.
machine might have provided a foreshadowing of the climax of this story if Ambrose had operated it” (81). Here, the writer seems to relate to his fictional characters as a non-fictional writer would relate to individuals of his/her text, reporting what happened without the privilege of creating what happened. This relationship also suggests that these events did actually happen, further reinforcing the probability that the narrator is Ambrose and these are events from his past. The writer also feels an ethical obligation to his eventual readers. Besides pressuring himself to create a coherent story, this writer also seems to recognize the need to answer the “so-what” question of literature: what does this story mean for a reader? He tries to infuse the story with meaning mainly through political themes, especially given the story’s setting. But he also recognizes the inherent difficulty in making a story matter: “One reason for not writing a lost-in-the-funhouse story is that either everybody’s felt what Ambrose feels, in which case it goes without saying, or else no normal person feels such things, in which case Ambrose is a freak” (88).
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.

Before I examine the general qualities of this narrative mode, I want to clarify what I mean by a coincidence of narrator and protagonist functions. We were able to recognize the coincidence of narrator and narratee functions in the previous chapter quite easily: if the same individual serves as both the narrator and narratee (self-address), then we have a
coincidence of these functions. However, this criterion (i.e. being a single individual) alone doesn’t constitute a coincidence of narrator and protagonist functions because unlike the narrator and narratee functions, which are codependent and reside on the same diegetic and temporal planes, narrator and protagonist functions typically reside on different diegetic planes and in different temporal spaces. Take, for instance, Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*, which we will examine in detail in chapter five: Humbert Humbert is both narrator and protagonist, yet his role as a narrator is quite distinct from his role as a protagonist, in large part because of the temporal and moral distance between his acting-self and his narrating-self. In fact, his ethical and legal pleas require that he distinguish his now narrating-self from his former acting-self. In order for narrator and protagonist functions to coincide, they must not only be enacted by a single individual, they must also occur concurrently, residing on the same diegetic plane and in the same temporal space. Dorrit Cohn describes this phenomenon in her discussion of simultaneous present-tense narration:

> Another [quality of simultaneous present-tense narration] is its aptitude for presenting consistently focalized self-narration, a mode rarely (if ever) sustained throughout a standard (past-tense) fictional autobiography. For here the temporal hiatus between the narrating and the experiencing self – which diary and epistolary novels may shrink to days, hours, even minutes – is literally reduced to zero: the moment of narration is the moment of experience, the narrating self is the experiencing self. One effect of this fusion is the seamless continuity that simultaneous narration achieves between outer and inner reality, report and reflection.  
*(Distinction 107)*

What Cohn describes here is what I mean when I refer to *a coincidence of narrator and protagonist functions*, specifically “the narrating self is the experiencing self.” For this
reason, all examples of this type of coincidence are simultaneous present tense narratives, which collapse the major distinctions between narrator and character functions.

Yet we must be especially careful to distinguish between different uses of the present tense, specifically between *simultaneous* present tense and *historical* present tense. Not all uses of the present tense reflect a coincidence of narrating and experiencing. Some narratives employ the historical present tense, in which past events are narrated in the present for rhetorical effect rather than to represent the actual situation of simultaneous acting and narrating. For instance, Truman Capote’s “A Christmas Memory” uses the historical present, narrating past events in the present tense, to enhance the immediacy of the narrator’s memories. We recognize Capote’s story (and other such examples) as historical present because of the narrator’s knowledge of events subsequent to the supposed narrating- and experiencing-now – as manifest in the ability to narrate future events – revealing a pre-existing awareness of the entire story that is typical of retrospective narration. Take in illustration the following passage from “A Christmas Memory”: “The wind is blowing, and nothing will do till we’ve run to the pasture below the house where Queenie has scooted to bury her bone (and where, a winter hence, Queenie will be buried, too)” (175). Although the narrator uses the present tense throughout the story, which on the surface gives the impression of simultaneous living and telling, he is aware of events posterior to the story-now (i.e. Queenie’s death), revealing instead a retrospective perspective of the events, something we associate with
historical present. Unlike simultaneous present tense narration, historical present
distinguishes between narrator and protagonist (though at times it tries to obscure this
distinction). The historical present of “A Christmas Memory” exposes the difference
between the mature narrating-self and his seven-year old protagonist-self, the narrator
lamenting the loss of – while vicariously reliving through the narration – that innocence.
Although the narrator adopts the focalization of his younger-self, his discourse is
informed by what he has experienced between the “then” of story and the “now” of
narrating. Because in historical present tense narratives the narrator does not truly narrate
as the events are occurring, the rhetorical qualities particular to simultaneous present
tense that I will discuss below do not apply to historical present tense.¹

Just as there exist relatively few examples of the coincidence of narrator and
narratee – a shortage we addressed in the previous chapter – there too exist very few
examples of a coincidence of narrator and protagonist. Although Dorrit Cohn suggests
that it is growing in popularity (Distinctions 97),² simultaneous present tense narration is
still infrequently used compared to the more traditional retrospective narration. And just

¹ One could argue, perhaps, from a philosophic rather than rhetorical or grammatical
stand-point, that there exists little if any distinction between past and present tense
narratives. Recall William Faulkner’s well-known sentiment concerning the relationship
between past and present: “no man is himself, he is the sum of his past. There is no such
thing really as was because the past is. It is a part of every man, every woman, and every
moment” (246). However, the grammar of present tense narration produces an
immediacy of experience that is crucial to the reading experience, something I’ll discuss
in more detail later in the chapter.

² One finds a number of examples of present tense stories within Raymond Carver’s
fiction. See “Sacks,” “Where I’m Calling From,” “Menudo,” “Whoever Was Using this
Bed,” and “The Bridle.”
as we hypothesized about why very few narratives exist in the former case, so too can we hypothesize about why so few narratives employ simultaneous present tense narration and a coincidence of narrator and protagonist. Cohn herself points to its artificiality, to the lack of a real-world analogue, as a reason for its seeming unpopularity: “the language that verbalizes a first person’s experience without temporal remove refers to a patently artificial creature” (“Fictional” 19). She recognizes that the standard case is “live now, tell later” (Distinction 96). Yet Cohn considers simultaneous narration’s ability to break mimetic standards a liberation rather than a liability:

its innovation, to state it blantly, is to emancipate first-person fictional narration from the dictates of formal mimetics, granting it the same degree (though not the same kind) of discursive freedom that we take for granted in third-person fiction: the license to tell a story in an idiom that corresponds to no manner of real world, natural discourse. (Distinction 105)

Speaking of mimesis in general, though with simultaneous present tense narration in mind, Phelan adds that “mimesis is not a product of faithful imitation of the real (whatever that is) but rather a set of conventions for representing what we provisionally and temporarily agree to be the real” (“Present Tense” 228) and focuses on rhetorical effect rather than real-world imitation. However, setting aside the slippery question of mimesis, we also see an inherent difficulty and unnaturality in contemplating – let alone narrating – events as they occur. Interestingly, although not written in the present tense, a passage from Jonathan Franzen’s The Corrections detailing the “problem of existence” of one its characters, who suffers from Parkinson’s disease, parallels in poignant ways the
difficulty of simultaneously narrating (in this character’s case, merely understanding) events as they occur:

in the manner of a wheat seedling thrusting itself up out of the earth, the world moved forward in time by adding cell after cell to its leading edge, piling moment on moment, and that to grasp the world even in its freshest, youngest moment provided no guarantee that you’d be able to grasp it again a moment later. By the time he’d established that his daughter, Denise, was handing him a plate of snacks in his son Chip’s living room, the next moment in time was already budding itself into a pristinely ungrasped existence […] which was why, rather than exhaust himself playing catch-up, he preferred more and more to spend days down among the unchanging historical roots of things. (66)

Because of the pacing inherent in narrating-while-experiencing described in this Franzen passage, and because of the attending lack of opportunity to evaluate, simultaneous present tense narration tends to restrict its narrator’s function to that of reporting, inviting the reader to supplement the other two functions, interpreting and evaluating. The difficulty experienced by the character in the Franzen passage parallels the difficulty authors have maintaining a consistent use of simultaneous present tense narration, something we’ll encounter when we turn to Independence Day and Waiting for the Barbarians below. A constant description of what is currently happening doesn’t allow for reflective pauses, perhaps pointing to one of the reasons why simultaneous narration remains relatively unpopular among writers.

The coincidence of narrator and protagonist functions we find in simultaneous present tense narration influences the possibilities for narrative situation. The more standard case of completely retrospective narration, in which the entire narrative is
delivered in one sitting, however unrealistic the duration of that sitting might be, maintains a stable and consistent narrative situation. For instance, we learn from the opening unnamed-narrator’s frame in *Heart of Darkness* that Marlow tells of his encounter with Kurtz to his shipmates while waiting “for the turn of the tide” (17). At the close of the novel, we return to the same narrative situation: “Marlow ceased, and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha” (95). What is important for our discussion here is that for Marlow’s entire narrative, there is no change in situation. We experience a slightly different status of narrative situation in episodic narrations, which lie somewhere between retrospective and simultaneous narrations: we experience retrospective narration *within* the episodes, but in the narrative audience there is a sense of not knowing what will happen next *between* the episodes. Because episodic narrations rely on narration by installment, there is the potential for the narrative situation to shift between episodes. For instance, Stevens’s daily entries in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* occur at different stops on his trip across England. Yet even within this difference we find the consistency of sitting, reconsidering his past, and writing – though from different geographic locations; the increasing literal distance Stevens travels from Darlington Hall and his employment does, however, parallels his increasing ability to view his professional (and, by default, personal) life outside of his dignity-laden monomaniacism.

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3 It is important here to distinguish between *episodic narrations*, which are narratives told in installments, and *episodic narratives*, which are narratives told in one sitting but comprised of episodic events (e.g. *Huck Finn*, *Tortilla Flat*, *Tom Jones*).
Unlike in retrospective narration – and to a lesser degree, episodic narration – in simultaneous present tense narration, the narrative situation shifts throughout the narrative. Because the experiencing and narrating occur simultaneously, any change in event situation must be mirrored by a change in narrative situation. For instance, “We are Nighttime Travelers” opens with the narrator “standing in the kitchen” (79). Yet as the story progresses, the narrative situation shifts as do the scenes in which our narrator-protagonist acts. For instance, we end the narrative with the narrator narrating from his bed: “I roll in the bed, reach across, and touch her, and because she is surprised she turns to me” (96). Although the location of the discourse can be very important in simultaneous present tense narration, that location is likely to change with the change in event-scene, so it is more likely that the significance of the location will vary over the course of the narrative; consequently, it is fair to conclude that location and occasion will not have the same significance as they will in retrospective or episodic narration.

But narrating location is only one component of the narrative occasion: we also need to consider to whom the narrator speaks (narratee) and for what reason (objective). As we have just seen, in simultaneous narration the narrating location is the experiencing location. Thus, to have a narratee present at the time of narrating, the narratee would also have to be present during the experiencing action. However, in the narratives we’ll examine in this chapter, there is no narratee present in the scenes (not to mention there is no indication from others at the scene that the narrator/protagonist is narrating). The opening of “We are Nighttime Travelers” implicitly recognizes the absence of the
narratee by providing details that a narratee would not need if he/she were present:

“Francine is asleep and I am standing downstairs in the kitchen with the door closed and the light on and a stack of mostly blank paper on the counter in front of me. My dentures are in a glass on the sink” (79). In one of the more poignant scenes of Independence Day, Frank Bascombe explicitly recognizes and laments that no one is there to hear his story: “only there’s no one. No one here or anywhere to say this to. And I’m sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry” (217). This is not a concern for the completely-coincident narrator (whom we’ll examine in the following chapter) because the narrator serves as his/her own narratee; therefore the narratee is present at the time of narrating.

Taken on its own, this is not a interpretive problem. After all, we encounter a number of narratives, most noticeably epistolary narratives, whose narratee is not present at the time of the narrating. We also encounter narratives that provide so little detail about the narrative occasion that we cannot determine the presence or absence of a narratee, in which case the default is to assume there is a narratee with the narrator. But unlike the latter case, in which we cannot know for certain the narratee is not there, simultaneous narratives do supply enough detail of the narrator’s situation (specifically that his location coincides with the story-level scenes) to recognize that the narratee is not present at the time of narrating. Moreover, the simultaneous narratives we will look at in this chapter differ from epistolary narratives because they give neither explicit nor implicit indication that the narrator records the narrative (either through writing or some other means) in a way that would allow someone in the narrative audience (i.e. someone
in the narrator’s ontology) to access it at a later time; nor is there any general indication that the narrator expects someone to access it sometime in the future. In fact, the narrators give the impression rhetorically that someone external (i.e. not merely the narrators themselves) is able to access their narratives at the time of narrating.

Given, then, that the narratee is not present at the time of narrating and that there is no indication that a future narratee will experience the narrative, we are faced with a narrative that does not contain a narratee within the immediate ontology of the fiction. For this reason, simultaneous narration defies one of Gerald Prince’s foundational tenets of narratee study: just as every narrative must have a narrator, so too must it have a narratee. At the very start of his seminal study of the narratee, Prince remarks, “All narration, whether it is oral or written, whether it recounts real or mythic events, whether it tells a story or relates a simple sequence of actions in time, presupposes not only (at least) one narrator but also (at least) one narratee, the narratee being someone whom the narrator addresses” (7). Yet in simultaneous narration, there is no potential for an external intradiegetic audience to receive the narrative either at the time or narrating of at a later time. I term this phenomenon particular to simultaneous narration the absentee narratee.

It might seem a bit unrealistic to expect to naturalize the status of the narratee in a mode that is so overtly synthetic. As I have suggested throughout this chapter,

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4 In her essay “The Narratee and the Situation of the Enunciation: A Reconsideration of Prince’s Theory,” Mary Ann Piwowarczyk echoes Prince’s claim: “every fictional text is
simultaneous narration is perhaps the most unnatural of all narrative modes, using Monika Fludernik’s notion of a natural narrative being one that occurs spontaneously in the real world and thus allows us to translate fiction back to reality with little manipulation (Toward 13-15). Likewise, Cohn recognizes that “every conceit the reader may try out with a view to finding a pragmatically acceptable origin for this discourse – contemporaneously written script, continuous tape-recording, nonstop oral diary – breaks down when it is matched with the textual realities” (Distinction 105). What is important here, especially considering my larger project of destabilizing the primacy of voice, is that in addition to recognizing the mimetic impossibility of a narrator narrating events as he experiences them, as Cohn points out, we also need to recognize the similar mimetic impossibility of an external narratee in simultaneous present-tense narration. Just as we have a narrator who cannot in any way be naturalized, we also have a narratee that cannot, which has ramifications on the reception end of the rhetorical transmission. The consequence of having an un-naturalizable narrator differs from that of having an un-naturalizable narratee, however. Although simultaneous narration is mimetically impossible, we don’t conclude there is no narrator, simply because every tale must have a teller to exist. Conversely, however, simultaneous narration does seem to challenge the default existence of an intradiegetic audience, the narratee, whose role is not necessarily guaranteed by the existence of a narrative.

in some basic sense an act of communication and requires outside the text an addresser
The narrator’s synthetic nature combined with the narratee’s synthetic nature distance the entire narrative transmission from the world in which the story takes place, a world that operates quite similarly to our own (at least in the narratives I’ll discuss in this chapter). The narrative transmission seems to transcend that ontology (of the fiction): if the narrative transmission cannot exist in its own ontology – for reasons of mimetic impossibility that Cohn and I have identified – then it must extend elsewhere. That is, the narrator seems to narrate as if strangely aware that someone outside his ontology – such as an authorial reader – is accessing his narrative, and thus acting as his principal audience, considering that the narrator is aware that no one within that ontology can access it. As we saw in chapter one with choose-your-own-adventure narratives, simultaneous present-tense narration seems to involve narrators who communicate to the authorial audience. The primary effect of the absentee narratee, then, is to invite the reader to enter into the fiction more readily than might occur with narrative modes containing a determinate narratee because of the impression that the reader is the principal audience of the narrator; this is distinct from other means by which the reader feels addressed, such as the “you” address of second-person narration that we explored in chapter one. In this regard, the absentee narratee resembles cinematic narrative voice-over. With film, we know when the narrative transmission occurs – literally as we watch

and addressee and within, a narrator and narratee” (167).

5 It is fairly common for readers to feel directly addressed by narratives containing an uncharacterized narratee. By creating a situation in which an external narratee is impossible, simultaneous narration makes this feeling of being addressed even more tangible.
the movie. As with the absentee narratee in simultaneous narration, the narrative voice-over in film seems to transcend its ontology and address the authorial (cinematic) audience directly. Speaking of cinematic voice-over narrators, film scholar Sarah Kozloff writes, “these narrators either speak to an unspecified audience or address us viewers directly and self-consciously” (50). Kozloff goes on to argue that because the voice-over narrator seems to recognize the existence of the viewers, “voice-over narration is a mechanism for assuaging the guilt involved with [cinematic] voyeurism” (51).

