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A Poetics of Unnatural Narrative

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Naturalizing and Unnaturalizing Reading Strategies

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Focalization Revisited¹

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1. Aims of the Essay

In this essay I argue that applying the principles of unnatural narratology in the form of what I call unnaturalizing reading strategies to the interpretation of unnatural narratives is often a more appropriate choice than applying the principles of naturalization and familiarization. A main contention is that Genette's separation of voice and mood (who speaks and who perceives) and Genette's understanding of focalization as a restriction of access to point of view are more radical proposals than previous narratologists have recognized—and that they are in line with unnatural narratology and allow for unnaturalizing reading strategies.

The argument compels me to revisit some points from an early essay of mine called “The Impersonal Voice in First-Person Narrative Fiction” that played a role in the emergence of unnatural narratology along with work by Maria Mäkelä, Jan Alber, and Brian Richardson. In the essay I argue that in first-person narrative fiction, the limits of the protagonist's voice in such areas as knowledge, vocabulary, and memory are sometimes strikingly transgressed

1. I wish to thank Jan Alber, Stefan Iversen, Rolf Reitan, Brian Richardson, and Richard Walsh for their comments on an earlier version of this essay. Very special thanks go to Jim Phelan for invaluable support and help.

and that this is neither a mistake nor something foreign to the genre but, on the contrary, a matter of utilizing a possibility fundamental to it.

In the present essay I wish to take this one step further and to argue that what seemed to me and most other narrative theorists at the time to be a rare and strange type of narrative does in fact tell us much about character narration in general, and that character narration, in this view, in turn, tells us something about fictional narration in general. This is because these narrative types are all most fruitfully understood as different manifestations of a relationship between author and characters. In natural frameworks one would expect all character narrators to be internally focalized, since one would expect a character narrator to have access to his or her own thoughts and not to other people's thoughts. I argue that Genette's focalization theory is really a relational theory about the relation between characters and authors, and that it is an integral part of the system that an author can choose to combine any access or nonaccess to thoughts and knowledge with any kind of narration, including character narration, precisely because the system disconnects mood and voice.

Genette's insight into the disconnect between mood and voice in fiction explains why and how fiction can (but obviously need not) employ a range of unnatural mind representations in combinations such as homodiegetic narration with zero focalization (in the manner of Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*). Furthermore, this combinatory principle can even be expanded beyond Genette's own examples to include such unnatural combinations as you-narration with internal focalization, we-narration with external focalization, and so on. Therefore, it fits nicely with the discussions of strange and unnatural narratives in Brian Richardson's *Unnatural Voices*, in which chapter 2 covers second-person narration, chapter 3 covers we-narration, and the rest of the chapters cover other unusual narrative situations.

I argue further that the separation of mood and voice and the possible combinations that follow from it are connected to the no-narrator thesis. These combinations are attributable not to a fact-reporting narrator but rather to a fictional world-creating author. This attribution in turn emphasizes the difference between reading with the assumption that the storyworld is invented (fiction) and reading with the assumption that the storyworld is not invented (nonfiction). This understanding then logically leads to a choice between interpretations: If we interpret the words in a 300-page dialogue novel with a character narrator, or—on a smaller scale—the shorter rendering of a dialogue that took place 50 years ago² as only *appearing* to be verbatim accounts, we

2. Cf. Phelan on Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" in the current volume.

make a legitimate but naturalizing choice. If we believe instead that they are part of the invented act of narration, we can also believe that the dialogues are verbatim accounts and can thus base interpretations on the characters saying some words rather than others. In making this equally legitimate choice we would also be following the principles of unnatural narratology because we would make an interpretational choice that is unnaturalizing in the sense that it is not limiting the narrative possibilities to what is mnemonically possible or plausible in real-world narration. In what follows I test these assumptions and argue in favor of unnaturalizing reading strategies in a range of examples before finally suggesting a simple, rhetorical model in which the real author rather than the narrator is the main agent of the telling, and in which not all narrative acts are representational.

2. Exceptionality, Similarity, and Unnatural Narratology

Much of the introduction to David Herman's impressive anthology *The Emergence of Mind* is based on a refutation of what he calls the exceptionality thesis. He directly connects this thesis to the question of unnatural narratology and to theorists such as Alber, Mäkelä, Richardson, and Skov Nielsen (11). Herman writes that "[. . .] the questioning of the exceptionality thesis is in a sense the starting point for all the approaches to fictional minds outlined by the chapters in this volume [. . .]" (18), and refers to almost every contributor in the volume as "anti-exceptionalist" (20, 21, 22). The exceptionality thesis, then, is the thesis that we approach fiction and nonfiction by means of different protocols for reasoning and with different interpretive strategies, and that, for example, "[. . .] readers' experiences of fictional minds are different in kind from their experiences of the minds they encounter outside the domain of narrative fiction [. . .]" (8), "[. . .] a thesis against which I think this volume militates," writes Herman (32). Interestingly, Herman explicitly notes his opposition to Richardson:

Richardson describes as follows the conventions for representing minds in texts he characterizes as mimetic: "A first person narrator cannot know what is in the minds of others, and a third person narrator may perform this, and a few other such acts, but may not stray beyond the established conventions of depicting such perceptions: the thought of one character may not be lodged within the mind of another without any intervening plausible explanation" (6–7). I would argue by contrast that, in light of the research on folk psychology that I discuss in this section, the modes

of narration that Richardson characterizes as unnatural or “anti-mimetic” converge with present-day understandings of how minds actually work. (33–34)

Finally, I wish to mention a call to the exceptionalists that seems apt to me:

Granted, fictional narratives have the power to stipulate as true reports about characters’ mind-contents. But the onus is on Exceptionalists to demonstrate that readers have to use different interpretive protocols to make sense of such stipulated mental states and dispositions, in comparison with the protocols they use for construing actual minds. (33)

I agree with the latter quote, and, accordingly, I want to argue that it is *sometimes* necessary, *often* profitable, and *nearly always* possible to use different interpretive protocols when the mind-content of characters (other than of a character narrator herself/himself) is rendered. To make this argument, however, I need to engage in a reading of Genette’s focalization theory. Genette is completely absent in Herman’s introduction and in its voluminous list of references, and this is not surprising since the study of consciousness-representation in fiction has been almost totally separated from the study of focalization. I will argue, however, that they are two sides of the same coin. Before doing so, I will first define what I mean by unnatural narratives and unnatural narratology and clarify my intention, which is not to claim that all fictional narratives are unnatural.

3. Definitions

For me, the expression “unnatural narratives” first and foremost takes on meaning in relation to what it is not: natural narratives. By natural narratives I refer to narratives that have been designated as such by influential narrative theorists. Most prominently the term “natural” has been applied to narrative theory by Monika Fludernik in *Towards a “Natural” Narratology*. Here, she describes the term as follows:

Natural narrative is a term that has come to define “naturally occurring” storytelling [...] What will be called *natural narrative* in this book includes, mainly, spontaneous conversational storytelling, a term which would be more appropriate but is rather unwieldy. (*Towards* 13)

This is the first and most important of three different meanings that feed into the term “natural narratology.” Its source is Labov and linguistic discourse analysis. The second meaning of the term “natural” comes from “Natürlichkeitstheorie,” which uses the term to “[. . .] designate aspects of language which appear to be regulated and motivated by cognitive parameters based on man’s experience of embodiedness in a real-world context” (17). Whereas both of these two meanings function as descriptive denominators of a certain kind of narrative or language, the third one is on a completely different level and refers to the readers’ *reaction* to certain types of narrative, literature, or discourse. It comes from Culler and his use of the term “naturalization” to designate readers’ efforts to make the strange and deviant seem natural and thus to familiarize it: “Culler’s naturalization in particular embraces the familiarization of the strange” (*Towards* 31). I do not disagree that natural narratives of the kind described by Fludernik exist, but an equally important point is one that Fludernik herself stresses in 2003: that we should not necessarily privilege these:

Rather than privileging naturally occurring storytelling situations, Natural Narratology, by contrast, attempts to show how in the historical development of narratorial forms natural base frames are again and again being extended. [. . .] [O]nce an originally non-natural storytelling situation has become widely disseminated in fictional texts, it acquires a second-level “naturalness” from habituality, creating a cognitive frame [. . .] which readers subconsciously deploy in their textual processing. Even more paradoxically, fiction as a genre comes to represent precisely those impossible naturalized forms and to create readerly expectations along those lines. (“Natural Narratology” 255)

It is instructive to see explicitly stressed that such a thing as an “originally non-natural storytelling situation” exists. The question, though, is whether the reader will always try to naturalize anything—and if so, if it can always be done successfully.

In yet another text, this time from 2001, Fludernik writes: “When readers read narrative texts, they project real-life parameters into the reading process and, if at all possible, treat the text as a real-life instance of narrating” (“New Wine” 623). I think it is worth noting, first, that as a descriptive statement as opposed to a normative statement about what readers *should* do, it hardly covers all readers, nor all lay readers; and second, that even if this is what many readers tend to do, we are not obliged to repeat the projection at a methodological level. Familiarization, or what Culler calls naturalization and

Fludernik, narrativization, is a choice, and whether the choice is conscious or automatic, it remains a choice and not a necessity. A different choice in the form of unnaturalizing interpretation is equally legitimate and rewarding in many texts. Following from this, these are my answers to the “what?” and the “how?” of unnatural narratology:

- What are unnatural narratives? They are a subset of fictional narratives that—unlike many realistic and mimetic narratives—cue the reader to employ interpretational strategies that are different from those she employs in nonfictionalized, conversational storytelling situations. More specifically, such narratives may have temporalities, storyworlds, mind representations, or acts of narration that would have to be construed as physically, logically, mnemonically, or psychologically impossible or implausible in real-world storytelling situations, but that allow the reader to interpret them instead as reliable, possible, and/or authoritative by cueing her to change her interpretational strategies.
- What is unnatural narratology? The investigation of these strategies and their interpretational consequences and, more broadly, the effort to state the theoretical and interpretive principles relevant to such unnatural narratives. This means that for me all unnatural narratives are fictional but only some fictional narratives are unnatural. Only some fictional narratives cue the reader to interpret differently than real-life storytelling situations do, whereas scores of realistic and conventional fictional narratives do not do that. I do wish to stress, though, the unnaturalness also of some conventional forms,³ such as, say, the use of zero focalization in traditional works of realism.

4. Genette’s Focalization Theory

By rereading Genette in *Narrative Discourse* and *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, I will demonstrate how his distinction between “who sees?” and “who speaks?” is more radical and unnatural than has generally been acknowledged. Next I argue that even though the distinction between “who sees?” and “who speaks?” is indispensable, it is also problematic in several ways, among other things because narrative allows for a traffic between voices and for techniques such as free indirect discourse which mix voices that belong to different levels in Genette’s system, and because it attributes incompatible fea-

3. See Maria Mäkelä’s essay in the present volume.

tures to the narrator. This, however, does not destroy the system. On the contrary, it does, in a sense, strengthen it, by allowing for a system in which the author's voice is influenced and supplemented by character discourse instead of vice versa.

Let me begin this section by quoting two famous moments of postclassical and classical narratology respectively. Moment 1 is Fludernik's redefinition of narrativity in terms of experientiality instead of plot: in my model there can be narratives without plot, but there cannot be any narratives without a human (anthropomorphic) experiencer of some sort at some narrative level (*Towards* 13).

This approach has gained tremendous influence in a number of important definitions and conceptualizations of narrative, including Herman's in his *Basic Elements of Narrative*, in which "what it is like" (to experience events and disruptions) is one basic element. More generally, there seems to be a shift from plot-based to experience-based conceptions of narrativity.

Moment 2 is so famous that it is already a commonplace to say that it is so famous that it hardly needs quoting. It is from Genette's *Narrative Discourse*:

However, to my mind most of the theoretical works on this subject [. . .] suffer from a regrettable confusion between what I call here *mood* and *voice*, a confusion between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who is the narrator?*—or, more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?* (186)

Even at first glance it is easy to see some of the differences between the two moments: Genette is interested in linguistic categories such as mood and voice. Fludernik is interested in cognition and human experience. Yet, how does Genette arrive at this distinction which is, although not unchallenged, so widely recognized today? What is truly original about Genette's insight and distinction here? In *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Genette does his best to downplay the discovery. He says about his study of focalizations that it was just a reformulation:

It was never anything but a reformulation, whose main advantage was to draw together and systematize such standard ideas as "narrative with an omniscient narrator" or "vision from behind" (zero focalization); "narrative with a point of view, reflector, selective omniscience, restriction of field" or "vision with" (internal focalization); or "objective, behaviorist technique" or "vision from without" (external focalization). (65–66)

To say that zero focalization is nothing more than a systematization of standard ideas such as that of the omniscient narrator is—it seems to me—at the same time far too modest and wildly imprecise. *Narrative Discourse Revisited* is striking in at least two ways.

First, the visits it pays to each of the chapters in *ND* are very, very far from equally long: in *ND* the first four of the five chapters comprise more than two hundred pages. These chapters are done away with in some twenty to thirty pages in *NDR*. Then, in revisiting the final chapter on voice and the intersection between mood and voice, *NDR* devotes close to one hundred pages to discussions of the questions in this chapter.