We can think of the third component of the narrative occasion – narrative objective – in connection with the progressions of simultaneous narration. Unlike retrospective narration, simultaneous narration conflates narrative’s three progressions: the character’s, the narrator’s, and the reader’s; retrospective narration keeps these progressions distinct. In retrospective narration, the character follows story time, experiencing events as they occur in real time. Retrospective narrators, however, are aware of the entire story before they begin narrating and therefore know more than the characters at any given time. It is what allows a narrator to offer comments such as “little did I know at the time but…” When reading retrospective narration, we reside somewhere in between: mostly we align with the character and uncover information and

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6 One could make the analogous argument that many written narratives also give the impression that the narrator narrates as we read. However, there is a significant rhetorical difference between cinema and written narrative that distinguishes these temporal relations: unlike in film, in written narrative we have the responsibility to “produce” by reading the narrative. More accurately, in written narrative we are re-producing the narrating when we read; in film, which will continue to progress if I step out of the theatre, the narrator produces the narrative on its own.
experiences as he/she does, but we also align at times with the narrator, for instance when he/she alludes to something they will come later in the story (and thus something the character wouldn’t know at the time). Take in illustration the opening paragraph of Ethan Canin’s “Emperor of the Air”:

Let me tell you who I am. I’m sixty-nine years old, live in the same house I was raised in, and have been the high school biology and astronomy teacher in this town so long that I have taught the grandson of one of my former students. I wear my father’s wristwatch, which tells me it is past four-thirty in the morning, and though I have thought otherwise, I now think that hope is the essence of all good men. (3)

Besides establishing the narrative situation, this opening discourse provides us with an indication (but not a complete revelation) of what the narrator “now” knows (i.e. at the time of narrating), which is something that he didn’t know (“though I have thought otherwise”) from his character perspective at the start of the story events, which begin in the next paragraph. The narrator knows how he comes to believe what he does about hope as well as the particulars of that belief, whereas the reader only knows generally that the character will eventually come to this understanding; the character, whom we meet in the next paragraph, is last on this chain of awareness and has no foresight that this epiphany will occur. Even when we do not encounter explicit acknowledgement of development as we get in “Emperor of the Air,” we typically have indirect markers in retrospective narration that some sort of development has occurred, and we question why and how the narrator develops. For instance, at the start of Great Expectations we recognize a difference between the mature narrating Pip and the immature, boyhood
experiencing Pip simply from his discourse (i.e. his language use as narrator); in turn, we wonder how young Pip matures into the narrating Pip.

Simultaneous narration, however, conflates story progression, discourse progression, and what I will call reading progression and makes equal the amount of knowledge about what will happen. Because the simultaneous narrator engages with the story at the same time the character does, he – like the character – is unable to know what will happen in the future and therefore is unable to provide the reader with any forward-looking knowledge. The opening sentence of “We are Nighttime Travelers” – while directly relating the narrator’s Prufrockian existence – also seems to characterize the naivety of the simultaneous narrator’s discourse that we typically associate with a character experiencing events (as opposed to a narrator recounting events): “Where are we going? Where, I might write, is this path leading us?” (79). Because of its defining feature, the simultaneity of acting and telling, simultaneous present tense cannot foreshadow any change or development. Likewise, not knowing what will happen in the story (or even that there will be a “story”), the simultaneous narrator cannot construct his narrative in ways that a retrospective narrator can: as Phelan notes, “since he does not know how events will turn out, he cannot be shaping the narrative according to his knowledge of the end. Consequently, we cannot read with our usual tacit assumptions that the narrator, however unself-conscious, has some direction in mind for his tale” (“Present” 223); “the narrative situation puts teleology beyond his control” (“Present” 234).
Now that I have outlined a number of general rhetorical qualities of simultaneous narration, I want to turn briefly to two simultaneous narratives – *Independence Day* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* – to examine how the present tense complements the narratives’ thematics. Richard Ford’s *Independence Day*, Pulitzer Prize winning sequel to *The Sportswriter*, continues the story of Frank Bascombe. Now a real-estate manager, Bascombe has planned a July Fourth weekend getaway with his son, Paul, who has been falling into trouble in and out of school and beginning to worry his mother (Bascombe’s ex-wife) and counselors. Bascombe discovers during their trip to the Basketball and Baseball Halls of Fame that his son’s feelings of isolation and depression are not unlike his own. The novel concludes with Bascombe rejecting his philosophy of “the Existence Period,” a stance of independent living that denies regrets of the past or anxieties of the future. This eventual rejection leads us to reassess the effect of the present tense narration, which, like the Existence Period, allows Frank to neglect the past and future by being absorbed in the now.

Much of Frank Bascombe’s philosophy in *Independence Day* can be summed up by a comment he makes in its precursor, *The Sportswriter*: “all we really want is to get to the point where the past can explain nothing about us and we can get on with life” (24). Throughout both novels, Bascombe spends most of his time trying to forget a past teeming with disappointment and depression: a failed marriage (to a woman he still loves) and the sudden death of his first son seem to bob on the surface of his consciousness. His means of dealing with the “sandpaper regret” of his past (and his
preliminary prescription for his son, Paul) is to “forget, forget, forget” (*Independence*
320). To shelve these preoccupations with a past he is powerless to change, Bascombe enters into what he terms the “Existence Period,” a stage of his life marked by a disregard for both his past and those around him. He remarks, “a successful practice of my middle life, a time I think of as the Existence Period, has been to ignore much of what I don’t like or that seems worrisome and embroiling, and then usually see it go away” (10). The Existence Period also requires an existential-like commitment to the here-and-now. He elaborates:

> instead of going on worrying about how happy I was all the time – after which worries and contingencies might glide away like leaves on a slack tide […] I might find myself, if not in the warp of many highly dramatic events, reckless furies and rocketing joie de vivre, still as close to day-to-day happy as I could be. This code of conduct is the most self-preserving and salubrious tenet of the Existence Period. (111)

The Existence Period allows Bascombe to maintain a level of perceived independence that isolates him not only from those around him but also from his former and future selves. Speaking directly of the Bascombe of *The Sportswriter*, but aptly describing the Bascombe of *Independence Day* as well, Elinor Ann Walker writes, “Frank embrace[s] literalness,” and “being a literalist is just another way of being completely in the moment and happy there, which as a goal seems perfectly reasonable. Its danger for Frank, though, is that he confuses such contentment with being absolved of a certain kind of responsibility for the future” (79); I would add that he also risks absolving himself from a certain responsibility to the past as well. Bascombe tries to avoid the past not only because it reminds him of regret and provides reasons for being depressed but also
because he fears that a reassessment of that past would only find it even less fulfilling
that he’s imagined: he philosophizes, “you’re usually wrong about how things used to be
anyway, except that you used to be happier – only you may not have known it at the time,
or might’ve been unable to seize it, so stuck were you in life’s gooeyness; or, as is often
the case, you might never have been quite as happy as you like to believe you were” (95).

Like life in the Existence Period, narrating in the present tense encourages
Bascombe to maintain exclusive focus on the now rather than recounting or reassessing
the past (as in retrospective narration) or looking ahead (as in conditional narration).
Perhaps most noticeably, the union of acting and telling in present tense narration allows
Bascombe to occupy his consciousness with the sometimes mundane events of the
everyday: as a simultaneous narrator, he does not demonstrate the selectivity of
retrospective narration. The over four-hundred page novel – which covers a three-day
period – includes a number of events and descriptions (e.g. a six-page exchange between
Bascombe and a business associate Karl, whose conversation “makes any but the most
banal response inescapable” [138]) that might have thematic relevance but don’t advance
the action (a progression Bascombe is unaware of as a simultaneous narrator); rather, the
consistent overlap of story- and discourse-times allows him not to think other, more
substantive thoughts. That Bascombe spends a striking amount of the novel travelling in
his car underscores both his desire to flee his past and his attraction to constant stimuli
that will distract him from substantive thought. Describing how his son sometimes deals with troubling thoughts, thoughts which Bascombe eventually discovers are parallel to his own, Bascombe also seems to describe – unwittingly – his own use of present tense narration as a means to deny the past:

[Paul] has told me that as of recently he has begun to picture the thinking process, and that his seems to be made of “concentric rings,” bright like hula hoops, one of which is memory, and he tries but can’t make them all “fit down flush on top of each other” in the congruent way he thinks they should – except sometimes just before the precise moment of sleep, when he can briefly forget about everything and feel happy. He has likewise told me about what he refers to as “thinking he’s thinking,” by which he tries to maintain a continuous monitorship of all his thoughts as a way of “understanding” himself and being under control and therefore making life better (though by doing so, of course, he threatens to drive himself nuts). (14)

Yet despite his investment in the Existence Period, Bascombe remains unable to disregard his past. In fact, most everything he does, right down to buying and moving into his ex-wife’s former house (“I should say, perhaps, the former house owned by formerly my wife” [7]), suggests his unconscious impulse to retain the past. Throughout the entire novel, in part an obligation of authorial disclosure, Frank narrates significant

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7 Similarly, in his travel narrative *Travels with Charley*, John Steinbeck admits that his attraction to back roads rather than highways stems from a desire to avoid thinking of serious topics: “I can only suspect that the lonely man peoples his driving dreams with friends, that the loveless man surrounds himself with lovely loving women, and that children climb through the dreaming of the childless driver. And how about the areas of regrets? If only I had done so-and-so, or had not said such-and-such – my God, the damn thing might not have happened. Finding this potential in my own mind, I can suspect it in others, but I will never know, for no one ever tells. And this is why, on my journey which was designed for observation, I stayed as much as possible on secondary roads where there was much to see and hear and smell, and avoided the great wide traffic slashes which promote the self by fostering daydreams” (74).
portions of his past. Perhaps the most influential event he recounts in retrospection is the occasion when his ex-wife reveals that she plans to remarry. Frank provides a detailed account of the phone conversation that also includes a hypothetical response that, clearly, he now (at the present time of narrating) regrets not having delivered:

Don’t marry him, sweetheart! Marry me! Again! Let’s sell both our shitty houses and move to Quoddy Head, where I’ll buy a small newspaper from the proceeds. You can learn to sail your skiff off Grand Manan, and the kids can learn to set type by hand, be way little seafarers, grow adept with lobster pots, trade in their Jersey accents, go to Bowdoin and Bates. (103)

Our response to this impassioned speech, a response that enjoys some sense of relieved tension because Frank has verbalized his feelings to the one who matters, relies on the fact that Frank tells us “these are words I didn’t say into the dense millennial silence available to me” (103) only after we read them. Unlike other, arguably less effective instances of hypothetical narration, here we don’t recognize it as hypothetical until after the fact, forcing us to change our initial response, the one we have as we read the passage thinking he actually spoke these words to her; because the narrator ultimately retracts information, this technique resembles what Brian Richardson terms denarration, which

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8 In “Indeterminate Ursula and ‘Seeing How it Must Have Looked,’ or ‘Damned Lemming’ and Subjunctive Narration in Pynchon, Faulkner, O’Brien, and Morrison,” Martin Fitzpatrick defines subjunctive narration, a similar yet distinct phenomenon from what I’m calling hypothetical narration, as “uncertain narrative, marked by an inherent unknowability” (244). Fitzpatrick’s examples differ from this passage in Independence Day because their hypothetical or subjunctive nature is not withheld in the way it is by Ford’s narrator. In Fitzpatrick’s examples, readers know that the events are unconfirmed as they read them; thus, readers will not need to re-evaluate the discourse as they do in Independence Day.
he defines as “a kind of narrative negation in which a narrator denies significant aspects of her narrative that had earlier been presented as given” (168). It also resembles the companion to Richardson’s denarrated, Prince’s disnarration, which Prince defines as “events that do not happen though they could have and are nonetheless referred to (in a negative or hypothetical mode) by the narrative text” (Narrative as Theme 30); as is true of this passage, disnarration has the effect of suggesting “the notion ‘unrealized’ (the theme of missed occasions, lost illusions, unjustified ambitions)” (Prince Narrative 37). That the tension is ultimately not relieved through this passage forces us to view it with regret, as a missed opportunity, just as Frank himself does.

Rather than be an effective way “to ignore much of what I don’t like or that seems worrisome and embroiling, and then usually see it go away” (10), the Existence Period seems to be a way of reminding himself to forget, which inevitably only serves as a reminder of the things he wants to forget. Acknowledging that we are unable to escape our pasts completely – and that in many instances, the best path does not include an attempt at escape – Frank must internalize a more reasonable way to negotiate his past. This he seems to do in his concluding epiphianic moment. He has adopted a relationship to his past that allows him to recognize it without being dominated by it: “and this odd feeling I have is of having passed on (not in the bad way) to a recognition that ghosts

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9 Richardson identifies two main effects of denarration: instances of denarration “draw attention to […] the performative nature of the articulation of fiction” (171); “denarrated events pose yet another problem for narrative theory, specifically, how is one to separate story from discourse?” (173). Denarration also has the rhetorical effect I describe in the
ascribed to places where you once were only confuse matters with their intractable lack of corroborating substance” (442). Toward novel’s end he has reversed his initial stance on retrospection and is willing to access his past: “none of us, I grant you, would mind a second appraisal with the benefit of some time having passed” (424). Ultimately, Bascombe transitions from the Existence Period to the “Permanent Period” (450), a move that involves reasserting his place both in time (i.e. someone with a past and a future) and in society (i.e. someone who recognizes that he does not live in a vacuum): as Walker writes, “Frank finally rejects seeming for being, opening himself again to the unforeseen contingencies, and in dependence, discovering something of what it means to be independent” (135). Describing how he wrote the novel’s ending, Ford himself speaks of the change in Bascombe’s worldview:

the first ending left Frank alone in the car with the doctor’s drawing of his son Paul’s wounded eye, and I thought that was a wonderful image, visually very strong, but it didn’t register the end the way I wanted the end to register; it seemed wrong that Frank was alone in the car […] Without question I wanted the ending to represent Frank moving into affiliation with others – which it does – now – with Frank walking up into the crowd watching the Fourth of July parade. (quoted in “An Interview” 145)

Just as Bascombe recognizes the unreliability of the Existence Period as a flawed philosophy of independence and isolation, we as authorial readers recognize the unreliability of the present tense narration as a technique to suggest being in the moment. The concept of a narrative technique such as present tense narration being unreliable is

Ford passage: forcing readers to reassess their earlier impressions based on these later narrative negations.
one that parallels the more common notion of a narrator being unreliable: just as we identify a narrator’s unreliability by recognizing a disjuncture between what he/she says and what the implied author wants us to understand, so too can we recognize a type of technical unreliability in relation to present tense narration’s suggestion that the narrator is operating (almost exclusively) as the story is unfolding. Unlike the present tense narration of a story such as “We are Nighttime Travelers,” in Independence Day the notion of the narrator being in the moment of the story is deceptive or unreliable. As we saw quite clearly in the passage above (when he hypothetically responds to his wife’s plans to remarry), Bascombe’s narrational consciousness is not completely synchronized with his story-level actions: although he narrates story events as they occur, we as readers are aware that his “real” thoughts are not with the narration but with previous events. This is not to say that occurrences during the holiday weekend do not influence his psychological development; rather the implied focus on the past within the explicit narrating of the present reveals a narrative technique that is unreliable in its explicit suggestion: Frank Bascombe is not “in the now” but rather is mired in the past. Without describing it in the terms I use, Walker also recognizes the connection between a flawed philosophy like the Existence Period and questionable language use. She writes, “Frank’s voyage through theExistence Period and toward interconnectedness with others requires a kind of renegotiation with language, the spoken, written, and unuttered word alike” (157). Although she does not specify in her analysis his use of the present tense, his narrative technique certainly warrants renegotiation too, for its potential to narrate the
present without consideration of the past or future can be as damaging to his psyche as are the tenets of the Existence Period, which also encourage an obsessive focus on the here-and-now.

Like *Independence Day*, *Waiting for the Barbarians* employs simultaneous narration. However, unlike Ford’s novel, which maintains simultaneity throughout, Coetzee’s does not, wavering between the historical present and the simultaneous present. By recognizing the consequences of the shift between the two different uses of the present tense, we can identify different rhetorical effects of each tense. The narrator of Coetzee’s novel, a nameless magistrate, depicts his conflicted complicity in a political regime that he realizes is unjust. The narrator stages a one-man revolt against The Empire, risking his political career and life, yet cannot ultimately reconcile for himself his own treatment of “the barbarians,” namely a woman he rescues from the torturers. The novel ends with him reclaiming, principally by default, his role as magistrate to a depleted barracks, still unsure of his own relationship to “the barbarians” and to (literal and figurative) colonization.

The novel’s simultaneous present tense narration complements the narrator’s relationship to the Empire and colonization in large part because, like the narrator, the narrative technique wavers and is inconsistent. That is, just as the narrator oscillates between complicity and condemnation of the Empire, so too does the simultaneous narration seem to oscillate between true simultaneity and historical present. Although
Phelan points out that “occasionally Coetzee moves from the simultaneous present to the historical present” (8n244), he does not explore the extent or the effect of this shifting. However, the instability of the simultaneous narration, I will argue, is more substantive than a few minor lapses and warrants attention, for it reflects the narrator’s confused and strained attempts to access the past, something that the present political situation, in denial of its own injustices, discourages.

Before we can incorporate these instances of historical present into our analysis of the simultaneous present, we need to see exactly how pervasive they are. If it were merely that the narrative slipped into the historical present once or twice during the course of the narrative, we might overlook them as authorial lapses. For instance, we encounter a quick and insignificant shift into the historical present in Independence Day, during which Bascombe disrupts the coincidence of story- and discourse-times and alludes to future events: “‘Yeah,’ he [Paul] says. ‘Because I have to take a leak when we get there.’ And that’s all he says for miles” (263). The jump from when Paul announces his need to go to the bathroom to the blank space of many miles is inconsistent with the overlap of experience duration and narrating duration in simultaneous narration. Given, however, that this is the only instance of historical present in the over-four-hundred page novel, we can overlook it as an authorial lapse without having to account for it in our holistic analysis of the narrative technique. Yet, when we turn to Waiting for the Barbarians, we encounter more frequent instances of the historical present. In fact, we can divide these instances into two categories: (1) discontinuous story and discourse
times, in which the necessary temporal coincidence of narrating and acting is broken; and (2) allusions to future events, suggesting that the narrator is aware of the entire story at the time of narrating.

Waiting for the Barbarians opens with the narrator telling of his first encounter with Colonel Joll and his fascination with the Colonel’s sunglasses, setting up an initial contrast between the two. This two-page opening employs the simultaneous present, comprised primarily of dialogue, and covers not only the initial meeting but also the evening and the narrator’s pre-dawn awakening. Immediately, we encounter a disjoint between story-duration and discourse-duration: although we expect with simultaneous narration that the duration of acting will coincide with the duration of telling, here what takes a few minutes to narrate (roughly consistent with our reading time) covers many hours of experience. This is a significant difference from what we encounter with Independence Day, in which four-hundred and fifty pages of discourse cover a three-day

10 The coincidence of acting and narrating parallels the sometimes slippery coincidence of thought and expression of that thought. The post-structuralist condition suggests that we cannot think outside of language; therefore the duration of our thoughts is dictated by the time it requires to put those thoughts into language. We see in Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway a clear temporal representation of thought: the narrative represents Clarissa’s semi-colon-type thinking not only by the time required by expression but also by the time required to lift a notepad: “It was her life, and, bending her head over the hall table, she bowed beneath the influence, felt blessed and purified, saying to herself, as she took the pad with the telephone message on it, how moments like this are buds on the tree of life, flowers of darkness they are, she thought (as if some lovely rose had blossomed for her eyes only); not for a moment did she believe in God; but all the more, she thought, taking up the pad, must one repay in daily life to servants, yes, to dogs and canaries, above all to Richard her husband, who was the foundation of it – of the gay sounds, of the green lights, of the cook even whistling, for Mrs. Walker was Irish and whistled all day long –
time span of experience, making discourse-duration much more consistent with story-duration. At another point, the magistrate narrates a seven-day span in five pages (58-63), giving the effect of a diary or episodic narrative rather than a simultaneous one. In fact, the entire of *Waiting for the Barbarians* displays this temporal disjoint: one-hundred and fifty pages cover many months of activity, a relationship more plausible in the historical present.  

One of the principal characteristics of simultaneous narration, something I discussed earlier in the chapter, is the narrator’s inability to narrate events posterior to the present of story-time. Coetzee’s narrator unwittingly describes this characteristic of his discourse when he alludes at the end of novel, in a passage similar to the opening sentence of “We are Nighttime Travelers,” to his inability to know and thus narrate the outcome: “like much else nowadays I leave it feeling stupid, like a man who lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere” (156). However, throughout the novel he defies this quality and narrates future events. As early as page one must pay back from this secret deposit of exquisite moments, she thought, lifting the pad, while Lucy stood beside her, trying to explain how” (29).

11 Dorrit Cohn recognizes instances of incongruity between story-time and discourse-time in *Waiting for the Barbarians* as well, most noticeably the line, “I doze and wake, drifting from one formless dream to another” (quoted in Distinction 101). However, as Phelan does with the “of the screams” sentence I note below, Cohn opts to naturalize these instances of historical present within a holistic reading of the novel as simultaneous present rather than account more directly for the text’s oscillation between the two tenses as I do: Cohn argues, “Perhaps more than anything else, the temporal structure of this passage, evoking as it does a teller who stands away from – looks back on – his experience, induces us to de-literalize its tense and to revert to the historical present resolution – but only until the textual moments that resist this reading again obtrude
four we encounter an incongruity between the present tense and knowledge of the future: “of the screams which people afterwards claim to have heard from the granary, I hear nothing” (4-5). Considering that this sentence describes his first encounter with the Colonel’s torture of the “barbarians,” that he merges his present-tense experience of not-hearing screams with a future-knowledge that there were screams introduces his conflicted feelings of blissful ignorance and undeniable recognition of the Empire’s treatment of the “barbarians.” These two warring emotions surface together more explicitly a few pages later: “I know somewhat too much; and from this knowledge, once one has been infected, there seems to be no recovering. I ought never to have taken my lantern to see what was going on in the hut by the granary. On the other hand, there was no other way, once I had picked up the lantern for me to put it down again. The knot loops in upon itself; I cannot find the end” (21). Besides alluding to the contrast between enlightenment (the lantern) and purposeful ignorance (Joll’s sunglasses), this passage exposes the continual struggle the magistrate faces with his complicity in the Empire even while he knows of its injustice.

On other occasions, the narration of future events comes across more subtly and does not call for as much interpretation; yet these instances still indicate the historical present. For instance, take the narrator’s description of Colonel Joll’s return from a “swift raid on the nomads” to gather more prisoners to interrogate:

themselves and insist that the present language must after all coincide with the speaker’s presently lived experience” (Distinction 103-4).
Then in the middle of the night he is back. Bugle-calls from the ramparts break into my sleep, the barrack hall erupts in uproar as the soldiers go scrambling for their weapons. My head is confused, I am slow in dressing, by the time I emerge on to the square the column is already passing through the gates, some of the men riding, some leading their mounts. (20)

This scene progresses as if simultaneously narrating and acting, the narrator describing his initial confusion and his eventual realization that the commotion is Joll’s return. However, the paragraph’s opening sentence already recognizes the Colonel’s return before we encounter the magistrate’s confusion, something we do not expect with the logic of simultaneous narration. Here the narrator seems to speak from retrospect (historical present), giving us a summarizing sentence before moving into pseudo-simultaneous narration. A similar situation occurs later in the novel when the magistrate describes an evening he spends with some fellow officers: before narrating the actual events of the evening (in this same seemingly-simultaneous narration), he reports, “the evening goes well” (49).

It is important that all of these instances of historical narration occur early in the novel. In order for them to have the rhetorical effect of confusing the temporal relationship between story and discourse, they must occur before the simultaneous narration has become stable. The slight slippage in Independence Day I noted above does not raise the same rhetorical concern, and will probably be overlooked, simply because it occurs at a stage in the narrative when the simultaneous narration has already established itself without question as the narrative tense.
Yet despite these breaks from simultaneous narration, the novel as a whole maintains the general rhetorical effects of simultaneous narration that I addressed in the first section of this chapter. Perhaps the most important aspect of simultaneous narrating involves heightening the readers’ understanding and engagement with the narrative. As Phelan argues,

The absence of any retrospective perspective […] places the authorial audience’s prospective experience of the narrative very closely to the magistrate’s ongoing experience. The positioning has two very significant effects. First, just as the magistrate’s understanding comes provisionally and in pieces, so too does ours. Second, although our awareness of Coetzee behind the magistrate means that our understanding can exceed the magistrate’s, we frequently must struggle to attain the necessary distance from the magistrate’s views and actions. (“Present Tense” 234-5)

Moreover, because the narrator narrates as he experiences, he has neither design over the narrative nor specific idea of its outcome. At crucial moments, such as his “delivery” of the woman back to her people, the narrator does not know how things will turn out: the anticipation of what her decision will be (whether she will stay with her people or return with the magistrate) is shared by the narrator, the character, and the reader. His ignorance of future events impacts how the narrator contextualizes the entire narrative: because he is narrating as he is experiencing, the narrator cannot offer any indication of how he will change or develop as a character; this is a significant difference from autodiegetic retrospection that either implicitly or explicitly recognizes a difference between the then-character and the now-narrator. Similarly, the present tense narration allows the magistrate to deaden the reality of cause and effect, enabling his self-evaluation to remain tentative and changeable. As Uri Margolin has noted, “most cause
and effect relations [in simultaneous narration] remain within the realm of mere possibility since they have not yet reached their completion at the moment of utterance” (“Story Modalised” 53). The magistrate seems to relish in this looseness between cause and effect, for it grants his choices a certain freedom from result (albeit an illusory one) that a narrator aware of the effect at the time of narrating the action does not enjoy. That is, when the magistrate narrates a particular choice of action, he is unaware of what will result because as a simultaneous narrator he cannot know posterior events. Thus, he can reinforce formally through his limited narrational knowledge that as a character he is unable to foresee the outcome of his actions.

By mingling both simultaneous present and historical present, Coetzee is able to reinforce the theme of co-existing ignorance and awareness, such as we saw with the “of the screams” episode. On a more basic level, this mingling also allows Coetzee to have his cake and eat it too, as it were: he is able to unify the progressions of the narrator/protagonist, narratee, and authorial audience to enhance the affective quality of the narrative (a unification particular to simultaneous present tense narration), and he is able to avoid some of the more evident compositional complications of using simultaneous narration, such as the need to conflate discourse time and experiencing time (which in a narrative spanning roughly a year would require thousands of pages of discourse). He is able to manipulate duration, include jumps in time, while still suggesting an immediacy of event, an intimacy between reader and tale, with the present tense.
With the types of coincidence I discussed in chapters one and two, I was able to offer a single, generalizing remark about the distinguishing rhetorical effect of each mode: for instance, in chapter one I generalized that the coincidence of narratee and protagonist foregrounds the relationship between a reader and story-level events, engaging the reader with the possibility of vicariously adopting the intradiegetic role of character. However, the coincidence of narrator and protagonist that I’ve been discussing throughout this chapter, has a number of rhetorical effects, such as the cognitive union of character, narrator, and reader that I looked at in the beginning of the chapter, that prevent a single, tidy generalization. Still, we can look to the mode’s overwhelming artificiality, and specifically what makes these narratives so artificial, as a quality that unifies these narratives and distinguishes them from narratives in other modes.

The highly artificial nature of this mode, the mimetic impossibility of the narrative transmission, paradoxically both distances readers from the narrative and draws them in. The artifice of simultaneous present tense narration exposes its own fictionality (i.e. this can only happen in literature) and reminds us we are readers. At the same time, however, the immediacy of the present-tense address gives the impression that events are unfolding as we read; additionally, because of the absentee narratee, we as readers feel directly addressed, further drawing us in to the fiction. We experience these two seemingly paradoxical reader responses with all literature, though exaggerated in
simultaneous present; I will call this phenomena *double consciousness* of reading, something others elsewhere have termed fictionality.

In his “Preface to Shakespeare,” Samuel Johnson recognizes the importance of a play (or other work of literature) invoking in the audience a sense of mimetic realism, at the same time recognizing its own fictionality. After applauding Shakespeare for his ability to make the audience believe his imitations (“his scenes are occupied by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion” [422]), Johnson recognizes the other half of this double-consciousness: “The truth is that the spectators are always in their sense, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players” (431); he adds, “the delight of tragedy proceeds from our consciousness of its fiction; if we thought murders and treasons real, they would please no more” (432). More recently, Peter Rabinowitz discusses the same duality of reader response, like Johnson referencing Shakespeare:

the aesthetic experience of [literature] exists on two levels at once. We can treat the work neither as what it is nor what it appears to be; we must be aware simultaneously of both aspects. A viewer is hardly responding appropriately to *Othello* if he rushes on the stage to protect Desdemona from the Moor’s wrath; nor is the reader of the Sherlock Holmes stories who treats his idol as a historical being, makes pilgrimages to his home on Baker Street, and uses weather reports to determine when certain stories “actually” took place. Neither, however, is it proper to refuse to mourn Desdemona simply because we know that she will rise, return to her dressing room, remove her makeup, and go out for beer with Roderigo. Similarly, anyone who argues that Holmes is simply a fiction, and thus refuses to fear for his safety as he battles Moriarty, is missing the point of the whole experience.
In the proper reading of a novel, then, events which are portrayed must be treated as both “true” and “untrue” at the same time. (125)

Although we employ this double-consciousness whenever we read literature, as Johnson and Rabinowitz recognize, there is a distinction when we read simultaneous present tense narration that makes this duality of response in narrative more salient. In most narratives with a synthetic nature, and thus a definite reason to recognize its fictionality, that artifice results from fictional content (i.e. clocks striking thirteen). To borrow one of Rabinowitz’s examples, the artifice of the Sherlock Holmes story is based purely on the fictional quality of its characters: this isn’t real because these individuals do not exist in the real world. However, the artifice of simultaneous-present tense narration is not necessarily a result of fictional content (though these events and people are in fact fictional) but from an apparatus that can exist only in fiction. To put it another way, we recognize the fictionality of simultaneous present tense narration not only because the characters aren’t real life people but also because the discourse is impossible except in fiction: its artificiality is evident in its form as well as its content. Given its highly artificial structure, then, simultaneous narration (and the coincidence of narrator and

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12 I will focus this discussion on narrative and not consider drama. I do so because the artifice of the theatrical apparatus is fairly evident among different types of drama as opposed to the wide range of possible artifice and possible realism in written narrative. It would be a strange case indeed for someone to wander into a theatre and not recognize immediately that it was a staged production. Conversely, it is not unimaginable that
protagonist) exaggerates the double-consciousness with which we read all narrative, pulling us into the fictional world with its immediacy of action and at the same time exposing its own synthetic nature.

someone might happen upon a written narrative and read it as an “actual” account of whatever it depicts.
CHAPTER 4

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.

*Bright Lights, Big City* recounts the downward spiral of its unnamed protagonist, who in a few days’ time loses his job as facts verifier for a prestigious magazine; gets
publicly snubbed by his estranged wife, whom he has been trying to contact for months; and realizes the plasticity of his best (and only) friend – all blurred by his overwhelming substance abuse. Throughout these social and professional “setbacks,” he is haunted by memories of his mother’s death, the anniversary of which is but a few days away. At novel’s end, the protagonist eventually becomes so jaded with social expectations that he decides – with the support of both his younger brother and a sincere and earnest woman he has just met – to “go slowly [...] and to learn everything all over again” (182).

Unfortunately the uniqueness of McInerney’s narrative structure and technique – namely, its second-person address – has overshadowed the novel’s poignant depiction of capitalist culture in New York City during the 1980s – at least in the novel’s criticism. However, the novel’s structure and technique complement rather than subsume the thematics.

Readers and critics have wrestled with the narrator’s status in Bright Lights, Big City, something we will also see below in their responses to La Modification. The work does not clearly identify its narrator, resulting in the question, Who exactly is speaking? Is it the protagonist speaking to himself, a possibility posited by Richardson (Poetics 314)? Or is it an “effaced narrator” external to the protagonist as Kacandes suggests (Are You 142)? The novel’s opening reads as if it were the protagonist’s self-reflexive commentary: “You are not the kind of guy who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. But here you are, and you cannot say that the terrain is entirely unfamiliar, although the details are fuzzy” (1). The movie version of Bright Lights, Big City (screenplay by McInerney) reinforces a reading of self-address: its opening scene
shows the protagonist (played by Michael J. Fox) staring into a mirror behind the bar while a second-person address voice-over in Fox’s voice speaks these same lines. To support this reading, in a later passage the narrator admits to his mom (one of his few confidants) that he is prone to seeing himself as if a second person: “You described the feeling you’d always had of being misplaced, of always standing to one side of yourself, of watching yourself in the world even as you were being in the world” (166).

However, there are other sections of the novel which seem to be as if addressed from an external voice, in particular sections that routinely describe the protagonist’s action. The following passage exemplifies these descriptive sections:

You start north, holding a hand over your eyes. Trucks rumble up Hudson Street, bearing provisions into the sleeping city. You turn east. On Seventh Avenue an old woman with a hive of rollers on her head walks a German shepherd. The dog is rooting in the cracks of the sidewalk, but as you approach he stiffens into a pose of terrible alertness. (8-9)

Unlike the novel’s opening cited above, this passage seems inappropriate for self-address for we find no reason why the protagonist would tell himself these things. Likewise, other sections specifically indicate when the “you” is talking, implying that other sections are not self-address. For instance, after the protagonist reads an advertisement for facial insurance sent to his wife, who is a model, we get: “Where would you be, for instance, if a spurned husband threw acid in your face? No. Stop this. This is not your better self speaking. This is not how you feel” (37). The italics of this passage, clearly defined as interior monologue, imply that the rest of the narrative, which isn’t clearly specified as “your” voice, isn’t actually self-address. Yet, the reference to “a better self” could also
suggest that the italics is one of two of his voices, the other being the standard print that comprises the rest of the novel. Readers’ difficulty in assigning the voice has led Fludernik to comment, “McInerney’s *Bright Lights, Big City* […] provides us with no naturalizations of any realistic story-telling situation except to the extent that one wants to argue that the protagonist is telling the story to himself. That explanation does not work well in the case of the McInerney novel” (Second-Person 291). Richardson also recognizes the novel’s seeming ambiguity of voice:

> A number of hypotheses appear, ready to attempt to explain this curious situation: a psychomachia between self and soul, a dialogue between id and superego, a character employing the voice of another to interrogate himself, a realistic dramatization of the disorienting effects of cocaine. It is the nature of second person narration to render all of these hypotheses plausible, while ensuring that no one can be definitive. (Poetics 314)

To a certain extent, however, the question of whether or not this is the protagonist’s voice loses force once we remind ourselves that all of this discourse resides exclusively in his head. It is clear that the protagonist “you” is the only auditor of this voice. That is, the voice/narration occurs while the “you” is in the company of friends, co-workers, strangers and no one else is aware of this voice because it resides in the “you’s” head. Strictly speaking, then, if it is only in his head, the voice must be his (even if it is his incarnation of someone else’s voice). Unlike in Calvino’s *If on a winter’s night a traveler* (see chapter one), in which a metafictional relationship between narrator and protagonist makes the simultaneous present-tense narration from an effaced narrator seem possible, in *Bright Lights, Big City* we are unable to naturalize an effaced narrator given
the novel’s dramatic situation (i.e. that he is in the company of others but no one else hears the voice).^1^

Rather than an artistic liability, this confusion in voice complements the novel’s themes, form meshing well with content. Readers’ inability to assign the voice consistently parallels the protagonist’s oscillation between subscribing to social and cultural expectations of the time and detesting these same expectations. Throughout the novel, the protagonist contrasts what he envisions as his character with the life he actually lives. For instance, he comments, “you see yourself as the kind of guy who appreciates a quiet night at home with a good book. A little Mozart on the speakers, a cup of cocoa on the arm of the chair, slippers on the feet” (36), despite spending most of his evenings in some bar with some woman staggering from some controlled substance. Likewise, he attempts to distinguish himself from his late-night companions even as he immerses himself in their company, something we imagine his companions are paradoxically doing themselves: “for some reason you think you are going to meet the kind of girl who is not the kind of girl who would be at a place like this at this time in the morning” (3). The protagonist struggles with who he thinks he is (“your presence here is only a matter of conducting an experiment in limits, reminding yourself of what you aren’t” [4]) and who society (materialized explicitly in his freewheeling friend Tad) encourages and expects him to be. These struggles parallel his struggles between internalizing/adopting the collective voice of 80s culture and keeping this voice external,

^1 Perhaps the voice of Obi-wan Kenobi in Luke Skywalker’s consciousness serves as a
exemplified in the seemingly shifting status of the narrator’s voice. Thus, our difficulty ascribing this narrative voice to either the protagonist or to an effaced narrator seems fitting considering that the protagonist himself seems conflicted about his relationship to the collective consciousness of 80s culture.