Second, in *ND* the long chapter on “Order” goes on for some fifty pages but does not lead (in *ND* or *NDR*) to any taxonomy or scheme for different kinds of narratives. The same holds true for the almost equally long chapter on “Duration” and the revisit, and for that of “Frequency” and its revisit. And ditto for “Mood.” But then, when it comes to narrative situations and the considering of mood and voice jointly, schemes suddenly proliferate, resulting—among other things—in the famous six-box scheme, shown in figure 4.1.

Why exactly is it that this distinction (mood/voice, who sees/who speaks), which was “never anything but a reformulation,” is the distinction on which Genette’s narrative situations are based? Why does it seem much more useful to distinguish between types of narratives on the basis of different focalizations than on the basis of, say, frequency or order? To try to answer this, we have to examine what is, in *ND* and *NDR*, the insight about focalizations that actually does not just amount to a reformulation of earlier standard ideas. In *ND* Genette talks about a possible typology:

It is certainly legitimate to envisage a typology of “narrative situations” that would take into account *both* mood and voice; what is not legitimate is to present such a classification under the single category of “point of view,” or to draw up a list where the two determinations compete with each other on the basis of an obvious confusion. (188; my italics, H.S.N.)

This envisaged typology is not provided in *ND*, but in *NDR* it is provided in the form of the six-box scheme. This already tells us that not only is the classification not reducible to questions of omniscience or ratios of knowledge, but it is not even commensurable or compatible with these. What it does instead is take into account *both* mood and voice. Genette actually knows very well that the real question does not concern the ratio of knowledge:

The narrator almost always “knows” more than the hero, even if he himself is the hero, and therefore for the narrator focalization through the hero is a

Narrating (Relation) \ Type (Focal.)	Authorial (Zero focal.)	Actorial (Internal focal.)	Neutral (External focal.)
Heterodiegetic	A <i>Tom Jones</i>	B <i>The Ambassadors</i>	C "The Killers"
Homodiegetic	D <i>Moby-Dick</i>	E <i>Hunger</i>	

FIGURE 4.1

restriction of field just as artificial in the first person as in the third. (*Narrative Discourse* 194)

The keyword here is "restriction." Genette describes and exemplifies but never actually precisely *defines* focalization. Yet, from his examples and discussions we may be able to extract a precise definition:

Focalization = restriction of access to point of view

Thus, in zero focalization there is no (zero) restriction of access to point of view. In internal focalization there is a restriction of access to the internal point of view of one or more characters. In external focalization there is a restriction of access to external points of view on the characters. The knowledge of the narrator in general is irrelevant compared with the choice of restriction. Omniscience and knowledge do not really play a role here. The choice of focalization is not a choice of knowledge. If it was, it could not be a choice anyway. How could a narrator choose to know more or less than he did? The choice of restriction, or nonrestriction, of access to point of view, on the other hand, makes perfect sense. But let us also remember that the visual metaphors are themselves too limited. Genette says in *NDR*:

My only regret is that I used a purely visual, and hence overly narrow, formulation. [. . .] so obviously we must replace *who sees?* with the broader question of *who perceives?* (64)

There is a strong sense in which consciousness, perception, mind access, and experientiality are at the very center of Genette's focalization theory. The different ways in which narratives can give us access to minds are the very means by which narratives are typologized in Genette. Focalization is thus not dependent on knowledge in and of itself, and the narrator arguably always knows

more than she tells, independent of whether the reader gets access to the thoughts of one, all, or none of the characters. Instead, focalization is dependent on the restriction or nonrestriction of access to characters' perception.

Genette's focalization theory is not essentially a theory about voice and certainly not one about vision. It is—in the way it is explicitly formulated by Genette—a relational theory about the *relation* between characters and narrator, but actually, as we will see, between authors and characters.⁴ If the question “who sees?” is too purely visual and should—as indicated by Genette—be replaced by the question “who perceives?” then it is equally true that the question “who speaks?” is too purely verbal and should be replaced or at the very least supplemented by the question “who chooses the restriction or nonrestriction of access to this perceiving?” Together, the two rephrased questions allow us to ask: “To which character's/characters' experientiality (if any) does the narrator give access?” A narrative situation, in Genette's sense, then, results from the combination of restriction of access to the perception of one, all, or none of the characters with the presence or absence of the narrator as a character of whom mention is made. A short passage in which Genette reflects on the possibility of talking about a “focalizer” is extremely illuminating in this respect:

[. . .] if *focalizer* applied to anyone, it could only be the person who *focalizes the narrative*—that is, the narrator, or, if one wanted to go outside the conventions of fiction, the *author* himself [. . .]. (*Narrative Discourse Revisited* 73)

It seems to me that this reveals a necessary feature of the theory. Focalization theory is really a theory about the relation between authors and characters. If we attribute the choice of restriction to a narrator, we encounter an aporia: for each of the six boxes in Genette's system two questions have to be asked and answered. For example, in the homodiegetic narration with zero focalization, the question “who speaks?” can be answered by “the first person narrator, Ishmael,” and the question “who sees?” can be answered by “several characters including Ishmael, Starbuck, and Ahab” (this being the very reason that focalization is zero and not internal). The quite surprising lack of surprise on Genette's part toward this strange option is probably due to the fact and the paradox of Genette's focalization theory that not only is the choice of focalization contingent on the question of relation (the question of whether there is

4. In my view it is this relational nature that is lost all too often in accounts and applications of focalization theory where focalization is repeatedly conflated with one of its two sub-parts, that of point of view, and thus reduced to a matter of the question “Who sees?”

any mention of the narrator as a character in the storyworld or not); it simply disconnects this question of relation (narrating instance) from the question of type (focalization). In other words: the questions of the narrator as enunciator of the story and the narrator as responsible for the choice of focalization are never really brought to bear upon each other.⁵ In fact, the narrator is assigned two completely distinct and incompatible roles, one inside and one outside the fictional world. And the idea of the narrator as the one who speaks and reports a story (e.g., as Ishmael does) is actually incompatible with the idea of the narrator choosing a type of focalization. This incompatibility is more hidden, but equally important, in third-person narration.

A merit of Genette's system is that its very premise is based on the assumption that fictional narratives can most usefully be categorized according to their employment or nonemployment of authoritative representation of minds. Neither temporal order, duration, frequency, nor above all thematics is used by Genette to typologize the narratives of the world. Instead the six boxes represent six different ways to mediate experientiality.

The very distinction upon which the system is built—the distinction between “who sees?” and “who speaks?”—is fundamental for fictional narration where the author can represent the experiences, thoughts, and perceptions of someone else whether or not this someone is referred to in the first or the third person. Again, focalization is essential to, whereas relation is contingent upon, fiction.