In addition to being second-person self-address, the structure of Bright Lights, Big City is also simultaneous present tense narration. Perhaps the most noticeable effect of the simultaneous present tense narration – at least in terms of structure – is that it positions the narrator and protagonist on the same diegetic plane. Narrator and protagonist are not only played by the same individual, their functions overlap. As the novel progresses, protagonist level action begins to overshadow discourse level analysis and scene nearly effaces summary. In the early stages of the novel, when we need context and character background, summary and scene are balanced: mixed with reports of what “you” is doing are flashbacks and mental wanderings about particular characters or issues. However, the narrative progresses to less-talk-more-action once the formalities of introduction (aimed primarily at the flesh-and-blood and authorial readers) are complete. As this occurs, the narrator function seems to exit (though we know it cannot: there always must be some act of telling or else there is no narrative) and protagonist function takes center stage. One way in which McInerney foregrounds the protagonist function is by limiting (almost to the point of extinction) narrative commentary. We encounter extended scenes in which nothing but action is reported, as if narrated by a pop-culture exception that helps prove the rule.
zero-degree narrator. The following passage typifies scenes in which the narrator basically disappears:

You walk up Fifth Avenue along the park. On the steps of the Metropolitan Museum, a mime with a black-and-white face performs in front of a small crowd. As you pass you hear laughter and when you turn around the mime is imitating your walk. He bows and tips his hat when you stop. You bow back and throw him a quarter. (152)

Restricted narration such as this, in which the narrator’s role is limited to that of an observer/reporter, follows for a number of pages. McInerney also foregrounds the protagonist function by privileging the character’s focalization over the narrator’s voice. In one of the novel’s more dismal scenes, the protagonist attempts to think clearly amidst drug-induced instability as he fumbles through a co-worker’s apartment bathroom looking for more drugs:

The black-and-white tiles on the floor keep moving. You stand in front of the toilet and consider. Do you feel sick? Not exactly. Not yet, anyway. You might as well take a leak, though, as long as you are here. You unzip and aim for the bowl. There is a poster with some kind of print in front of you. You lean forward to read it, and then you lean back, so as not to fall forward. (143-4)

Here the voice and focalization are incongruous: whereas the focalizer is incoherent and failing, the voice maintains lucidity, appearing no different from other sections of the novel in which the protagonist is not under the influence. However, we do not expect to find such an incongruity in simultaneous present-tense narration, in which voice and focalization reside on the same diegetic plane and therefore are open to the same
In this passage, the protagonist-level focalization is affected whereas the narrator’s discourse is not, revealing an imbalance of attention (both by writer and reader) toward the protagonist function. Most importantly, however, the protagonist function becomes dominant simply because it enacts character development: unlike in *La Modification*, in which discourse prompts change (as we’ll see below), in *Bright Lights, Big City* protagonist action is the catalyst for character development. The protagonist comes to his last-page epiphany because of what he’s seen in himself, Tad, his estranged wife, and others (story-level experiences) not because of the particular way in which he has narrated these experiences (or even because he has narrated them).

The protagonist function also dictates the narrative’s temporal movement (another difference from *La Modification*, in which discourse affects temporal progression). Story-level events rather than narrator’s discourse chart the narrative’s duration, which is typical of narratives in which the narrator function is obscured by the protagonist.

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2 Richardson identifies a similar inconsistency between voice and focalization in the opening of Carlos Fuentes’s *Aura*, a narrative resembling *Bright Lights, Big City* in form. The novel’s second sentence reads, “Distriado, dejas que la ceniza del cigarro caiga dentro de la taza de te que has estado bebiendo en este cafetín sucio y barato” (2) translated as “You don’t even notice when the ash from your cigarette falls into the cup of tea you ordered in this cheap, dirty café” (3). As Richardson comments, the narrator could not report something that the protagonist does not recognize if their functions are coincident: “here we are given both the protagonist’s sub-vocal speech *and* the description of an event that he did not witness” (Poetics 313). However, rather than a confusion of voice and focalization, *Aura’s* second sentence is actually an error in translation that leads to misreading. Translated literally, the sentence should read, “distracted, you let the ash …” or “absentmindedly, you let the ash …” This more literal translation maintains a consistency of voice and focalization because in it the protagonist is still aware of what he has let happen. To be translated as “you don’t even notice,” the original Spanish would have been “No te das cuenta.”
function. At one point the narrative shifts (by way of line break) from eleven-thirty in the morning to “near midnight” (109). This ellipsis results from no activity of interest occurring: when the protagonist function shuts down so too must the discourse follow. This passage underscores that the protagonist-level activities (scenes) dictate how the narrative depicts time. If a reader were asked, What is the time span of Bright Lights, Big City?, he/she would appropriately answer: the time that lapses between the night he meets the bald bartender and the morning a few days later when he decides to start over; this is the answer the novel’s structure elicits. A narrative dominated by the narrator function, however, would more clearly span the time it required to tell the story (something we’ll see with La Modification).

Besides influencing the over-all structure of the narrative, the relative absence of discourse analysis (and the pervasiveness of protagonist action) affects how we understand the novel. Not only do we get the sense from the second-person address that this protagonist’s actions are dictated from outside (even if this is his own voice, the lack of “I” gives the impression of external direction or prescribed desires), we also recognize through the lack of discourse analysis that the protagonist is not very deliberate or reflexive; that is, he doesn’t seem to think much about what he is doing. Part of McInerney’s critique of consumer culture surfaces through these structural choices. The protagonist exemplifies that – with the help of media and advertising – we do what we’re told with little thought or question. This becomes explicit in a passage in which the protagonist begins to realize the extent that he has been molded by culture: “you are the
stuff of which the consumer profiles – American Dream: Educated Middle-Class Model: are made. *When you’re staying at the Plaza with your beautiful wife, doesn’t it make sense to order the best Scotch that money can buy before you go to the theatre in your private limousine?”* (151). For much of the later stages of the novel, the narrative foregrounds the protagonist function, the protagonist shifts to auto-pilot, and we encounter action with virtually no thought.

One of the earliest examples of second-person narration, Michel Butor’s *La Modification*, a French novel published in 1957 (translated as *A Change of Heart*), recounts the thoughts and memories of its protagonist, Leon Delmont, during a train ride from Paris to Rome. Delmont is traveling to Rome to inform his mistress, who lives in Rome, that he plans on leaving his wife and to invite the mistress to move to Paris to be with him, already having investigated potential employment and accommodations for her in Paris. However, memories and anticipations (especially his anxiety about his future relationship to the city of Rome) combine to dissuade Delmont from following through with his plan, the novel ending with his resignation not to see his mistress during the weekend trip and to return to his wife with renewed faith in their marriage. Thus, his “change of heart” does not reflect his initial decision to leave his wife but rather his eventual decision to cut short his adulterous affair.

Whereas *Bright Lights, Big City* is strikingly devoid of discourse-level analysis, this type of analysis comprises almost exclusively Butor’s *La Modification*, making the
works quite distinct rhetorically. This difference results from a difference in narrative technique: although both novels share a coincidence of narrator and protagonist functions, *Bright Lights, Big City* foregrounds the protagonist function whereas *La Modification* foregrounds the narrator function. But before we turn to the ways in which *La Modification* foregrounds the narrator function, we need to address the novel’s use of self-address, especially considering the extent that critics have disagreed about who is narrating.

The earliest readers of *La Modification* identified its narrative structure as self-address, reading it as the protagonist’s (Leon Delmont) interior monologue. Morrissette remarks, “his [Butor’s] earliest comment leaves much unclear and suggests, without actually stating flatly, that the *vous* represents the character addressing himself” (15). Later critics have agreed. Perkins and Hopkins write, “another noteworthy device in [*A Change of Heart* [English title of *La Modification*]] is the extensive use of perspective to establish that we experience this story from within (adulterous-husband) Leon’s consciousness,” and “these words are Leon’s, uninterpreted by any other voice” (127). “Butor himself offered self-address as a possible interpretation of *La Modification* when

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3 Interesting, the following analysis of *La Modification* requires much longer and complicated articulation than did the discussion of *Bright Lights, Big City*. Rather than commenting on my abilities as a critic, this difference, I posit, tells us something about our reading habits: readers are – generally speaking – more accustomed to focusing on story/event. Thus, discussing how *Bright Lights, Big City* foregrounds story events (protagonist function) requires much less space than discussing how *La Modification*, conversely, obscures story-event and highlights discourse (narrator function).

4 In “Narrative Apostrophe: Reading, Rhetoric, Resistance in Michel Butor’s *La Modification* and Julio Cortazar’s ‘Graffiti’,” Irene Kacandes provides a succinct critical
he identified the second person as ‘celui a qui l’on raconte sa propre histoire’ (‘he to whom one tells one’s own story’)” (quoted in Kacandes 335). Yet, other critics have questioned this reading, citing a number of passages that would seem inappropriate as self-address. Speaking of the novel’s second sentence (“you lift up your suitcase of bottle-green grained leather, the smallish suitcase of a man used to making long journeys”), Richardson comments, “it is difficult to imagine a veteran salesman muttering these words to himself” (313.) Similarly Fludernik argues, “the use of vous (rather than informal or colloquial tu) for the address pronoun strongly argues against reading the text as Leon Delmont addressing himself, nor is the extensive description of Delmont’s surroundings convincing as part of an internal self-address” (289-90). Concerned primarily with an audience/narratee’s ability to respond to a narrator, Kacandes notes, “some readers tried to naturalize the narrative situation […] by deciding that the protagonist was talking to himself or that the actual author was trying to address the actual reader. But readers’ very need to do so and the lack of unanimous response on the part of readers indicate narrative apostrophe’s ineradicable ambiguity” (Narrative Apostrophe 337). This disagreement among critics results largely from the narrator’s use of “you,” which identifies and characterizes the narratee without providing a clear indication of the narrator. Kacandes identifies a parallel effect resulting from the absence of “I”: “In Butor’s novel no first-person pronoun indicates a narrator from whom the history for the novel, focusing primarily on this very disagreement.
words emanate: Benveniste’s *I*, which must exist as enunciator of the *you*, simply does not appear” (334-5).

This is not idle disagreement among critics. Recognizing the exact narrative structure (e.g. self-address or not) is crucial for a complete understanding of the narrative. I will argue that the novel is, as its earliest readers suggested, self-address (and coincidence of narrator and narratee) for two main reasons: (1) this reading better accounts for most of the text; that is, although there are impediments to this reading, there is less recalcitrance than the external-narrator reading; and (2) reading it as self-address makes for a better novel aesthetically.

Most critics who argue against a self-address reading (e.g. Richardson and Fludernik) point out that such a reading is not mimetically feasible. They contend that, realistically speaking, no one would make these types of comments to him/herself. However, this disregards the inherent artificiality of interior monologue, especially once it is rendered into written form, making it no longer interior: interior monologues ranging from Shakespeare’s soliloquies to soap-opera asides all contain a degree of “artistic” artificiality; this seems by convention unavoidable. Likewise, literature is ripe with redundant telling (something we examined in chapter one): instances in which the narrator provides information that a narratee wouldn’t need but an actual reader would; in the case of self-address, the narrator would be redundant telling to him/herself, no less unfeasible than when it occurs in heterodiegesis. We respond to these “flawed” conventions in the same way we respond to a homodiegetic narrator’s ability to
remember extensive dialogues verbatim, something Butor’s narrator is able to do as well: we excuse them as inevitable literary artifice. Furthermore, Fludernik’s comment that the novel’s detailed description of the surroundings precludes it from being self-address is both misleading and inaccurate. Despite her suggestion, there are very few instances of scenery descriptions, and nearly all of these are quite short. The following example is typical: “A man thrusts his head through the doorway, looks to right and to left, sees that he’s in the wrong compartment, moves off and disappears” (Second-Person 121). Along with being much less frequent that Fludernik suggests, these descriptions are relevant – even expected – from someone who is speaking (or thinking) to himself; they serve as necessary breaks within his reveries, locating Delmont back in actual time: if the narrative is a representation of what is going through the narrator’s mind as he thinks/speaks to himself (simultaneous present-tense narration), it seems appropriate to include what his mind processes in real time, some of which is quite obtuse and tedious (“a small boy bites violently into a piece of bread cut in two from which a sliver of ham protrudes” [87]). Consistent with certain linguistic and psychological theory, thought for Delmont exists only in language: therefore, for him to think to himself is for him to narrate to himself. In fact, the narrative’s simultaneous present tense seems to necessitate these seemingly tedious references, for standards of selectivity are much different in present-tense narration than in retrospective narration: because a narrator reports what is currently happening, the present-tense narrator does not have as much opportunity as does the retrospective narrator to edit the presentation of events. In most instances the
very stimuli (external surroundings) he is contemplating initiate his reveries, for instance, when he observes a couple seated across from him and then considers his own marriage (116) or, conversely, when he externalizes his own thoughts of changing his life to a priest (another fellow passenger) (74-5; 96). The very nature of self-address/internal monologue (as with its sibling technique, stream of consciousness) makes it difficult—and perhaps inappropriate—for someone else (e.g. readers) to naturalize it. As Robert Humphrey writes of stream of consciousness: “the nature of consciousness involves a private sense of values, private associations, and private relationships peculiar to that consciousness: therefore it is enigmatic to an outside consciousness” (63-4).

Even without these “flexible” mimetic standards, there are compelling reasons within the narrative itself to suggest that the narrator is speaking to himself. We notice early in the novel the narrator’s use of stream of consciousness, speaking entire pages, even shifting paragraphs, without ending a sentence. The following is typical of these stream of consciousness sections:

Oh, already (you realize it now; at the time there was only that uneasiness, that feeling of unaccountable anguish that crept over you as if something, some demon of weariness and cold, were concealing your real self from you; only now do you realize it, for you hadn’t had the time, you

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5 In a fairly cryptic remark, Butor comments on his use of long sentences, as seen in these stream of consciousness passages: “one of the aspects that the struck the first readers of La Modification the most, and scandalized some readers the most, was the length of its sentences. It is easy to see that to relate the minute details of an anecdote, which had been chosen to be as banal as possible, to the principal events of the history of the West, fairly complex grammatical structures were necessary, in order to be able to in some way to capture certain themes in big loops, as with a lasso, accomplishing thus a literary equivalent of the spirals of the great baroque architects” (“La Modification Presented to the Chinese,” 73)
were fully occupied by too many cares at once; and it has taken this pause in your life made by a clandestine trip, a trip which for once has not been undertaken on your firm’s behalf and on which business problems no longer trouble you, it has taken this respite for them to come back and harass you, for you were unwilling lately, to give it a thought to anything that might in any way shake your faith in the existence, the reality of the solution which you’ve at last determined to reach, of the imminence of that new and happier life), already things were proving precarious, they were beginning to break up, to loosen, to spoil […] (126)

The very existence of stream of conscious narration suggests homodiegesis, that the protagonist is speaking to himself. The most conspicuous writers of stream of consciousness (e.g. Faulkner, Woolf, and Joyce) nearly always employ it with homodiegesis, for it is a technique defined by its ability to depict (rather than just describe) what and how a character thinks. The stream of consciousness effect in this passage reminds us of the dramatic situation of the entire narrative: Delmont is unaccompanied on the trip (and there is no evidence that he speaks to anyone on the train); thus, we have no other viable auditor who exists on his diegetic plane. In his influential work on stream of consciousness, Humphreys identifies “the character represented as alone” as one of the defining characteristics of Molly Bloom’s famous stream of consciousness (26).

But perhaps the most compelling reason to read La Modification as self-address concerns – paradoxically – the inclusion of a few brief sections that are quite clearly external address. Just over midway in his trip (and in the narrative) we encounter this passage: “You say to yourself, I don’t know what to do; I don’t know what I’m doing here; I don’t know what to say to her” (163). This is the first time that we encounter “I,”
the effect of which makes us attribute this use of "you" to an external speaker; here someone/something is telling Delmont what he is thinking. (We cannot imagine the layering needed for these sentences to be self-address: telling yourself that you are telling yourself something.) This passage (and the few others like it) makes us realize that the reason why we have not encountered this type of external direction and reporting prior is because the other sections are not external address. These passages are rhetorically distinct (primarily because they are grammatically distinct) from the rest of the narrative, suggesting that whereas these are clearly external address, the others are self-address: that is, they illustrate to us what the rest of the novel is not. On the one hand, we might consider these passages artistic flaws because they disrupt the continuity of the original narrative mode, something that might not be altogether surprising considering the novelty and experimentation of Butor’s novel (and his admitted inexperience using second-person self-address). But on the other hand, this shift in narrative mode comes precisely at a time when we also recognize a shift in content – namely, Delmont is now beginning to question his decision to ask his mistress to move to Paris with him: a different voice seems to intrude (he considers it unwanted doubt) just as he begins to challenge what the original voice has proposed. Thus, we can justify the shift in narrative mode because it seems to complement a shift in the protagonist’s thoughts.

Throughout “La Modification Presented to the Chinese” in Improvisations on Butor, Butor himself discusses his concerns and anxieties using such an uncharted narrative mode.
I have spent a great deal of time addressing the issue of self-address because it influences how we understand and interpret the narrative. Most significantly, reading the narrative as Delmont speaking to himself (as opposed to reading it as external narration) makes the novel both more interesting and more poignant. As Peter Rabinowitz recognizes, given multiple ways to interpret a work of literature (recognizing that certain readings can be ruled out based on textual recalcitrance), readers should – and typically do – opt for the one that makes for the best text: “The most general rule here, familiar in part through such critics as Wayne Booth and Mary Louise Pratt, states that we should read a text in such a way that it becomes the best possible text” (45). When we read *La Modification* as self-address, we attribute the organization of thought (or lack thereof in certain sections) to Delmont, making him a more dynamic and self-aware character. Rather than an external narrator “informing” Delmont of what he is thinking (as we see in forms of second-person narration with a discrete narrator), Delmont himself is conscious not only of his thoughts but also of his process and act of thinking. Thus, we attribute his “change of heart” to the organization of thought (i.e. act of narration) rather than simply to the possession of thought. Moreover, self-address allows the protagonist “you” to have a voice, something that Kacandes identifies as missing in other forms of apostrophe (Narrative Apostrophe 334), making Delmont more active in his narrative and, in turn, his reconsideration. Additionally, the structure of a divided consciousness speaking to itself complements the novel’s themes, which are grounded on pairs and
dichotomies (e.g. Rome/Paris; wife/mistress; internal thought/external voice). A passing reference to the mythical Janus underscores the novel’s dualities and represented split-self.

Not only are the narrator and protagonist of La Modification the same individual, the narrator and protagonist functions of La Modification overlap. In Bright Lights, Big City, the protagonist action nearly completely effaces the narrator discourse, a result in large part of the simultaneous present-tense narration. Conversely, in La Modification the narrator’s discourse constitutes action that ultimately has more consequence than events within the story plane (again a result in large part of simultaneous present-tense narration). Whereas in Bright Lights, Big City the narrating occurs concurrently with the protagonist’s action (obscuring the discourse) in La Modification the principal action of La Modification is a narrator thinking/speaking to himself. Of course, there is non-narrating activity that takes place within his memories, but it is still strongly subsumed by

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7 Also in “La Modification Presented to the Chinese,” Butor comments on the extent that the two cities influence the narrative: “the principal character of La Modification, traveling from Paris to Rome, gradually realizes that the relations he has with two women, his legitimate wife and his mistress, are closely dependent on the relations between these two cities in his mind and in the minds of his compatriots” (71). We see Delmont’s recognition as his trip progresses: “you were compelled to realize that your love for Cecile was dominated by Rome as by some enormous star, and that if you longed to bring her to Paris it was in the hope that, through her, Rome would be with you all the time” (242).

8 Strictly speaking, we could say this of all narratives: all that really takes place in any given narrative is a (sometimes unidentified) narrator telling something to a (sometimes unidentified) narratee. However, with most narratives the protagonist function is prominent enough for readers to reside in the story-level as well; sometimes we reside so strongly on the story level that we lose the sense of discourse (as in Bright Lights, Big City).
the act of interior monologue. The story-discourse distinction clearly exists in *La Modification*: we have past events and the narration of those events through interior monologue. However, the story level is static whereas the discourse level exhibits progression and dynamics. In *Bright Lights, Big City*, the experiencing-I of the story and the narrating-I are virtually the same. This is slightly different in *La Modification*, in which the narrating becomes the primary experience, merging the experiencing-I with the narrating-I in a different way. Monika Fludernik also recognizes ways in which certain narratives (especially second-person narratives) conflate their narrator and protagonist functions, though she does so by arguing for a blurred story-discourse distinction, something not necessarily true of *La Modification*: “the collapse of the story-discourse distinction becomes most apparent in second-person texts written in the present tense and in the second-person imperative (‘subjunctive’) mode” (Test Case 458); “by doing so, they break the frame of narration (consisting of discrete levels within a model of communicative circuits) and violate the boundaries of narrative levels” (457).

Butor foregrounds the narrator function by charting the narrative’s temporal progression with events that occur on the discourse plane. As narrative theory reminds us, all narratives possess both story-time (i.e. how long it takes the depicted events to occur) and discourse-time (i.e. how long it takes something to be told). Yet not all narratives give equal emphasis to both temporal movements. Most often, the amount of emphasis a particular narrative gives to either story- or discourse-time depends on the...
strength of the narrator’s presence and the strength of the dramatic situation: narratives with highly characterized, active narrators and strong dramatic situations tend to highlight discourse time (i.e. readers get a strong sense of the discourse’s duration) whereas narratives with obscured (zero-degree) narrators and unidentified dramatic situations typically don’t provide a strong sense of discourse duration. For instance, a novel such as Cather’s *A Lost Lady*, whose narrator plays a very passive role in the narrative, does not emphasize discourse-time whereas a work such as Nabokov’s *Lolita*, whose dramatic situation and narrator are prominent, does. The dramatic situation of *La Modification* is simple and clearly indicated: a man on a train ride from Paris to Rome thinks/talks to himself. The novel’s structure highlights the narrative’s discourse, most noticeably by ending a chapter when Delmont is preparing to leave his seat (to go to the dining car, for example) and then resuming the narrative with a new chapter once he returns to his seat.

For instance, chapter two ends with “the two men whose seats flank the door have stretched out their legs, which crisscross; you apologize for disturbing them, and you go out” (36) and chapter three begins, “you recover the seat which the traveling salesman left a moment ago” (37). These ellipses underscore that the action depicted within the narrative is confined to his internal thoughts, denying us even a trip to the dining car.

We are reminded of this throughout the narrative, reinforcing the discourse plane, during sections which also indicate temporal movement. For instance, “you” light a cigarette on page 37, and on page 41 (after a quick reverie) “your cigarette burns your fingers; it has answered by, A narrator tells a story to a narratee.
been smoldering away on its own.” Likewise, we (and “you”) follow fate of a cracker on
the floor: on page 90 it is “trembling on the floor”; on page 93 it gets crushed under a
soldier’s boot; and on page 97 stain from the crushed cracker is nearly hidden by another
patron’s shoe. Lest a reader enter too much into the story plane and forget that all we
really have in this narrative is a man thinking/speaking to himself, the narrative breaks in
with oftentimes quick and tedious returns to the discourse level. These references remind
us that the duration of this narrative is the duration of the train ride rather than the
duration of Delmont’s affair with his mistress. Unlike Lolita, which slides so strongly
into story that we at times lose the immediacy of the narrative act, despite a strong
dramatic situation and sense of discourse, La Modification foregrounds the narration and
narrative situation so strongly that we never really leave the discourse plane.

Because La Modification foregrounds the narrator function so strongly, it draws
our attention throughout the novel to the impact and influence of the act of narration. For
example, the dynamics of Delmont as a literary character (how and why he changes)
occur on the discourse plane: whereas we typically expect characters to change/develop
as a direct result of actions and experiences, Delmont changes/develops as a result not of
living events but from narrating those events. The act of narration serves as the primary
cause of character development in other novels as well, such as Lolita and Ishiguro’s The
Remains of the Day: the narrators of both novels change not because of experiencing
events as characters but as a result of narrating those events from a temporal distance.
Delmont himself attributes his “change of heart” to his interior monologue. At the
moment he begins to reconsider his plan, he remarks, “you drank no coffee, contrary to your usual custom, just so as to be on the safe side, so as to avoid any additional causes of insomnia, of being caught up in that tangle of thoughts and memories which might lead to heaven knows what catastrophic change of mood and of plan” (166) and “Why haven’t you read that book, since you bought it? It might perhaps have protected you against all this” (168). In fact, as we see with his narrative predictions for his future with his mistress Cecile, narration becomes such a powerful influence that he does not actually have to experience these events: no action or event needs to occur in real-life because they have already occurred through narration (in his mind). Narrating has spared Delmont the troubles of a failed plan. Although he curses his interior monologue because it challenges his original design and self-understanding, ultimately for Delmont narrating events (especially future events) becomes a welcome alternative to actually living the events.

Like both *Bright Lights, Big City* and *La Modification*, Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” unifies narrator and protagonist functions. However, unlike in *Bright Lights, Big City* and *La Modification*, in “The Yellow Wallpaper” these functions do not overlap throughout the entire story. Rather the story’s narrative structure progresses from discrete narrator and protagonist functions to overlapping functions, a progression in form that parallels the eventual thematic unification of the narrator with her secret sharer, the woman behind the wallpaper. Before we turn to the complex ways in which the
story’s narrator and protagonist functions merge, let us look at the impact of the other relationship that defines complete coincident narration: the coincidence of narrator and narratee.

As early as the opening page of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the story’s narrator identifies that she will be her own audience: “– (I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind) –” (41). Although obscured by the parenthetical, indicating early a lack of narrational confidence, her remark introduces one of the most important aspects to understanding her narrative: self-address. Her comment also recognizes the extent that her self-address will influence her narrative. Most obviously, knowing no one besides herself will read her diary provides her a sense of security, affording her an opportunity for honesty and openness that she would not otherwise enjoy. As her narrative progresses she utilizes this opportunity more and more, most noticably as she grows more suspicious of her “remedies.” For instance, in her first entry she remarks, “[John] is so caring and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction” (43); later, in her tenth and eleventh entries, she says, “John is so queer now” and “I don’t like the look in his eyes” (56). Her suspicions do not arise because of any change in John’s behavior in the time between the entries but because her perceptions are shifting, in large part because of her expression while narrating. In fact, her expanding artistic liberation, as evidenced by the narrative’s increasing candor, provides a significant part of the narrative’s progression: the narrator’s dynamics result not only because she loses psychological stability, but also – perhaps more importantly – because
she increasingly realizes her artistic and creative impulses. (Her growing freedom as a narrator parallels the merge in protagonist and narrator functions that we will examine below.) It is important to recognize (especially for our current study) that whereas she becomes more aware of her own social situation in part because of her thoughts and actions while she is not narrating, sequestered alone in her room, she experiences an even more substantial change in affect because of her actual narrating. That is, her act of narration, more so than her (limited) non-narrating experiences, influences her shifting mental state – both toward awareness of her domestic conditions and toward mental instability. Moreover, privacy becomes a necessary aspect of this particular narrative considering that she is to refrain from writing as part of her prognosis. She comments, “There comes John, and I must put this away, – he hates to have me write a word” (44), and “I did write for a while in spite of them; but it does exhaust me a good deal – having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition” (42). With this tension between her writing and her recovery, we encounter one of the story’s principal themes: the debilitating impact of man’s control over woman’s artistic expression. We recognize, as the narrator herself seems to intuit, that her “illness” is spurred on in large part because she is denied the opportunity to write/create.

Arguably, however, her self-address also hinders her “recovery” (at the same time that it encourages her to recognize her social position), even promoting her slide into insanity. Although her privacy allows her to be honest and open, it also prevents an external release of her anxieties. Not having an outlet for her delusions causes them to
fester and augment. One wonders if the narrator were inclined – or encouraged – to discuss her thoughts with others if she would not have been eventually overtaken by them. Again we see ways in which the very act of narration (specifically that it is self-contained) affects her mental state. This ambiguity (i.e. whether her narrative privacy helps or hinders her psychological stability), or more accurately this seeming duality of effect (i.e. her narrative privacy both helps and hinders her mental state), contributes to the story’s larger interpretive crossroads: Is the narrator’s eventual insanity a disadvantageous condition or is it instead a necessary state for her to recognize her oppression? Does her husband consciously prescribe faulty and counterproductive remedies or he is merely a bad doctor? Does the narrator see a woman trapped in the wallpaper and then recognize her own comparable oppressions or does she instead already (perhaps unconsciously) recognize her domestic oppression and then transfer it to an imagined figure behind the wallpaper? Is this story a gothic tale in which the woman behind the wallpaper is actual or is it a realist study in mental illness?

Throughout the opening stages (early diary entries) of “The Yellow Wallpaper” we notice a very limited protagonist function. That is, very little happens on the story plane. This, however, should not surprise us considering that John, the narrator’s doctor and husband, prescribes limited activity for the narrator. “The Yellow Wallpaper” opens with an extensive summary of the house and the narrator’s general condition. This iterative description contributes to setting at the time of narration and does not move the action along; the narration resides on the discourse plane. She disrupts this initial
summary (discourse) with a brief scene (story), a two paragraph account in past-tense of
John justifying the seemingly dismal accommodations. Throughout “The Yellow
Wallpaper” we do encounter a few other instances of singulative events, events that
reside on the character/story plane (as opposed to the narrator/discourse plane), such as
her looking out of the window or approaching the wallpaper for closer analysis. But
nearly all of the narrative is analysis and thought that occur during narration. We suspect
that most of the narrator’s waking hours are spent examining the wallpaper, but what we
encounter explicitly in the narrative is her analysis while she is narrating. The first time
that the narrator “identifies” a woman in the pattern reveals analysis and thought during
her narrating: “and it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that
pattern. I don’t like it a bit. I wonder – I begin to think – I wish John would take me
away from here!” (50). The “—I begin to think – ” suggests that these thoughts occur as
part of her narration. We also see this later on, when she writes, “I lie here on this great
immovable bed – it is nailed down, I believe – and follow that pattern by the hour. It is
as good as gymnastics, I assure you” (48). She then describes her analysis of the
wallpaper, noting the “horizontal breadth for a frieze, and that adds wonderfully to the
confusion” of the pattern. However, after she has described these examinations, we
realize that what we have been reading is analysis she has been doing while she is
writing. At the end of the description, she notes, “it makes me tired to follow it. I will
take a nap I guess” (49). She needs to end her entry in order to rest not because writing
tires her but because her analysis while writing tires her. It is important that we recognize
the conflation of the two events of writing and analysis. The story emphasizes the activity of writing and its impact on the narrator: it is not the wallpaper itself that has troubled the narrator; it is writing about the wallpaper that seems to influence the narrator’s psychological state. We are to wonder if her obsession and ultimate submission to the wallpaper would have occurred if she did not use narration to “organize” her thoughts. It is crucial for the concerns of this study (especially this chapter) as well as our understanding of the story that we see the narrator is not writing about herself as a protagonist but as a narrator. The opening of the fourth entry underscores this self-reflexivity:

I don’t know why I should write this.
I don’t want to.
I don’t feel able. (49)

The distinction between story and discourse breaks down during these frequent and integral sections of the narrative primarily because the discourse becomes the story. It is not surprising that as the narrative progresses the narrator speaks less and less about external events (such as what she has done between diary entries or what her husband is doing) and more and more about her own activities as a narrator. Likewise, the strong narrative situation (similar to what we saw in La Modification and counter to what we get in Bright Lights, Big City) directs our attention and foregrounds the level of discourse. Throughout, “The Yellow Wallpaper” highlights the here-and-now of narrating (e.g. “I am sitting by the window now, up in this atrocious nursery, and there is nothing to hinder my writing as much as I please” (44)), further foregrounding the narrator function.
We do, however, see a distinction between narrator and character functions during scenes in which the narrator first begins to discuss the woman-behind-the-wallpaper. In these scenes, the woman-behind-the-wallpaper serves as a character (not yet the protagonist) distinct from the narrator. Likewise, we recognize both a distinction between narrator and protagonist as well as a distinction between story and discourse because of a temporal distance between when the woman behind the wallpaper “acts” and when the narrator narrates those events. The entire fifth entry establishes this temporal distance and distinguishes between narrator and protagonist functions. The narrator describes the woman behind the wallpaper: “the faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out” (50). Later in the entry, the narrator writes of herself as protagonist as well: “I got up softly and went to feel and see if the paper did move, and when I came back John was awake” (50). It makes sense thematically that here, when the narrator is just beginning to see a figure in the pattern, that we recognize a distinction between protagonist and narrator functions. When the narrator begins to associate herself with the woman behind the wallpaper, we recognize a parallel merging of her narrator function with the woman behind the wallpaper’s character function, culminating in the final scene of the story.

The last entry remains consistent with the others with its present-tense narration: “But I am here, and no person touches this paper but me, – not alive!” (57). However, the end of this last entry paradoxically moves into the past-tense but describes events that occur after the present-tense narration time (i.e. the time of the phrase “But I am here”).
She records, “Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!” (58). This final description does not seem possible in present tense simply because she cannot write as she crawls. It also doesn’t make sense mimetically that the narrative shifts to past tense action because we cannot imagine her regaining mental and emotional stability in order to write this at a later time. On one hand, the confusion of tense – both when things occur and when they are narrated – seems to be an artistic liability: it disrupts the mimesis of the story. But on the other hand, it maintains the affect of a story convoluted by an increasingly disturbed narrator. Most important to our analysis of protagonist and narrator functions, this ending literally fuses the protagonist (woman-behind-the-wall) function with the narrator function: here the narrator acts (i.e. crawls across her husband’s body) and narrates (i.e. writes in her journal) simultaneously. Grammatically, the narrator refers to the woman behind the wallpaper as “I,” making her association with this figure complete, and it is only here that the woman behind the wallpaper becomes the protagonist: “I wonder if they [all of the creeping women] come out of the wall-paper as I did?” (58). Hence, that we are confused about the dramatic situation – is this present-tense narration or past-tense action – complements the eventual coincidence of protagonist and narrator functions (perhaps in ways we cannot ultimately naturalize) and parallels the narrator’s now-literal association with the woman behind the wallpaper. The narrator and protagonist functions merge as the narrative progresses (e.g. we encounter less description of story-level protagonist and more description of discourse-level narrator as well as a union of one-
time discrete protagonist and narrator) at the same time that the narrator merges identities with the woman behind the wallpaper, recognizing (perhaps unconsciously) their comparable oppressions.