As soon as the complete disconnect between mood and voice in fiction is acknowledged, there is nothing particularly strange about, say, homodiegetic narration with zero focalization (though it certainly may be interpreted as unnatural).⁶

To sum up: Genette categorizes the narratives of the world on the basis of the different ways in which they do or do not give us access to minds. His approach is theoretical and deductive instead of empirical, to the degree that it includes both unconventional as well as conventional unnatural options (in the form of, respectively, heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narratives in zero focalization) and even leaves a box empty for the possible but not fully actualized homodiegetic narrative with external focalization.⁷

5. This may be one of the main reasons why Genette underestimates his own insights. I agree with what Phelan says in *Living to Tell About It* about Genette's getting sidetracked by the linguistic meaning of mood (110–19), and I think additionally that Genette would have had to revise his “obligatory narrator theory” if he had pursued the insight that the only viable candidate for “focalizing” in the sense of choosing focalization is the author. In *ND* and *NDR* this is clearly a revision he strongly wants to resist.

6. Obviously, it does not correlate with any real-world framework, but the same holds true for heterodiegetic narration with zero focalization.

7. Genette, of course, discusses several potential candidates, including Camus' *L'Étranger*,

Let me emphasize that for me what is unnatural about zero focalization has to do with interpretation rather than ontology. Thus I am not suggesting that sentences such as “He is missing his girlfriend” or “She blushed and felt ashamed of herself” are impossible in real life or are always fictional or unnatural. Rather, I propose that when interpreting zero focalization, it is very often possible and rewarding to interpret the mind representations in a way that is exactly “[. . .] different in kind from [. . .] experiences of the minds [we] encounter outside the domain of narrative fiction [. . .]” (Herman 8). In the next section I demonstrate how unnaturalizing approaches to certain texts may correspond to common sense and to how actual readers actually often tend to read.⁸

5. Four Examples of Unnaturalizing Reading Strategies

5.1. *Glamorama*

In *Recent Theories of Narrative* (1986), Martin Wallace writes “One telltale sign of omniscience [. . .]: comments on what a character did not think” (146). Several times in the first-person novel *Glamorama*, by Bret Easton Ellis, we are explicitly told what the protagonist Victor does not perceive:

“Disarm” by the Smashing Pumpkins starts playing on the soundtrack and the music overlaps a shot of the club I was going to open in TriBeCa and I walk into that frame, *not noticing* the black limousine parked across the street [. . .]. (168; my italics, H.S.N.)

This strange feature presents the reader with the paradoxical situation that the narrator seems to be at once omniscient and ignorant. This paradox arises, however, only if we attribute the narrative act and the enunciation of the narrative as a whole to Victor—and in fact there is little evidence, aside from the use of the first-person pronoun, that we should do that. In the course of *Glamorama* there are numerous passages in which events and thoughts are related that the character, Victor, could not possibly know about—indeed, that

but does not find any of them completely satisfactory. I can think of only one perfect example myself: a Danish novel called *Tredje gang så ta'r vi ham . . .* by a favorite author of mine, Svend Åge Madsen. Here we find sentences such as these: “I am waiting at the entrance to the house. Maybe I am hoping for Djedja to regret and return, maybe I just can't make a decision”; and “Shortly after, however, I find myself on my way to the castle. Apparently I intend to ask for her there” (Madsen 22; my translation, H.S.N.).

8. For a similar point, see the last passages in Mäkelä's essay in the current volume.

no character narrator would be able to know about. Among the most striking examples is the rendering of the passengers' last thoughts in an exploding airplane (438–41), and of the sleeping Cloe's dream (43). One example from the exploding airplane—which no one survives, and where Victor is not present—reads like this:

“Why me?” someone wonders uselessly. [. . .] Susan Goldman, who has [. . .] cancer, is partly thankful as she braces herself, but changes her mind as she's sprayed with burning jet fuel. (440)

What do we make of this? Victor is not on the plane. All the passengers die. This seems like a clear-cut case of homodiegetic narration with zero focalization.⁹ Naturalizing readings will have to explain this peculiarity by searching for ways to naturalize it. Might Victor somehow have gained access to the thoughts represented? Naturalizing options also include but are not limited to assuming that Victor is outright lying or making up what he cannot know, that he is unreliable, has gone temporarily mad, is joking or being ironic, or even that he might have—as a character in the storyworld—the gift of telepathy. I am not going to argue against each one of these options, but I think they are all extremely unlikely and heavily contradicted by other parts of the text. It seems to me that if we make the interpretational choice of believing that we can trust that this is actually what the passengers are thinking, then this in and of itself entails an interpretation that does **not** “converge with present-day understandings of how minds actually work” (Herman 33–34) since surely it is not a present-day understanding of real minds to say that they are able to reliably render what dying persons isolated in a plane far away are thinking.

This has to do exactly with the disconnect between mood and voice. In natural frameworks one would expect all homodiegetic narratives to be internally focalized, since we would expect a first-person narrator to have access to his or her own thoughts as opposed to external focalization but not to other people's thoughts as opposed to zero focalization. However, if we assume, as a reading strategy, that mood and voice are disconnected, then we can also assume that the possibility of transgressing the limits of personal voice regarding knowledge, vocabulary, memory, and so forth, is present. Therefore, we

9. I prefer the description homodiegetic narration with zero focalization over descriptions such as first-person narrative with *paralepsis*. Insofar as “*paralepsis*” means “saying too much” in the sense of disclosing knowledge you could not possess, it is only a question of *paralepsis* in *Glamorama* and similar narratives if we still think of the first person as the source of the narration, and this is exactly the view I want to challenge. In this sense, “*paralepsis*” serves to naturalize the understanding in its own way by assuming that “I” must be the speaker, as in natural linguistics, only occasionally displaying information “I” could not have.

should not restrict our interpretations to what would be possible or plausible if mood and voice were connected, if the answer to “who speaks?” and “who sees?” was necessarily the same as in natural narration, and if, accordingly, the character, that is, Victor, had to the source of the narrative.