The merging of protagonist and narrator functions also complements the story’s theme of artistic oppression. Perkins Gilman notes that much of the motivation for “The Yellow Wallpaper” came from a doctor’s prescription for her to refrain from writing: “this wise man put me to bed and applied the rest cure, to which a still good physique responded so promptly that he concluded there was nothing much the matter with me, and sent me home with solemn advice to ‘live as domestic a life as possible,’ to ‘have but two hours’ intellectual life a day, and ‘never touch pen, brush or pencil again as long as I lived’” (348). We see this motivation manifest through the parallels of the narrator and the woman behind the wallpaper: the woman behind the wallpaper’s literal struggle with the wallpaper symbolizes the narrator’s struggle with her journal, the writing paper. The story’s at-times ambiguous use of “paper” helps highlight this symbolic association. For instance, almost immediately after discussing her concerns about writing (“I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me”), she mentions, “But I must not think of that. This paper looks to me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had!” (46). Because she does not change topics from writing, our inclination is to read “paper” as a reference to her journal; this is especially true considering we have already sensed a running theme of illness and creative oppression. Later in this entry, however, we realize that this instance of “paper”
explicitly refers to the wallpaper; still, our reading process has connected the two “papers” in our minds. In other instances, “paper” refers less explicitly to both the wallpaper and the journal, but rather amorphously brings to the reader’s mind the comparisons between the two. Throughout the story, paper is seen as something one needs to break through, an obstacle to expression. It is literalized in the woman behind the wallpaper; with the narrator, her journal becomes a vexed tool of sorts, something that (perhaps anticipating post-structuralism) confuses expression, something one needs to get beyond. This is evidenced most noticeably in the final scene where writing fails to depict the scene in a way mimetically consistent with the rest of the narrative. Again we are faced with an indeterminacy of cause and effect: does the narrator first “see” the woman behind the wall and then recognize her artistic oppression, or does she in some way sense this creative oppression and then transfer it to an imaginative figure in the wallpaper’s pattern, akin to personifying anxieties through dreams; or perhaps she herself does not make the symbolic association between the papers at all. The conflation of protagonist (the woman behind the wallpaper) and narrator underscores the thematic parallels between their struggles with papers. Similarly, the story’s over-all progression, which moves toward foregrounding of the narrator function seems appropriate in a story about a woman’s attempt to reconcile her complex relationship toward artistic creation/writing.

One of the unifying rhetorical qualities of completely-coincident narration is its tendency to objectify the narrative. Because the three functions remain self-contained
within a single individual, we experience the narrative as if eavesdropping, listening in on something that isn’t intended for anyone other than that individual. (Here, clearly, I am working within the parameters of the diegesis; obviously broadening the scope and viewing the narrative as a piece of literature reveals that it is written by an author and intended for us.) For this reason, completely-coincident narration contrasts with the coincidence of narratee and protagonist (chapter one), a mode that specializes inviting the reader to adopt the role of protagonist. This requires some explanation, especially considering that *Bright Lights, Big City* and *La Modification* both employ a second-person address, which I argued in chapter one is a technique that draws the reader in. Although at times a reader might feel addressed by the “you” of *Bright Lights, Big City* or *La Modification*, ultimately that sense becomes obscured by the insularity of the narrative transmission, which at times distances the reader because he/she does not have the potential to respond to that address in that way he/she does with other forms of second-person narration (such as turning the page in Manhire’s story or potentially acting out how-to advice); that is, the reader cannot enter into the position of narratee in the ways that he/she can with the coincidence of narratee and protagonist (chapter one) because the narrator specifies him/herself as the narratee. Moreover, extended second-person address that depicts specific events (as opposed to hypothetical and varying events such as we get with how-to) actually prevents the reader from adopting the “you,” for it continually reminds us that we are not in the situation of the “you”: we are not snorting cocaine in the bathroom, for instance, or sitting on a train contemplating a possible
divorce. This inability to maintain long stretches of vicarious reading is the main reason, I posit, that most second-person narratives are short stories and not novels.

This is not to say that readers cannot share in the plights of completely-coincident protagonists; rather, I want to suggest that completely-coincident narration provides situational distance between the reader and the narrative events that invites readers to view those events from the outside. This objectification is perhaps most prominent in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” in which we intrude upon the secret diary of the protagonist.

We relate to the narrative as might a psychologist, though we might offer a diagnosis different from the one reached by the men in the story, keeping a distance from the events that enables objective analysis. Gilman herself recognizes the extent to which the story becomes an objectifiable work from which readers (and presumably doctors and psychologists) can learn rather than merely experience. In “Why I Wrote ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’,” Gilman comments, “The little book is valued by alienists [nineteenth-century psychiatrists] and as a good specimen of one kind of literature” (349 italics mine).
CHAPTER 5

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

The narrative category I have saved for the last – non-coincident narration – is both the most populated and, in turn, the most diverse. Whereas the completely-coincident narratives I examined in the previous chapter conflate the narrator, narratee, and protagonist functions, non-coincident narratives maintain discrete narrator, narratee, and protagonist functions. Because of the scope of this study, I will narrow my analysis of non-coincident narration to three texts, Valdimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*, Willa Cather’s *A Lost Lady*, and Margaret Atwood’s “Happy Endings,” which I have chosen because they demonstrate a broad range of the different ways these three discrete functions can relate to one another; likewise, these texts demonstrate the range of rhetorical possibilities for non-coincident narration. Throughout the chapter, I will be concerned with how non-coincident narration creates a distance between narrator and narratee and the story-world and, in turn, how this distance can serve different narratives differently. *Lolita* uses non-coincident narration to complicate the ethics of the novel in two ways: (1) the non-coincident narration distinguishes between Humbert the narrator and Humbert the
protagonist, muddling our holistic evaluation of him, and (2) it creates a shifting relationship between Humbert and his varied narratees, which makes his intentions in narrating unclear. “Happy Endings” employs non-coincident narration to obscure the story events and leave the narrator’s concluding questions about literary interpretation in the abstract. *A Lost Lady*, perhaps the ethical flip-side to *Lolita*, uses non-coincident narration to distance the narrator and narratee ethically and morally from the story-world, ultimately discouraging the authorial audience from ethical judgment as well.

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.

Using a model that distinguishes different diegetic planes we are able to recognize and, when appropriate, preserve the distinction between narrator and protagonist functions. This is particularly important when we address a work such as *Lolita* because both the narrator and the protagonist are the same individual, and their distinctions as functions risk being obscured in readers’ minds. Martin Green, for instance, ignores the distinctions between Humbert the narrator and Humbert the protagonist and cites his flaws as a character (protagonist) to argue that he is an unreliable narrator: “we have a hundred reasons to distrust that voice. He is a murderer and a pervert” (16). With my triangular model that preserves the distinction between diegetic planes, the connection between unreliable acting and unreliable narrating that Green assumes would not be

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1 Many critics and readers recognize the duality of Humbert but do not position these two personas along the story-discourse distinction as I do. Julia Bader, for instance,
automatic: after all, not all flawed protagonists are unreliable narrators. One could argue that a rapist who admits the rape is certainly a flawed character but a reliable narrator. Richard Bullock also inappropriately merges Humbert’s two functions. Early on in his analysis, he recognizes that “the Humbert who fails as an artist of the flesh and imagination must not be confused with the Humbert who narrates the novel” (187). However, despite recognizing this difference between narrator and character, Bullock attempts (ultimately unconvincingly) to unify the two as artists and fails to preserve the distinct functions of narrator and character. He claims, “in creating *Lolita* as a work of art compounded in his own life, [Humbert] unites physical and fantastic in the artifact and does the same in his very being, existing in the work as both artist and artifact, cause and effect” (201). Bullock’s reading (and others that merge the narrator and protagonist), meets significant recalcitrance from the narrative, in particular the numerous and varied instances in which the novel (Humbert as mouthpiece) guides and encourages us to keep these functions and personas distinct. At times, Humbert seems to distinguish his current narrating-self from his former protagonist-self deliberately. He does this stylistically by referring to his protagonist self in the third-person, establishing a narrator/protagonist distance we typically find in heterodiegesis: “Pubescent Lo swooned to Humbert’s charm as she did to hiccuppy music” (106). He juxtaposes this third-person reference with a return to the first-person in the next two sentences as he describes his morally-accepted relationships with adults, even indicating one woman’s age: “adult Lotte loved me with a
mature, possessive passion that I now deplore and respect more than I care to say. Jean Farlow, who was thirty-one and absolutely neurotic, had also apparently developed a strong liking for me” (106). By using the third-person to describe his relationship with Lolita and the first-person to describe his relationships with adult women, Humbert uses semantics to accept responsibility for the latter while distancing his narrating self from the former. He employs the same tactic when he delivers his self-sentence: “Had I come before myself, I would have given Humbert at least thirty-five years for rape, and dismissed the rest of the charges” (310). Humbert also creates distance between his narrating and acting selves by confining his role as narrator to that of a reporter (a limited role that Seymour Chatman would argue is true of all narrators2), further distinguishing himself from the acting protagonist Humbert: he claims, “I am only a very conscientious recorder” (90).

At other times, the moral distance between Humbert the narrator and Humbert the protagonist seems less contrived or deliberate and something sincere and unplanned. For instance, there are numerous occasions throughout the narrative in which his perceptions as narrator clash with the perceptions he held during his relationship with Dolores. The famous passage that ends Chapter 3 of Part 2 illustrates this distinction poignantly:

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within the story plane. See Bader’s essay, “Lolita: The Quest for Ecstasy.”
2 Generalizing from Dickens’s narrator in Dombey and Son, Chatman writes: “The narrator, in this case omniscient and unidentified, is a reporter, not an ‘observer’ of the story world in the sense of literally witnessing it. It makes no sense to say that a story is told ‘through’ the narrator’s perception since he/she/it is precisely narrating, which is not an act of perception but of presentation or representation” (Coming to Terms, 143).
And so we rolled East, I more devastated than braced with the satisfaction of my passion, and she glowing with health, her bi-iliac garland still as brief as a lad’s, although she had added two inches to her stature and eight pounds to her weight. We had been everywhere. We had really seen nothing. And I catch myself thinking today that our long journey had only defiled with a sinuous trail of slime the lovely, trustful, dreamy, enormous country that by then, in retrospect, was no more to us than a collection of dog-eared maps, ruined tour books, old tires, and her sobs in the night – every night, every night – the moment I feigned sleep. (177-8)

The opening sentence of this passage reveals the protagonist’s perspective, one which articulates his then view of his devastated sexual satisfaction and Lolita’s glowing health. However, the focalization shifts to the narrator-now with the phrase “I catch myself thinking today,” which initiates a view, marked with “defilement,” quite different from the view of the opening sentence. But this passage does more than just represent two temporally distant and morally diverse perspectives on the same series of events: it provides an instance in which “the narrator’s focalization contains the character’s” (Phelan Living to Tell), tying together contrasting views of the same events: “although it is only the narrating-I who draws the conclusion that their journey had defiled the country, it is both the narrating-I and the experiencing-I who envision Lolita sobbing ‘every night, every night’” (Living to Tell). The complicated conflation of perspective in this passage, “dual focalization” as Phelan terms it, both reinforces the distinction between Humbert the narrator and Humbert the protagonist (by establishing two different perspectives) and diminishes that distinction (by eventually subsuming the protagonist’s focalization in the narrator’s).
That we encounter two different Humberts (here his mirrored name “Humbert Humbert” underscores this duality in function) complicates our ethical response to him as a character as well as our responses to his narrative. Any judgment of him must incorporate both his protagonist and narrator personas; however, how one chooses to balance these two personas depends on interpretation and perhaps personal taste and predisposition. It is possible and probable that we will have two different responses to the two distinct Humberts: one to the protagonist and one to the narrator. Thus, when we turn to a holistic evaluation of him or his narrative, we are forced to reconcile two potentially diverse ethical impressions: one of the reprehensible pedophile and one of the seemingly contrite repentant. As evidenced by readers’ varied and conflicted responses, this is not an easy task; as Fowler notes, *Lolita* is Nabokov’s “most triumphant integration of character and plot or, more precisely, of voice and activity” (147). In fact, the novel (and Nabokov the implied author) seems to guide us into these murky ethical waters, for even to the very end Humbert’s attitude toward himself and Lolita seems self-contradictory. We recognize in the last few pages his new found understanding, full of seemingly sincere contrition, of the horrors to which he has subjected Lolita, a product of his narrating: “at this or that twist of it [the narrative] I feel my slippery self eluding me, gliding into deeper and darker waters than I care to probe” (310). And we are drawn into thinking he repents his involvement with Lolita when we encounter his self-sentencing:

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3 Lionel Trilling opens his famous 1958 review of the novel with “*Lolita* is about love,” and Linda Kauffman replies thirty years later with, “*Lolita* is not about love but about
“Had I come before myself, I would have given Humbert at least thirty-five years for rape, and dismissed the rest of the charges” (310). The condemning tone and connotations of “rape” are distinctly absent in the first half of the narrative, in which Humbert attempts to paint himself as a victim of desire, suggesting a progression on the discourse plane, a development as he narrates. But only a few paragraphs later, in the final paragraph of the narrative, he offers the line, “Be true to your Dick” (311), directed at Lolita. Amidst his professed contrition surfaces this line of sarcasm and pun that seems to undercut the understanding and guilt he claims in the previous passage to have attained. Thus, the narrative leaves the reader with a final point of ethical indeterminacy.

My model also prompts us to examine the status of the narratee and the relationship between narratee and narrator (and, by default, the relationship between narratee and protagonist). However, understanding how Humbert relates to his narratee becomes difficult in large part because his intended narratee varies throughout the novel. On the very first page of the novel, Humbert identifies his narratee as “ladies and gentlemen of the jury” and references “exhibit number one”; in the following paragraph he expressing his intention to “pass around in a minute” other pieces of evidence (11). These references to a legal proceeding suggest that the narrative situation centers somehow around courtroom trials, perhaps Humbert writing a brief for his defense. Later comments, such as “I insist on proving that I am not, and never was, and never could have been, a brutal scoundrel” (133), reinforce this. However, other references to incest, which is a betrayal of trust, a violation of love,” and asks, “How have critics
the narratee and narrative situation seem to contradict this initial impression of the narrative situation. (We also learn from John Ray, Jr.’s foreword that Humbert died a few days before the start of his trial.) On the following page, for instance, he reveals that he is “writing under observation” (12). And a few pages after this, he addresses his narratee as “doctor,” suggesting perhaps that his observation is psychiatric in nature: “a peculiar exhaustion, I am so oppressed, doctor, set in” (17). Throughout the rest of his narrative, Humbert addresses a number of different narratees: Clarence, his lawyer (34, 156); “my learned reader” with “his bald head” (50); his one-time neighbor, Jean Farlow – “(Jean, whatever, wherever you are, in minus time-space or plus soul-time, forgive me all this, parenthesis included)” (106-7); Lolita (107, 311); his printer (111); Charlotte (151); “reader” (151, 156); “your honor” (187); one of Lolita’s physicians, Dr. Isle (200); his post-Lolita girlfriend, Rita (261). Humbert himself laments the uncertainty of who his narratee is, hoping he is “addressing myself to unbiased readers” (287): “(ah, if I could visualize him [the reader] as a blond-bearded scholar with rosy lips sucking la pomme de sa canne as he quaffs my manuscript)” (228). It is not until the very last pages that we get a clear indication of his dramatic situation, long after the effect of the shifting narratees has reached the reader: “I first started, fifty-six days ago, to write Lolita, first in the psychopathic ward for observation, and then in this well-heated, albeit tombal, seclusion” (310).
The multiplicity of narratees seems to suggest that his audience is everyone who might eventually read his account (including those involved in the events whom he can address directly through the narrative). But that the narratees shift so quickly and so often also suggests – somewhat paradoxically – that there is no narratee besides Humbert himself: although he plans on publishing his manuscript after both he and Lolita die, at the time of its composition he seems so insular that these references to external narratees serve as excuses for him to narrate to himself. Either way, the shifting narratee adds to Humbert’s general narrational confusion and uncertainty that we find throughout the novel, as evidenced in a short chapter that intrudes upon the story to describe Humbert’s problems with narrating:

This daily headache in the opaque air of this tombal jail is disturbing, but I must persevere. Have written more than a hundred pages and not got anywhere yet. My calendar is getting confused. That must have been around August 15, 1947. Don’t think I can go on. Heart, head – everything. Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita. Repeat till the page is full, printer. (111)

This one-paragraph chapter breaks with the defensive tone of earlier sections and foreshadows the contrition of the end of the novel; it also disrupts the narrative style, including explicit reference to discourse-level issues and employing present-tense narration. More importantly, it exemplifies the difficulty Humbert faces on the discourse level both in organizing his story and in reliving these events through the act of narrating.

The instability concerning whom exactly Humbert addresses co-exists with another instability: what exactly is Humbert’s objective in telling his tale? As we’ve seen, oftentimes Humbert seems to shift his intended audience, leaving us uncertain also
about his objective. Is he writing to exonerate himself for the murder of Quilty or to admit guilt for raping Lolita, in which case the jury would be his primary narratee? Is he writing to apologize to Lolita (and to a lesser extent Charlotte and the other figures in his life)? Is he writing to understand himself and how his past – especially his boyhood relationship with Annabel Leigh – influenced his relationship with Lolita? Or more cynically: is he writing to relive somehow a past pedophiliac experience? Is he writing to attain artistic immortality for himself or Lolita, seeking aesthetic pleasure? Perhaps it is more accurate that all of these objectives combine as the narrative’s catalyst. One of the major progressions of the novel, especially on the discourse plane, is the seeming shift in narrational objectives: Humbert the narrator’s moves from defense and denial (witness “exhibit number one”) to confession and contrition (as seen in his self-sentencing). As is the case with Humbert’s narrative situation, his objectives become explicit only in the last few pages: “I thought I would use these notes in toto at my trial, to save not my head, of course, but my soul. In mid-composition, however, I realized that I could not parade living Lolita. I still may use parts of this memoir in hermetic sessions, but publication is to be deferred” (310). This passage indicates a shift in objective “mid-composition”; it also comes late enough for readers to have already gathered enough “evidence” for themselves to consider this statement of objectives unreliable. Or perhaps we shouldn’t be overly concerned with Humbert’s objectives but, instead, be concerned with the

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4 The abundance of the term “seeming” and its derivations throughout my analysis of *Lolita* is telling: rather than suggest a lack of critical confidence or ability, they exemplify the inconsistent and unsure responses that the novel elicits.
narrative’s effect, as John Ray seems to be when he concludes his foreword with this platitudinous remark: “‘Lolita’ should make all of us – parents, social workers, educators – apply ourselves with still greater vigilance and vision to the task of bringing up a better generation in a safer world” (8).

The connected instabilities of the identity of the narratee(s) and Humbert’s objectives as a narrator are also linked to the difficulty many readers encounter regarding their ethical responses to the novel: not being certain to whom or why Humbert is telling his story makes it difficult to formulate a stable and consistent response to the narrative as a whole, especially considering the extent that occasion and audience influence the context and meaning of a given statement or narrative. The potential for more than one reasonable explanation (the law’s definition of “reasonable doubt”) – here with the issues of audience and objective – is comparable to literature’s notion of indeterminacy and tends to confuse readers’ responses to texts. Speaking of his own inability to decipher Humbert’s narrational objectives, Lionel Trilling writes, “Indeed, for me one of the attractions to Lolita is its ambiguity of tone … and its ambiguity of intention, its ability to arouse uneasiness, to throw the reader off balance” (quoted in Booth 371). Rather than try to right the reader and take a definite ethical position on the novel, something that might ultimately be an impossible task, I have confined my analysis to show how the structure of the narrative prevents any easy ethical response.
Other works of literature also hinge on recognizing and maintaining the difference in diegetic planes and the difference between an individual’s perceptions as a character and his/her perceptions as a narrator. For instance, learning how Pip changes from his immature self depicted in the novel’s opening page into a mature self narrating the tale is in large part what propels *Great Expectations*. Richard Ford’s “Great Falls” also relies on maintaining distinct narrator and protagonist functions. Ford’s story recounts an evening in which a young boy and his father discover his mother’s infidelity: they come home early from a hunting trip to find her with a young fling named Woody. The story’s homodiegesis depends heavily on the temporal, ethical, and rhetorical distinctions between Jackie the protagonist and a much older Jackie the narrator, evident in the following passage:

My father looked at me where I was standing in the gravel, as if he expected to see me go with my mother toward Woody’s car. But I hadn’t thought about that – though later I would. Later I would think I should have gone with her, and that things between them might have been different. But that isn’t how it happened. (42)

This instance of reporting something that didn’t happen coincides with one of the general effects of disnarration that Prince explores, that of expressing the regret that accompanies what-if scenarios. If we fail to recognize the differences between Jackie the narrator and Jackie the protagonist, how he has transformed from a naïve boy to a jaded man, we risk misreading the ethics of “Great Falls” and the unreliability in the narrator’s concluding observation: there is “some coldness in us all, some helplessness that causes us to
misunderstand life when it is pure and plain, makes our existence seem like a border
between two nothings, and makes us no more or less than animals who meet on the road
– watchful, unforgiving, without patience or desire” (49). That Jackie doesn’t choose to
go with his mother, that he doesn’t even see it as an option at the time, leads him to
remain estranged from and confused about his mother and her relationship to his father.
Ford’s story concerns itself with the festering of this confusion over time, ultimately
resulting in Jackie’s hardened concluding comments about human nature, the story’s title
as much about Jackie’s turn to bitterness as it is about his mother’s infidelity.

The narrative structure of Margaret Atwood’s “Happy Endings,” while still an
example of non-coincident narration, differs from Lolita’s in that its narrator and narratee
are not part of the story world. “Happy Endings” employs a heterodiegetic narrator who
presents multiple endings, not all of which are happy, for a story that begins: “John and
Mary meet” (50). After riffing on this beginning for a few pages, describing a number of
possible ways in which it could progress, each demarcated by letters, the narrative
concludes with the narrator inviting the narratee to focus not on the events of the endings
but on why and how things happen, on the larger and more general issue of how events
interact and how plots develop. The main challenge of reading the very short “Happy
Endings” involves deciphering the application of this concluding remark about plots,
which, in turn, involves locating where the implied author stands in relation to narrator.

5 See my analysis of Independence Day in chapter three (p 117-8) for a fuller discussion
Atwood’s story progresses in a unique way, moving with the false sense that the reader is in control of its development. The story opens,

John and Mary meet.
What happens next?
If you want a happy ending, try A. (50)

This opening resembles that of a choose-your-own-adventure story, such as Manhire’s “The Brain of Katherine Mansfield,” which I discussed in chapter one: most noticeably, it contains a subjunctive clause that gives the impression that the reader can choose the direction of John and Mary’s story. However, there are two significant differences between this opening and standard choose-your-own-adventure stories. One, the narrator, rather than an extradiegetic director, offers the directions to “try A.” This keeps the narrator in control of the entire text (as opposed to an extradiegetic director prompting the reader to choose a path to follow) and creates a closer connection between the story (of John and Mary) and the overriding apparatus of that story – both of which we attribute to the narrator. Two, there is no option other than “try A.” Any sense we have of controlling the development of the story is illusory: what is a reader to do if he/she doesn’t want a happy ending? Other than put the story down (or be blatantly defiant and move to some section other than A), the reader progresses to A, which provides a thumbnail sketch of John and Mary’s happy marriage, healthy sex life, prosperous children, relaxing retirement, and their eventual deaths.

of disnarration.
6 See my analysis of “The Brain of Katherine Mansfield” (p 44) for my definition and discussion of the extradiegetic director.
Although the final sentence of A does not instruct us to go to a different section, there is the built-in assumption (of both the narrator and implied author) that we will progress to B, which provides a not-so-happy ending: “Mary falls in love with John but John doesn’t fall in love with Mary” (51). The narrator and implied author assume the reader’s progression because of readers’ (very reasonable) conditioning to move straight through a narrative, until it’s over, unless otherwise instructed. Ending B concludes with John marrying another woman, Madge, and a return to A and their eventual deaths. Atwood’s story continues in this way, offering endings C, D, E, and F, all of which conclude by returning to ending A and the eventual deaths of the characters. The link among these endings, other than the deaths of their characters, is the narrator’s use of recycled names. In ending B, Madge is the woman John leaves Mary for; in ending C, Madge is John’s original wife, whom he cheats on with Mary. Likewise, in ending C, Fred becomes the man Madge marries after John commits suicide; ending D starts with Fred and Madge taking on the roles John and Mary originally played in A. These recycled characters tease the reader to find connections between and among the endings, though the narrator provides no direct indication of any connection. That is, the Fred and Mary that start D might be the Fred and Mary that end C, but not necessarily. This ambiguity, the lack of definite connection, is crucial to the overall effect of Atwood’s narrative, for it places the responsibility of locating causal relation (if there is any to locate) on the reader.
We are left with multiple series of events whose possible relation depends on how the reader interacts them. This responsibility, should the reader accept it, corresponds to the larger invitation that the narrator makes at the end of the story, which involves understanding how events are connected, why one action leads (or doesn’t lead) from another:

So much for endings. Beginnings are always more fun. True connoisseurs, however, are known to favor the stretch in between, since it’s the hardest to do anything with.
That’s about all that can be said for plots, which anyway are just one thing after another, a what and a what and a what.
Now try How and Why. (56)

Clearly we can recognize the importance of asking How and Why, for these questions seek an understanding of human motivation and psychology that has always concerned literature. But what are we to make of the sentences about plots that lead to this final invitation? On the one hand, there is a simplicity in the narrator’s comments (surely there must be more we can say of plots?) that borders on empty platitude and suggests these comments are unreliable (i.e. not consistent with the implied author). This is the same impression we receive a few paragraphs before with the narrator’s comment that all endings are the same: “The only authentic ending is the one provided here: John and Mary die. John and Mary die. John and Mary die” (55-6). The reality that everyone will die can’t be denied, but it can be contextualized differently. Atwood doesn’t intend for

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Using E.M. Forster’s influential distinction between story and plot, Atwood’s narrator has mistaken the two: Forster claims that story is a series of events, temporally related, whereas plot is a series of events causally related (86).
us to read her narrator’s cynical comment about endings sincerely: yes, all characters will die, but that does not imply that all endings will amount to the same thing, especially when we consider the myriad ways characters approach that ending and the equally numerous ways readers interpret and contextualize those endings. On the other hand, this same simplicity seems to recognize that while considering How and Why might be an easy task to articulate, its difficulty comes in its execution. We are also left wondering, To whom exactly are these final sentences directed? Is the narratee a reader of plots, in which case the narratee would supplement the How and Why of narrative, or a maker of plots, a fellow writer, in which case the narratee would infuse the How and Why within the narrative?

That is, the final paragraphs of “Happy Endings” encourage us to consider how meaning is constructed in narrative. Turning back to the lettered sections of the story, we see hints of How and Why. Despite trying to present merely a series of events, the narrator (perhaps unwittingly) has provided some indication of why these events unfold as they do. For instance, the narrator explains that Mary pretends to want sex “not because she likes it exactly, she doesn’t, but she wants John to think she does because if they do it often enough surely he’ll get used to her” (51). In a different ending, the narrator likewise explains that (a different Mary) “feels sorry for [a different John] because he’s worried about his hair is falling out” (53). Although these “because” clauses provide only hints at why these characters do what they do, they are still indicators; they raise the question, Is it possible to string together events without
suggesting some sense of causality? Yet to make any meaningful sense of the narrative sections, readers would certainly need to supply more indication of Why than these few short clauses provide. That is, these “because” clauses offer just enough indication of Why to prompt a reader to realize he/she needs more.

What is of particular importance considering my focus throughout this chapter on rhetorical effects of non-coincident narration is the way in which the narrative structure of “Happy Endings” separates the narrator and narratee from the story, distinguishing these functions in a way that encourages us to disregard the specifics of John, Mary, Fred, and Madge and instead concentrate on plot development and – even more generally – causes of human behavior. The narrator is indifferent toward the story he/she tells, lacking any preference for one ending over another, which obscures the specific story events for the sake of the narrator’s larger concern with general plot development. Although the narrator seems to invite the narratee back into the story to “try How and Why,” the narrator does so in abstract terms, not necessarily concerned with the How and Why of John and Mary but with these questions as they apply more general to literary composition (and to our other various attempts to understand human nature). Moreover, the design of the narrative, keeping the story sections brief and the tone matter-of-fact, discourages the reader from engaging with these events; we know so little of the characters and their situations that we don’t feel any sympathies for them. Instead, we engage with the How and Why as abstract issues. To enhance this abstraction, to obscure the particulars of the endings further, it is crucial that Atwood maintains distance between
the narrator and narratee and the story’s characters, distance that non-coincident narration provides.

Willa Cather’s *A Lost Lady* employs yet a different manifestation of non-coincident narration, in which the narrator and narratee remain effaced from the novel’s characters and actions, a significant difference from the highly subjective narration in *Lolita*. This temporal and situational distance between the narrator and narratee and the story world serves an important function throughout *A Lost Lady*: it encourages the narratee and authorial audience to remain non-judgmental toward the narrative, in particular to the character of Mrs. Forrester. The plot of *A Lost Lady* centers around the economic and moral collapse of Sweet Water, a town once prosperous with railroad commerce. Along with this depiction, we witness the maturation of the novel’s protagonist and main focalizer, Niel Herbert. Niel’s maturation throughout the narrative is linked somewhat to Sweet Water’s troubles, but it is more closely tied to his developing perceptions of the novel’s other main interest, Mrs. Forrester, a woman attempting to reconcile her Bohemian constitution with Sweet Water’s relaxed – and at times underdeveloped – social etiquette. Throughout, the narrator refrains from (and, in turn, encourages the narratee to refrain from) moral judgment of Mrs. Forrester, in the end aligning Neil’s final perceptions of her with what the narrator has maintained throughout: an understanding and appreciation of Mrs. Forrester that lacks judgment.
As early as the novel’s opening sentence we recognize a distance between the narrator and the story that will be crucial to our on-going response to the text:

Thirty or forty years ago, in one of those grey towns along the Burlington railroad, which are so much greyer today than they were then, there was a house well known from Omaha to Denver for its hospitality and for a certain charm of atmosphere. (3)

Besides establishing a temporal distance (of thirty or forty years) between the time of the story and the time of the discourse, this sentence also suggests a mythical or somewhat fictional quality through the narrator’s uncertainty (was it thirty or was it forty years ago?). Later instances of the narrator’s omnipresence and omniscience, qualities we typically associate with heterodiegetic narrators, further distance the narrator and narratee from the story world.

That the narrator refrains from making judgments on the characters – most noticeably Mrs. Forrester – and thus refrains from inadvertently expressing his own character, also distances the narrator from the story world and keeps the narrator non-descript in the reader’s mind. For instance, when we first encounter Mrs. Forrester, the narrator defers to character focalization the description of Mrs. Forrester: “George and Neil were already old enough to see for themselves that she was different from other townswomen” (12). In other instances, we read a response to Mrs. Forrester that initially appears to be from the narrator’s perception but ultimately is attributed to a character: “There was something final about her imperious courtesy, -- high-and-mighty, he [Ivy] called it” (19-20). We see a similar thing happen later in the novel, this time adopting Niel’s focalization: “where Mrs. Forrester was, dulness [sic] was impossible, Niel
believed” (58). By delaying the focalizer until after the judgment, the narrator teases us into initially attributing that impression to the narrator, if only for the duration of the sentence. In an even more important statement concerning Mrs. Forrester’s morality, the narrator relinquishes judgment to Niel: “Niel thought it very bad taste in Ellinger to come to Sweet Water when Captain Forrester was away” (69). Niel’s impression here reveals his naivete concerning Mrs. Forrester, not acknowledging that she and Ellinger are actually having an affair and not attributing to her any responsibility in the adultery. Throughout the novel, the narrator’s role is limited to that of reporter; the narrator does not seem to employ the other two narrator’s function: to interpret and to evaluate. By deferring to character focalization – and not contesting that focalization – the narrator is able to describe Mrs. Forrester’s personality and include judgments without taking responsibility for those judgments: the narrator implicitly agrees without accepting accountability. The narrator does, at one point, offer a direct judgment of the novel’s antagonist, Ivy Peters. The narrator remarks, “He was an ugly fellow, Ivy Peters, and he liked being ugly” (15). However, our introduction to Ivy, when we witness him puncture the eyes of a woodpecker and release it to flounder blindly and bounce among the trees, makes this judgment unnecessary, even redundant.

The narrator’s lack of explicit judgment also complicates how we locate the implied author, something we’ll return to at the end of the chapter. In his original discussion of the implied author, Booth contends that recognizing a narrator’s unreliability and locating the implied author are co-dependent tasks: “unreliable narrators
thus differ markedly depending on how far and in what direction they depart from their author’s norms” (159). Because we don’t have a narrator who offers judgments (and, thus, one who doesn’t expose itself to the risk of unreliability), we have nothing against which to contrast our impression of the implied author. In fact, like the narrator the implied author of *A Lost Lady* remains well below the surface throughout the novel. As we will see below, there are thematic implications for a deliberately effaced narrator and an elusive implied author.

The narrator is not quite zero-degree to the extent that the narrator of Hemingway’s “The Killers,” for instance, is. However, we do encounter a zero-degree narratee in *A Lost Lady*. In his influential essay “Introduction to the Study of the Narratee,” Gerald Prince describes the zero-degree narratee:

He does not lack positive characteristics. But he also does not want negative traits. He can thus only follow a narrative in a well-defined and concrete way and is obliged to acquaint himself with the events by reading from the first page to the last, from the initial word to the final word. In addition, he is without any personality or social characteristics. (10)

Throughout *A Lost Lady* we encounter no reference to a narratee (though as we are reminded by Prince, every narrative – and narrator – must have a corresponding narratee). Because the narratee lacks any sort of identity, the authorial reader is able to adopt the position of narratee easily; unlike in narratives in which the narratee is highly characterized, with zero-degree narratees the authorial reader does not experience an identity crisis when he or she adopts the role of narratee. Moreover, the zero-degree narratee of *A Lost Lady* – by definition – remains distant from the story; this is critical,
especially when we examine the ways in which the novel implicitly discourages the narratee and, in turn, authorial audience from making moral judgments.

Although the title of the novel suggests that Mrs. Forrester will be the novel’s primary interest, in actuality Niel becomes the novel’s focus; in particular the narrative centers around his changing perceptions of Mrs. Forrester as he matures. For the most part, Mrs. Forrester remains a static character: throughout the entire narrative she attempts to reconcile her desires for social elitism with her sedentary life in Sweet Water, never really straying from her original temperament despite the trials she undergoes; as Niel notes late in the novel, “She had after all not changed so much” (143). Conversely, Niel changes drastically throughout the novel, maturing both in years and in perceptions. His view of Mrs. Forrester, as we will see below, progresses from youthful niavete, in which he admires her as one does a flower pressed between glass, to mature sympathy, in which he recognizes her as a victim of circumstance: where she was once a morally lost and contemptible woman in his eyes, she is now a woman lost in an environment that ill-suits her. In the final analysis, *A Lost Lady* is a coming-of-age story, though always recognizing that Niel’s maturation relies immeasurably on Mrs. Forrester’s presence in his life: “He came to be very glad that he had known her, and that she had had a hand in breaking him in to life” (147).