Without presenting a detailed analysis of the novel,¹⁰ I wish to mention that this general conception has considerable interpretive consequences. The very feature of a voice that does not unambiguously belong to Victor referring to Victor in the first person greatly contributes to the effect of the uncanny and is deeply connected with the theme of the double, it being one of the many elements in the book that cause the narrative’s words—and even the words “I,” “me,” and “my”—to be open for the intrusion of the double. The words “Who the fuck is Moi?” on the first page of the novel thus become the starting signal for a game of hide and seek in which the reader is invited to make a guess: “Who is ‘I’ now referring to?” *Glamorama* is in some respects a classic doppelganger narrative. The protagonist and first-person narrator Victor Ward apparently has a double, and gradually this double takes over his identity. In the end, one Victor—and everything seems to indicate that he is the one we have followed throughout most of the book—dies in Italy while the other Victor, his double, enjoys life in New York. The really odd and unnatural thing about *Glamorama*, however, is that not only does the double overtake the identity of the first-person narrator on the thematic level and in the narrated universe; he even becomes the new referent of the pronoun “I.” He has intruded in Victor’s life and even overtaken his pronoun. This phenomenon does not seem to correspond to any real-world, natural discourse. In my opinion, a natural linguistic conception in which “I” inevitably refers to the speaker would not be able to account for either the many passages with zero focalization or this pronominal takeover. Yet an understanding of the basic events and the storyline in *Glamorama* hinges crucially on understanding these.¹¹

10. For a more developed reading of *Glamorama*, see Nielsen “Telling Doubles.”

11. At the very beginning of the book the reader is warned, in Ellis’s humoristic way, that there will be no unity of plot and no unity of character (that I is another, as Rimbaud put it) in the following two passages:

[. . .] I don’t want a lot of description, just the story, streamlined, no frills, the lowdown: who, what, where, when and don’t leave out why, though I’m getting the distinct expression by the looks on your sorry faces that *why* won’t get answered—now, come on, goddamnit, what’s the *story*?” (5)

“Who the fuck is Moi?” I ask. “I have no fucking idea who this Moi is, baby,” I exclaim. “Because I’m like shvitzing.”

“Moi is Peyton, Victor,” JD says quietly.

“I’m Moi,” Peyton says, nodding. “Moi is, um, French.” (5)

5.2. *Moby-Dick*

Chapter 37 of *Moby-Dick* begins as follows:

The cabin; by the stern windows; Ahab sitting alone, and gazing out.

I leave a white and turbid wake; pale waters, paler cheeks, where'er I sail. The envious billows sidelong swell to whelm my track; let them; but first I pass.

Yonder, by ever-brimming goblet's rim, the warm waves blush like wine. The gold brow plumbs the blue. The diver sun—slow dived from noon—goes down; my soul mounts up! she wearies with her endless hill. Is, then, the crown too heavy that I wear? this Iron Crown of Lombardy. Yet is it bright with many a gem; I the wearer, see not its far flashings; but darkly feel that I wear that, that dazzlingly confounds. 'Tis iron—that I know—not gold. 'Tis split, too—that I feel; the jagged edge galls me so, my brain seems to beat against the solid metal; aye, steel skull, mine; the sort that needs no helmet in the most brain-battering fight!

The character narrator, Ishmael, is not present in the cabin; Ahab is alone, it says. Again, we have a similar range of naturalizing options at our disposal: Has Ishmael gone mad? Is he imagining things? Should we be careful to notice that the passage has to be clearly unreliable and therefore doubt that this is really happening?

A much simpler assumption is that we are invited to read Ahab's lonely thoughts in his cabin as authoritative and as true by stipulation even though the character, Ishmael, could not and does not know about them. This assumption is based on the idea that the invitation here is to conceive of the narrative as inventive in a way that does not **have to** assume that there are natural explanations for this transparency, which, in my view, seems to go well beyond any possible accessibility in the encounter with everyday minds. Tying back to the interpretation of Genette's system as a disconnect between mood and voice, this would mean that the person in the storyworld (let's again call him Ishmael) is relevant to the question of mood ("who sees?") but not to the question of voice¹² and access to thoughts. And surely few readers would attribute to Ishmael the character the gift of mindreading or telepathy. One could even think, conversely, of a homodiegetic narrative with internal focalization in which the protagonist is a mind reader who constantly provides the reader with access to other people's thoughts. In that case, focalization would still be

12. The exception is voice as idiom (cf. Walsh), but this question has to be addressed elsewhere.

internal, not zero, just as a story is not turned into a third-person narrative just because the character narrator refers to someone as “she.”

The naturalizing suggestions all have in common that they explain the passage as if real-world limitations apply and thus work from the assumption that the rules and constraints of real-life narration have to be in place. Even if I believe that these interpretations are misguided, I do not want to claim that they are self-evidently wrong. On the contrary: naturalizing and unnaturalizing options will necessarily stand in an agonistic relationship to each other, so that it is always a matter of competing interpretations. This is not something to regret. Instead it is an opportunity to emphasize that naturalizing readings are options and interpretational choices as opposed to the idea that it is natural or necessary to naturalize.

In *Moby-Dick* one finds sentences and long passages in which the perspective of the “narrator” Ishmael is respected and entire chapters in which it is transgressed to a striking degree. In the chapters in which the breaks with the focalization through Ishmael are very distinct, they nevertheless take place with an ingenuity that causes them not to shock at first reading. Genette himself explicitly mentions *Moby-Dick* as belonging to the category of homodiegetic narratives with zero focalization. Another description of the narrative situation in *Moby-Dick* would be to simply state that Melville leaves Ishmael altogether in the relevant chapters. As Phelan reminded me, this also points to the crucial agency of the author. This reading finds support in the fact that after the transgressive chapters 37 through 40, we return to Ishmael in chapter 41 with the following words of reassurance: “I, Ishmael, was one of that crew.”

No matter which description we prefer, what is important is that *Moby-Dick* shows us that an existential indexical continuity need not exist between the character referred to in the first person and the referring voice in first-person narrative fiction. This, in turn, makes it a particular subcase confirming the more general insight that mood and voice are separate in fictional narration in general.

5.3. *The Great Gatsby*

In a discussion of *The Great Gatsby* in *Narrative as Rhetoric*, Phelan observes that Fitzgerald does not even try to justify how the first-person narrator, Nick Carraway, is able to narrate what he could not possibly know. Phelan shows that Fitzgerald was rightly not concerned about providing any justification and that the reported scene is invested with full authority all the same (108–9). Similarly, in *Living to Tell About It*, Phelan exemplifies:

In chapter 8 of *The Great Gatsby*, Nick Carraway reports the scene at Wilson's garage involving Michaelis and Wilson as if he were a non-character narrator with the privilege of moving between his own focalization and that of Michaelis. What is curious here is not just that Nick narrates a scene at which he was not present but also that Fitzgerald does not try to justify how Nick came to know what Michaelis must have been thinking. (4)

In my opinion, the choice to think of the garage scene in *The Great Gatsby* as authoritatively represented—even though the narrator, Carraway, was not present—is a result of what I call an unnaturalizing interpretation strategy. This is especially because it does not try to justify itself by interpreting the passage as the possible guess of the character narrator. Nor does it claim that he must later have obtained this knowledge. Instead, one of the most important consequences is very nicely captured by Phelan in the following sentence—which in my view acknowledges the disconnect between mood and voice: “When the narratorial functions are operating independently of the character functions, then the narration will be reliable and authoritative” (*Narrative as Rhetoric* 112).