Besides acting as protagonist, Niel is also the novel’s primary focalizer. But rather than examine instances in which we are within Niel focalization – instances that comprise nearly all of the narrative – we should look at a crucial moment of the novel
when we are outside of his focalization. The scene in which we first discover that Mrs. Forrester is having an affair with Ellinger is not mediated through Niel’s focalization but through the focalization of another Sweet Water youth, Adolph Blum, a boy too intimidated by Mrs. Forrester’s social status to reveal her secret. Blum spies Mrs. Forrester and Ellinger on a sleigh ride, having excused themselves from their party under the guise of bringing back a holiday tree. Blum watches them park the sleigh and disappear into the woods with Ellinger carrying blankets. The scene elicits three related responses: (1) we are disappointed that Mrs. Forrester would be unfaithful to Captain Forrester; (2) we sympathize for Neil’s ignorance of the situation, that he naively misinterprets Mrs. Forrester (incidentally, this is one of the few points in the novel when the narrator and narratee both know more than the protagonist, Niel); and (3) our regret for Niel is compounded by the fact that by taking Constance off Mrs. Forrester’s hands for the day, he has unwittingly made this excursion possible. That Mrs. Forrester mocks Niel to Ellinger heightens this third response: she laughs, “And Connie! You’ve reduced her to a state of imbecility, really! What an afternoon Niel must be having” (52). At this point the narrative lures us into moral judgment. The callousness of this scene invites us to condemn Mrs. Forrester. As Niel will do pages later when he eventually learns of her affair, quoting from Shakespeare, “lilies that fester smell worse than weeds” (72), we are inclined to cast harsh judgment on her infidelity.

But the narrator (and here we can include the implied author) does not want us to maintain a harsh view of Mrs. Forrester. Throughout the narrative, we have been
confined to Niel’s perspective, one that we later realize is immature and insufficient. Her situation is not as simple as any clear judgment would suggest. Perhaps the character who understands this best is her husband, Captain Forrester, as Niel will eventually discover: “Niel had often wondered just how much the Captain knew. Now, as he went down the hill, he felt sure that he knew everything; more than anyone else; all there was to know about Marian Forrester” (99) and “the longer Niel was with Captain Forrester in those peaceful closing days of his life, the more he felt that the Captain knew his wife better even than she knew herself; and that, knowing her, he – to use one of his own expressions – valued her” (122). Besides recognizing the extent that the Captain knew his wife, the passage from page 99 is the first instance in the novel in which the narrator refers to Mrs. Forrester as “Marian.” Considering the degree to which the narrator maintains Niel’s focalization, this shift in reference marks a new, more mature relation and understanding that Niel has toward Mrs. Forrester.8 That the Captain – whose exact understanding of his wife is never shared by Niel, the narrator, or the narratee (or, in turn, the authorial reader) – never reproaches his wife mirrors the absence of moral judgment on the narrator’s part throughout the narrative. Combined, these absences force us to reconsider any moral judgments we might be inclined to cast. As

8 Forster employs a similar focalization technique in *Howard’s End*. The novel’s heterodiegetic narrator maintains the focalization of its protagonist, Margaret, throughout most of the narrative. Thus, the narrator changes its relation and reference to Mr. Wilcox once he and Margaret wed: in the first scene after their marriage, the narrator writes, “Good-humor was the dominant note of her relations to Mr. Wilcox, or, as I must now call him, Henry” (177).
I’ve already mentioned, Cather restricts her narrator function primarily to reporting. However, in most cases of this type of restricted narrator, the authorial audience is invited to supplement the other functions (that is, the interpretation and the evaluation).

However, this restriction, coupled with the ethically-reserved Captain Forrester, an authorial mouthpiece and someone who serves as a pillar on which Sweet Water relies, actually discourages us from supplying the evaluation.

As does the authorial audience, Niel eventually changes his perceptions and recognizes what the narrator has exemplified implicitly throughout the narrative: appreciating Mrs. Forrester is easy; understanding her is a challenge; and judging her is inappropriate. After earlier remarking that “it was Mrs. Forrester herself who had changed” (130), Niel finally concludes that “she had, after all, not changed so much since then” (143). As the novel closes, he realizes that, in fact, she is the same endearing woman who years ago baked him and his friends cookies. He even negates his contemptuous “lilies that fester smell worse than weeds” with “she had always the power of suggesting things much lovelier than herself, as the perfume of a single flower may call up the whole sweetness of spring” (147). Far from being possessed by “incredible denseness,” as critic Dalma Brunauer suggests (50), Niel displays an epiphianic sense of understanding and maturity. Although the narrator and protagonist are temporally and situationally distinct, they share a union by the end of the novel because both relate to Mrs. Forrester similarly. Unlike in many narratives involving an effaced narrator, in which the effacement increases distance between the narrator and the story world, in A
Lost Lady the narrator’s objectivity actually serves to connect the narrator and character, who both realize the inappropriateness of moral judgments.

In the end, the narrator leaves the narratee (and authorial audience) with no clear moral judgment of Mrs. Forrester; nor does a primary character offer such judgment: neither Niel nor the narrator comments on the rightness or wrongfulness of Mrs. Forrester’s infidelity. Thus, the narratee has little help and even less cause to judge her. This inability and inappropriateness of judging Mrs. Forrester by the narrator, narratee, and protagonist underscores the novel’s naturalistic tendencies. We recognize clearly throughout how the novel exemplifies modernism with the moral decay emblematic of Eliot: compare Mrs. Forrester’s response to Ivy Peter’s advances (“She did not move, did not look up, but went on rolling out pastry” [145]) with the reaction Tiresias witnesses in The Waste Land (“Exploring hands encounter no defence;/ His vanity requires no response,/ And makes a welcome of indifference” [241-3]); moreover, we have the literal Waste Land once Captain Forrester’s marsh is drained. Additionally, we see the influence of economic ruin typical of Fitzgerald. But A Lost Lady becomes particularly interesting in terms of literary movements because it bridges naturalism and modernism. Most noticeably, the novel’s naturalism surfaces through our sense that Mrs. Forrester cannot be held responsible for her behavior; this lack of responsibility makes judgment seem inappropriate. Like other naturalist characters (most literally the protagonist of London’s “To Build a Fire”), Mrs. Forrester is ill-equipped for her environment. And like naturalist characters, her constitution seems assigned, a product of heredity or
environment that she cannot change. The lack of authorial intrusion that marks naturalist texts, a symptom of the declining confidence in moral conviction of the times, also marks *A Lost Lady* – most noticeably in the lack of commentary by the narrator and the elusive implied author. As the narrator and Niel both understand (and the narratee and authorial audience should follow), Mrs. Forrester is outside of moral judgment: it is Jim Casey’s (from *The Grapes of Wrath*) philosophical remark made sophisticated: “There ain’t no sin and there ain’t no virtue. There’s just stuff people do” (30). The only character in the novel who seems secure to forward a moral understanding (an understanding to which we are never exactly privy) is Mrs. Forrester’s husband, who, like Montoya of *The Sun Also Rises*, seems exempt from failing moral confidence because he is part of a previous generation. Unlike the value-laden reactions elicited by *Lolita*, our responses to *A Lost Lady* are largely devoid of moral judgment. The narrator and narratee, who remain temporally, and –more importantly – morally distant from the story and characters, respond with appreciation rather than judgment.

At the end of the previous four chapters, as way of concluding remarks, I have discussed rhetorical qualities particular to the narrative mode I examined in that chapter.

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9 Cather raises the issue of a character seemingly ill-equipped for his social situation in her often-anthologized short story “Paul’s Case.” The protagonist, Paul, recognizes that his character is beyond his control, that he is constituted for an environment other than his own and runs off to New York City, where he can entertain his Bohemian lifestyle. Ultimately, Paul realizes in true naturalistic fashion that his choices are illusory, and unable to manage his own life, he commits suicide. We respond to Paul as we do to Mrs. Forrester: with sympathy rather than judgment.
However, the diversity of texts we find within non-coincident narration prevents a single, tidy appraisal of the mode’s rhetorical effect. For this reason, I have focused this chapter on exploring the range of non-coincident narratives and have selected example texts based on their ability to demonstrate this range. One of the ways in which non-coincident narratives vary concerns the role of the implied author, something I have hinted at throughout the chapter and want to return to here in more detail. The three texts I have been discussing throughout this chapter demonstrate a broad range of how the implied author relates to the narrative and contributes to reader response. The implied author of Atwood’s “Happy Endings” is perhaps the easiest to locate, especially considering the flippance and questionable reliability of the narrator’s concluding comments, something I have discussed in detail earlier in the chapter. At first, the narrator of “Happy Endings” seems to be closely related to the implied author, a result of the story’s metafictional qualities. However, it is important that we, as interpreters of literature and the human experience, recognize the differences among the possible endings and, thus, not agree with the narrator’s belief that “the endings are the same however you slice it” (55). Even though it is an undeniable truth that all characters will die in the end (at least those in works that operate under the same principles of aging and death as the real world), it would be a grave over-simplification to say that all these possible endings are the same: do we interpret Lennie Small’s death (Steinbeck’s *Of Mice*

10 The narrators of John Cheever’s *Oh What a Paradise it Seems* and Tim O’Brien’s *In the Lake of the Woods*, for instance, can easily be confused with their implied authors
and Men) the same way we interpret Francis Macomber’s (Hemingway’s “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber”) even with their similarity as shootings by significant people in their lives?. Where Nabokov stands in relation to Humbert Humbert is a highly contested issue, so much so that discussions of Nabokov the implied author seems to hinge more on the particulars of the reader/critic than on the intrinsic characteristics of the text; by that I mean, readers of such a morally complex text seem to find whichever Nabokov their pre-dispositions lead them to. Despite – or perhaps because of – the difficulty locating the implied author of Lolita, the search is still an integral experience of reading the novel: the confusion readers experience when trying to locate the implied Nabokov coincides with the confusion readers face with the ethics of the novel (something I have been discussing throughout the chapter). The logic goes, if readers were able to settle on the implied Nabokov, namely whether he sympathizes with Humbert or condemns him, we would have a stronger sense of how to respond ethically to the novel. In some cases, conversely, narrative doesn’t provide much cause to distinguish between the narrator and implied author: whereas readers recognize some moral backdrop to Lolita, whether or not they can decipher exactly where the implied Nabokov stands, A Lost Lady provides little trace of the implied author. The effaced narrator is so distant from the narrative that we cannot use his/her (noticeably absent) perspective as a gauge, either positive or negative, of the implied author. This should come as no surprise, considering that the difficulty of locating the implied author in largely because both narrators are writers who general characteristics overlap with the
Cather’s *A Lost Lady* underscores the absence of explicit moral or ethical judgment in the novel the type of which we typically find with conspicuous authorial intrusions.\textsuperscript{11} Lacking a definitive and pronounced implied author, coupled with an effaced narrator, the work remains strikingly empty of moral convictions.

\textsuperscript{11} One need look no further than the didacticism of Samuel Johnson or the moralistic thematics of Nathaniel Hawthorne, both of whom stand out quite clearly as implied authors within their works.
CONCLUSION

In the preface, I defined my objective in the following way: “to develop a more adequate and useful approach to narration (recognizing that organization is oftentimes the springboard to interpretation).” I want to return to that claim here, now that I have fleshed out my new model of narration, and discuss in detail my model's relationship to the current dominant model, namely Genette's taxonomy of homo- and heterodiegesis.

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 autodiegesis – 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.

My model dismantles this hierarchy and removes the narrator from the position of a priori dominance by recognizing the extent that relationships between the narratee and protagonist also influence how readers understand and relate to narratives. One positive consequence of my reconceptualization is not only a more satisfactory taxonomy (i.e. one that adequately situates second-person narration) but also a better account of the connection between narrative technique and its effects: my model is to Genette’s as Genette’s is to the traditional model of first- and third-person narrations. The usefulness of my model, its ability to move beyond Genette’s, is likely to seem more apparent with partially-coincident and completely-coincident narration (chapters one through four) than with non-coincident narration; yet, as I hope to suggest below, my model is an advance even for non-coincident narration.

The coincidence of narratee and protagonist (chapter one) operates outside of the scope of Genette’s taxonomy because it requires that we forego the question of the narrator’s relation to the story world and instead investigate the relationship between the protagonist and narratee (and between the narratee-protagonist and authorial audience and flesh-and-blood reader), the relationship that defines the mode. Genette’s taxonomy cannot account for the coincidence of narratee and protagonist for reasons parallel to why the traditional model of first and third-person could not adequately account for “The
Narration defined by the coincidence of narrator and protagonist seems to remain in limbo, stuck between heterodiegesis and homodiegesis: on the one hand, such narration seems to be homodiegesis simply because the narrator directly addresses the narratee, who is also the protagonist, and therefore the narrator must reside in the same story world as that narratee-protagonist; on the other hand, the narrator also seems ontologically and diegetically distinct from the characters of story, resembling heterodiegetic narrators with its potential for omniscience and omnipresence (manifest in Calvino’s narrator). How-to narration also defies Genette’s distinctions because it depicts a projected story world, one in which the narrator is not literally a part but one that in most instances resembles (even replicates) the narrator’s own ontology. To put it plainly, this type of coincidence foregrounds the narratee-protagonist relationship over Genette’s narratorial distinctions.

Likewise, Genette’s distinctions don’t address the main rhetorical qualities of the coincidence of narrator and narratee. As I’ve suggested throughout chapter two, the coincidence of narrator and narratee foregrounds issues of discourse and raises questions concerning the ethics of listening and telling someone else’s story. This mode does so largely by constructing a rhetorical closed-circuit between the narrator and narratee, focusing our attention on these two functions; as I argued with my analysis of “Lost in the Funhouse,” the actual content of the story (the protagonist function) is at times much less significant that the act of telling that story. Perhaps simply a product of human nature, when we tell ourselves a story about someone else, typically we end up submitting the events of the story to our own acts of listening and telling and contemplate
how we – as listener, teller, and potential actant – can use that story. Whether the story the narrator tells himself is actual or fictional (an ambiguity in both “Doc’s Story” and “Lost in the Funhouse”) seems to some extent irrelevant, making the issue of whether or not the narrator resides in the same story world as the other characters and events secondary if not moot. Our main concerns with this mode are the conflation of the narrator and the narratee and the distinction between the narrator/narratee and protagonist (whether that distinction is because they reside in different story worlds or because they are two different individuals within the same ontology).

My discussions in the first two chapters expose one of the two main differences between my model and Genette’s: my model incorporates the narratee and examines its role in a narrative’s rhetoric, an omission in Genette’s. The coincidence I discuss in chapter exemplifies the other main difference between my model and Genette’s: my model hinges on diegetic planes whereas Genette’s hinges on story world. (This is a difference that arises when I turn to non-coincident narration as well.) The coincidence of narrator and protagonist will always be homodiegetic. That is, the defining feature of this mode (the conflation of the narrator and protagonist functions) parallels the defining feature of homodiegesis (the narrator is part of the story world of his/her characters). However, the coincidence of narrator and protagonist, as I have defined it, goes further. Not only are the narrator and protagonist the same individual – and therefore occupants of the same story world – their functions operate on the same diegetic plane: narrating and experiencing occur concurrently, creating the specific relationship between narrator and protagonist that we find in simultaneous present-tense narration. Homodiegesis
cannot distinguish between simultaneous present-tense and certain instances of historical present-tense (such as Capote’s “A Christmas Memory”) because in both cases there is the potential for narrator and protagonist to occupy the same story world. However, as my analysis of the rhetorical effects of simultaneous present-tense narration suggests, it is necessary to distinguish between these two forms of the present-tense, something possible only with a consideration of diegetic planes.

Completely-coincident narration (chapter four) merges the three coincidences I have been discussing, and therefore it defies Genette’s taxonomy for a combination of the reasons the previous three modes did. Moreover, because completely-coincident narration incorporates a completely self-contained structure (the narrator is the narratee is the protagonist), the mode objectifies the narrative situation and events, distancing the reader in ways that contrast the engaging rhetoric I examined in chapter one. Genette’s model, which groups these narratives as homodiegesis without considering the narratee’s role, cannot account for how the self-address (narrator as narratee) creates a situation in which the reader feels as if he/she is overhearing a private conversation (one that takes place in the head of the narrator as in Bright Lights, Big City and La Modification) or intruding in on a personal diary (as in “The Yellow Wallpaper”).

The narratives that belong to the category of non-coincident narration (chapter five) are texts that fit adequately in Genette’s taxonomy, implying on the surface that my model doesn’t seem as useful here as it did in the previous four chapters. However, that this category accommodates both homo- and heterodiegesis, suggests – quite provocatively, I think – differences between my model and Genette’s. That is, only
because we are employing significantly different criteria for understanding narrative is it possible for a single category in my model to contain narratives from both of his categories, in essence calling into question Genette’s principal distinction. Because I focus on diegetic planes and not ontology, my model exposes the rhetorical similarities between a homodiegetic narrator such as Humbert Humbert and a typical heterodiegetic narrator such as the one we find in *Tom Jones* (and, by default, exposes the differences between Humbert Humbert and a homodiegetic simultaneous narrator such as we find in the coincidence of narrator and protagonist). In both *Lolita* and *Tom Jones*, the narrator resides on a different temporal and diegetic plane than the protagonist, creating a rhetorical difference between the two functions. That is, even though the connection between Humbert the narrator and Humbert the protagonist might be closer than the connection between Fielding’s narrator and Tom Jones, both narrators are distanced from their protagonists in structurally (and at times rhetorically) similar ways. As I’ve suggested throughout chapter five, oftentimes our ethical response to homodiegetic texts such as *Lolita* (and others that include a temporal distance between acting and narrating) require that we distinguish between the narrator-persona and the protagonist-persona; and as I’ve commented in chapter five, those who focus exclusively on ontology confuse the narrator with the protagonist to the detriment of their readings.

The true test of my model, however, lies in the insights it offers to the range of narratives I have addressed. Throughout this dissertation I have examined both experimental texts that challenge current concepts of narrative theory (such as “The Brain of Katherine
Mansfield” and “Happy Endings”) and texts common to narrative theory (e.g. *Lolita* and *La Modification*) in order to demonstrate both the model’s comprehensiveness as well as its ability to provide additional insight into narratives already worked by other models.

However pleased I am with its maiden voyage, I am anxious to see my model road-tested further, and I look forward to future work that will refine this new approach to understanding narrative.
LIST OF REFERENCES


---. *Living to Tell about It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (forthcoming).