5.4. *Watt*

The fourth and final example is from Samuel Beckett's *Watt*, which seems to me paradigmatic in its inventiveness as well as in its disconnect between person and voice. One example is when we read about Arsene on his way out: “Before leaving he made the following short statement” (37).¹³ This “short statement” is then rendered word by word for some twenty-five pages. Shortly after, we learn about Watt himself, who is our only source for the words rendered for twenty-five pages:

He had realized, to be sure, that Arsene was speaking, and in a sense to him, but something had prevented him, perhaps his fatigue, from paying attention to what was being said [. . .]. (77)

It seems to me quite clear that Watt cannot remember Arsene's words even though they are there in front of our eyes, and it seems equally clear that we are not invited to dismiss the content of the twenty-five pages. As a conse-

13. For a discussion of *Watt* and this and many of its other implausibilities with a different aim, cf. Walsh “Force.”

quence there is an exceptionality thesis here, but not in the sense of exceptionality or distinction as a generic, ontological or categorical trait of fiction, literature, or unnatural narratives, but as an interpretational assumption.

The suggested unnaturalizing readings in the four examples possess different degrees of legitimacy, in the sense that it is more and more debatable which interpretation to choose. The examples are comparable to the situation in “The Cask of Amontillado,” discussed by Phelan in the current volume, in which there is arguably even more room for naturalizing interpretational choices. The general point that goes beyond the specific examples is that the reader is faced with interpretational choices in narratives that can be interpreted as unnatural. In each case the options will be agonistic and negotiable, so it remains a question of interpretation how interpretation and understanding are maximized. This is the very reason why it is fruitful to discuss how and why and when natural and unnatural readings are useful or inappropriate.

The four works discussed here are interpreted as unnatural in the sense that they designate and refer to a character with the first-person pronoun “I” without *emanating* from that character. The narrating “voice” does not emanate from the character but invents and creates a world, including the first person and his knowledge or lack of knowledge. This means that they are interpreted here as structurally similar in that they are all homodiegetic narratives with zero focalization. This form can be interpreted as unusual, strange, or experimental, and yet I would claim that it is paradigmatic for an unnaturalness that we find even in some of the most traditional fictional first-person forms, such as, for example, the classic detective novel. Take, for instance, the following short excerpt from Chandler:

The next morning was bright, clear and sunny. I woke up with a motor-man’s glove in my mouth, drank two cups of coffee and went through the morning papers. [. . .] I was shaking the wrinkles out of my damp suit when the phone rang. (40)

There is no zero focalization here and no transgressions of point of view. This prose is not experimental as regards narrative situation. Yet, what exactly is the relationship between mood and voice; between character and words? It seems equally unlikely that Marlowe should ever write, speak, or think exactly these words during or after the action. The reader would be hard-pressed to imagine that he thinks this to himself using the preterit tense while hungover. To imagine instead that Marlowe, in his old age, would occupy himself with autobiographical writings during quiet nights collides with the picture of

Marlowe provided. Thus, every time it says in the text, for example, “I walked,” “I drank a whiskey,” “I” refers to Marlowe, but Marlowe himself is not saying anything about what he did or drank. This, at least, is my contention. It is unnaturalizing in its assumption that a disconnect between mood and voice exists even here in internal focalization. It is an interpretational choice competing with other choices that might want to connect character and words and to ask—also in this case—about the occasion and purposes of the narration at the character’s rather than the author’s level.

Thus homodiegetic narration with zero focalization is just one of many unnatural narrative situations that Genette’s system allows for (heterodiegetic narration with zero focalization being the conventionalized type and homodiegetic narration with external focalization being the absolute rarity). Below I will indicate how the combinatory logic of focalization can be extended beyond the limits of Genette’s own system to include other unnatural forms and argue that these unnaturalizing options and readings hinge on an understanding of fiction as inventive (which sometimes, but not always, leads to fictional narratives being unnatural). Then I will connect this claim with the theoretical point that it is more theoretically sound to speak of the author than the narrator as the main agent of the telling. Finally, I will present the system that this leads to.

6. Inventing Authors

The peculiarities that allow for unnaturalizing interpretations do not mysteriously or inexplicably arise out of the blue. They result from two connected aspects of what we identified as integral parts of Genette’s insight, and they exist because of the disconnect between mood and voice (and more generally the contingent relation between pronoun and access to perception) and because of the relational nature of focalization theory as a theory about the relation between inventing authors and perceiving and reporting characters.

If we assume that the thoughts of the passengers on the airplane and of Ahab in his cabin come to us as authoritative, and (to a lesser degree) if we believe the events in Wilson’s garage are rendered precisely and that Arsene’s monologue in *Watt* and the dialogue in “The Cask of Amontillado” come to us as sufficiently trustworthy for us to give weight to single words and phrases in an interpretation, then all of these assumptions rely on a deeper assumption that really the source of information in each instance is not the unknowing character but the world-creating author. In what follows I will sketch the kind of model of narrative transmission this assumption leads to.

In a banal and obvious sense, real authors narrate to real readers. They write books telling the stories that the reader reads. The reader likes some authors but not others because he rightly attributes to the authors the storytelling capacity he finds in the books. It is an equally self-evident fact that characters in the books often narrate to each other. Whether there are also narrators in addition to and as something *different from* authors and characters is more debatable for the good reason that they are not obviously present for all to see. A possible objection to this point could be that in first-person narration, the first-person narrator is obviously present, and certainly I would not disagree that Victor, Nick Carraway, and Ishmael all exist in their respective storyworlds. None of these cases, however, force us to think of a narrator as someone distinct from authors and characters, since all of the mentioned persons (insofar as they narrate at all) narrate in their capacity as characters. I will argue that we do not need the concept of narrators as something distinct from authors and characters to explain or understand fictionalized narration. All of the mentioned persons clearly exist as characters, but my contention is that they do not transmit the narrative to a narratee or a reader.

Positing a narrator to help understand a fictional narrative as a report about something that the narrator supposedly knows or sees or experiences and hence as a literal communicative act from the narrator (cf. Walsh, "Person" 39) amounts to assuming that someone, that is, the narrator, is telling a story that is not fictional and that can therefore, on its own level, be interpreted as if the rules of nonfiction were in play. It is, in a sense, a way of conceiving of fiction as framed nonfiction (cf. Walsh, *The Rhetoric of Fictionality* 69). By assuming instead that a narrative is the fictional invention of the author, the reader assumes that she is invited to interpret the story and the world as invented and contingent upon the real world.¹⁴ If we interpret a narrative as fiction, we interpret it as creating (aspects of) a fictional world. This fictional world need not be like the real world. The author's statements, then, are interpreted not as statements about or as referring to the real world or any other preexisting world. Therefore, they are, as a rule, not subject to doubt. A reader who doubts time travel or UFOs in a science fiction novel that mentions the existence of these things is led astray. The author's narration of a fictional narrative is then considered inventional in the sense that it brings a fictional world into existence.

However, the author is not the only narrating agent in most works of fic-

14. Needless to say, readers can make different assumptions about these matters and may simply be wrong, just as we can disagree on the potential invitation to conceive of something as ironic.

tion. Characters often have conversations, thoughts, and ideas, and tell each other stories. As opposed to the author's narration, these thoughts and ideas and stories **do** refer to a storyworld that preexists them, which is the fictional world invented by the author. They may or may not therefore be true. So, in a psychological narrative about a mentally ill character, this character might wrongly assume that UFOs exist in the world he inhabits, and he may tell about this incorrect assumption.

One interpretational problem, then, is that the authoritative, undoubtable narration by the author and the personal, potentially unreliable narration by characters are not always clearly distinguishable. In character narration in the grammatical first person (homodiegetic narration), the narration by the character can be unreliable. And in third-person narration (heterodiegetic narration), the authorial narrative can lend idioms, worldviews, and mistaken thoughts from the characters via free indirect discourse and similar techniques. What we read in such instances is the **reliable** rendering of mistaken thoughts or beliefs. The author is still authoritatively inventing a world in which the reader should trust—including trusting that these mistaken beliefs exist in the world.

My argument against the narrator and for readings that are unnaturalizing in the sense that they resist applying real-world limitations to all narratives is thus not at all a move toward incomprehensiveness, mysteriousness, or noncommunication. Nor is it a move beyond rhetorical interests in the means, ends, purposes, and occasions of narratives. Instead, it is an attempt to reframe these very questions about communicational techniques, purposes, means, and ends and to attribute them to the appropriate agent in order to show the relevance of unnaturalizing readings and in order to not unnecessarily limit interpretations to what is possible in literal communicative acts and in representational models. In an unnatural framework we do not have to assume that there has to be a speaker at the same ontological level as the storyworld.

In effect, my proposals are completely compatible with rhetorical models such as James Phelan's and seem to me to be another step in a move that Phelan has begun toward revising standard models of narrative such as Chatman's (figure 4.2). Phelan rightly remarks that the model calls for a revision because "in Chatman's model, the implied author outsources just about everything to the narrator or to the nonnarrated mimesis" ("Rhetorical Literary Ethics"). Changing the emphasis exactly from narrator to author, Phelan ends his paper with the words "[. . .] it's all about a specific somebody, an implied author, telling to somebody else, an actual audience, for some purposes."

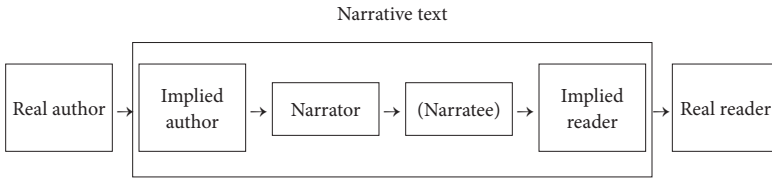


FIGURE 4.2

I would totally agree with this assessment. For me, though, it necessarily leads to the following model:

Real author → Narrative → Real reader

Or, if we want to acknowledge that the author is not the only narrating agent in many works of fiction and to include everything in the model:

Real author → Narrative (in which characters might narrate to other
characters) → Real reader

In this model the author is the main storytelling agent, and character narration is conceived of as a means that an author can choose to employ. Characters are subordinated to authors in the model, and character discourse is not supplemented by author discourse but sometimes vice versa when an author invites the reader to see that what is invented is how a character perceives the universe, not necessarily the universe as it is. Fictional narration lends itself very well to a rhetorical model interested in examining (among other things) the means and ends and techniques by which an author successfully or unsuccessfully realizes or fails to realize his or her intentions. Likewise, the rhetorical model is very apt for describing at a character level why, how, and for what purposes someone is telling someone else that something happened, as Phelan has taught us. However, my argument is that we should not apply the rhetorical model to narrators when we can apply it directly to authors and characters. If we begin to ask about the occasion and purpose of the supposed narrator, we will either be led astray or led back to the author or to a character. This is because more often than not “the narrator” (if it is an extradiegetic narrator)¹⁵ will have no identifiable or even imaginable occasion to tell to some narratee that the events happened. The communicational situation and occasion of

15. Intradiegetic narrators are characters; cf. Walsh, *The Rhetoric of Fictionality* 70–74.

author, on the other hand, is completely logical and well defined: he or she is telling the reader about a fictional universe. Take, for example, the words “Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead [. . .].” The place of these words in communication from author to reader is relatively straightforward. The author does not want the reader to believe that the described situation actually took place at some specific point in the real world but wants the reader to acknowledge that he *invents* a situation in which they do. As for the narrator, the situation is much less clear. The narrator must be conceived of either as someone who does not invent but tells what he or she knows to someone (the narratee) or as someone inventing a story for an audience. The problem with the former conception is that it is often thoroughly contradicted by the form and technique of the narration. The problem with the latter conception is that it amounts to an unnecessary doubling of agents, since the narrator is then only doing exactly what we already know the author is doing.¹⁶

The system I propose here is, I think, simple and consistent in that it always attributes narration to the author while allowing for the possibility of the author embedding narration in her representation and thus representing a character’s narration. Its premise is that the invitation in fiction is to conceive of the narrative as inventive, and thus it does not have to assume about a case such as Melville’s that there are natural explanations for diversions from nonfictionalized real-life frames, nor that it is a matter of accessibility in ways similar to encounters with everyday minds, nor that a character’s or another narrator’s account is supplemented because of the purposes and needs of the author. In this respect it is different from Phelan’s rhetorical approach. For example, Phelan concludes his friendly reading of my interpretation of *Glamorama* with the following remark:

The narration, after all, has so many features of standard character. In the sentence “I hand her a French tulip I happen to be holding,” a character narrator, Victor, assumes that his narratee knows what a French tulip is but does not know that Victor is holding one and does not know what Victor is doing with it. (See James Phelan’s essay in the present volume.)

I would tend to claim, instead, that “In the sentence ‘I hand her a French tulip I happen to be holding,’ the author, Ellis, assumes that the reader knows what a French tulip is but does not know that Victor is holding one and does

16. Unreliable narration in the first person is not really an exception to this, since we do not have to say that the author or the character wants something different from the narrator, but only that our interpretation of the narration as unreliable amounts to assuming that the character’s narrative is an unreliable source for the facts of the narrated world.

not know what Victor is doing with it.” The author refers to Victor with the pronoun “I” even when he narrates to the reader words that Victor never narrates to anyone. The similarity between Phelan’s approach and mine is that they both have the immediate consequence for interpretation that we are allowed to trust narration that could not possibly be reliable real-world narration. The difference is that Phelan attributes the fictional discourse to a narrator whether or not this narrator is a character narrator and then assumes that narrator functions can, in turn, be supplemented by disclosure functions. Conversely, I attribute fictional discourse to the author and say that disclosure functions can, in turn, be supplemented by narrator functions in the sense that idioms, purposes, techniques, and so forth, that belong to one or more characters can influence the narration, as is the case in *Moby-Dick* when the idioms and thoughts of Ishmael, Ahab, and Starbuck are represented. What is unnatural and experimental in *Moby-Dick*, then, is not the character Ishmael, which would amount to creating an unnatural storyworld. The character is fairly natural. The experiment is to foreground the disconnection between voice and person.

Let me reiterate that this also goes to show that not all fiction is unnatural. Far from it, because only in some works of fiction will the author create temporalities, storyworlds or mind representations that would be impossible in the real world, and only in some works of fiction will anything be gained from assuming that the reliability of the narration should be judged by standards that are different from real-world narration (as is the case if we assume that what could not be a reliable report by a character narrator is an authoritative invention by the author), since an author will very often choose “to accept all the constraints and work scrupulously within them.”¹⁷

As argued above, the real force of the combinatory logic behind Genette’s system is not between characters inside fiction and narrators in- or outside, mentioned or not (homodiegetic and heterodiegetic). In fact, these two axes are incompatible. Instead, it is between characters always inside and authors always outside choosing the reader’s restriction of access to these characters’ minds and points of view. So far we have examined unnatural combinations within the system, but the reformulation allows us—as a final perspective—to extend the scope of possible combinations: The author chooses two things: (1) pronoun (or pronouns), and (2) restriction of access to thoughts (basically and typically all, one, or none). Only some of the resulting possible variants will look like real-life narratives—that is, heterodiegetic narration with external focalization and homodiegetic narration with internal focalization.

17. Cf. Phelan in the current volume.

But notice that in addition to Genette's dichotomy between homo- and heterodiegetic narration, the author can choose all kinds of pronouns to refer to characters. In principle as well as in reality, nothing rules out the choice of "odd" pronouns such as "we," "they," and "you," and each of these is, in turn, combinable with zero, internal, or external focalization.¹⁸ Natural and unnatural readings will have different views on these narrative possibilities. From an unnatural point of view, these forms, like the works above, cue the reader to interpret in ways that differ from the interpretation of real-world acts of narration and of conversational storytelling. For example, you-narration is a comparatively odd form that lends itself well to unnatural interpretations. Rolf Reitan recently provided a thorough review of the field ("Second Person"), and in *Unnatural Voices* (2006), Brian Richardson makes a comprehensive list of second-person narratives, defining and delimiting the field so well that it does not include any narrative employing the second-person pronoun, since this pronoun is also used in several standard situations in which an author unambiguously addresses his reader, and in apostrophes. Richardson aptly writes, "We may define second person narrative as any narration other than an apostrophe that designates its protagonist by a second person pronoun" (19).

Notice that Richardson does not mention *addressing* the protagonist. He continues: "It is important to note that second person narration is an artificial mode that does not normally occur in natural narrative [. . .]" (19). I think Richardson is right, but would like to add a few words on why that is. We talk about and to each other using "you" all the time. Is it not true that second-person narratives are the most natural things in the world? To answer this, we have to remember, first, that using the "you" as a disguised form of "I" or "everybody,"¹⁹ as in "you just get so mad in these kind of situations, don't you?" does not count as you-narration since it does not specifically designate the protagonist but rather designates the speaker as part of an imagined community. Second, the curious thing about most fictional second-person narratives (with Butor's *La modification* as a prominent and classical example) is that although the protagonist is *designated* by "you" throughout these narratives, nothing at all suggests that he/she feels in any way addressed. He is not hearing voices, does not feel he is being spoken to, and does not respond to the narrative.²⁰ In short: nothing except the very use of the second-person pro-

18. For an impressive and intriguing analysis of these kinds of narratives, see Brian Richardson in *Unnatural Voices*.

19. This is sometimes referred to as the "generalized you."

20. At least this is the case in what Richardson calls standard cases and what Reitan shows to be more or less the only "real fictional, second person" narratives. For the point I am making here it is not important whether it holds true for some or all fictional, second-person narratives.

noun suggests that he is being addressed.²¹ So if in natural linguistics the first-person pronoun designates “the speaker,” the third person “the one spoken about,” and the second person “the one spoken to,” then it seems that in many fictional second-person narratives the pronoun loses this functionality. The protagonist is referred to and designated, but not addressed, by the second-person pronoun. He is just as ignorant of being the center of a narrative as are the protagonists in third-person narratives. Outside fiction, then—in, say, conversational narratives—the referent of “you” is inevitably addressed, and obviously not created by the pronoun. In most fictional second-person narratives, the referent of “you” is inevitably created and obviously not addressed by the pronoun. Looping back to first-person narratives, my argument above suggests that this line of reasoning can even be extended to first-person narratives in which “I” often does not refer to “the speaker” and in which, accordingly, even the first-person protagonist (Marlowe, Victor, etc.) may well be just as ignorant as third-person characters about being the center of a narrative.

From an unnatural point of view, we need not impose real-world necessities on all fictional narratives. We need not put all narratives into communicational models based on real-life storytelling situations. Common to the interpretations of the mentioned first-person and second-person narratives is that they read the stories as transgressing real-world communicational situations. Completely unlike what is possible in standard interpretations of “natural narratives,” the reader can assume about some unnatural first-person narratives that the protagonist is designated by the pronoun “I” but not enunciating it, and about some unnatural second-person narratives that the protagonist is designated by the pronoun “you” but not addressed by it. By doing this the reader effectively (1) attributes narration to the author, and (2) reads it as intentional and (3) as transgressing linguistic understandings of real-world language. One consequence is that the reader can interpret mind representations as authoritatively rendered in a way that distinguishes them from any representation of real minds and that foregrounds the difference between invented and reported storyworlds and minds.

What connects the *unconventional* and unnatural first-person and second-person narratives mentioned in this essay with *conventional*, unnatural third-person with zero focalization is that the relation between inventing authors and perceiving and reporting characters allows the reader to make interpretational choices that are unnaturalizing in the sense that she can trust as authoritative and reliable what would in real life be impossible, implausible, or, at the very least, subject to doubt.

21. Cf. Reitan: “Summing up: [. . .] Only category C [*Narrative you referring to protagonist, but not used as address*] covers proper second person narratives [. . .]” (153).

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