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The Return of the Omniscient Narrator

Paul Dawson

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CHAPTER 6

Voice and Free Indirect Discourse in Contemporary Omniscient Narration

To read a sentence as free indirect discourse, we must indeed use our ingenuity. We must infer who is quoted and which words of the sentence are quotation.

—Ann Waldron Neumann,

“Characterization and Comment in *Pride and Prejudice*” 390

IN CHAPTERS 2–5, I focused on the ways in which contemporary omniscient narrators draw attention to the narrating instance to rhetorically perform their narrative authority: mobilizing the function of narration via overt commentary and direct addresses to the reader; displaying the proleptic knowledge of history enabled by the spatio-temporal distance of the narrator from the storyworld; asserting their stylistic presence through metaphorical excess and linguistic control over characters’ thoughts; and offering synoptic wisdom through the display of polymathic knowledge in which nonliterary paradigms of knowledge (history, journalism, science) compete with the narrator’s conventional insight into the psychological interior of characters to explain “human nature.” As discussed in previous chapters, reliable knowledge of characters’ interior lives has typically been seen as the basis of narrative authority. In this chapter I investigate how contemporary omniscient narrators perform their “privileged” access to the consciousness of characters and the concept of the self that emerges from the formal techniques employed. If we accept that a general sensibility of fiction after postmodernism is its attempt to explore the problem

of character as a knowable human self, distinct from a postmodern critique of subjectivity embedded in the realist concept of character, then the representation of characters' psychological interior, of their consciousness, becomes a key area of investigation. Contemporary omniscient narrators explore this problem of character, I will argue, through a self-reflexive manipulation of existing conventions of thought representation.

I will begin by quoting a lengthy passage from chapter 22 of Walter Scott's 1822 novel, *The Fortunes of Nigel*:

At length his meditations arranged themselves in the following soliloquy—by which expression I beg leave to observe once for all, that I do not mean that Nigel literally said aloud with his bodily organs, the words which follow in inverted commas, (while pacing the room by himself,) but that I myself choose to present to my dearest reader the picture of my hero's mind, his reflections and resolutions, in the form of a speech, rather than in that of a narrative. In other words, I have put his thoughts into language; and this I conceive to be the purpose of the soliloquy upon the stage as well as in the closet, being at once the most natural, and perhaps the only way of communicating to the spectator what is supposed to be passing in the bosom of the scenic personage. . . . In narrative, no doubt, the writer has the alternative of telling that his personages thought so and so, inferred thus and thus, and arrived at such and such a conclusion; but the soliloquy is a more concise and spirited mode of communicating the same information; and therefore thus communed, or thus might have communed, the Lord of Glenvarloch with his own mind. (295–96)

In this passage Walter Scott's omniscient narrator shares with readers the choice between two modes of representing consciousness: reporting a character's thoughts through narratorial summary or quoting them in the form of a soliloquy. What this self-reflexive comment highlights is the artificial and hypothetical nature of translating thoughts into speech: "thus communed, or thus might have communed, the Lord of Glenvarloch with his own mind." Histories of the novel tell us that authors from Jane Austen onwards pioneered ways of combining the quotation of inner thoughts with the voice of the narrator in the grammatical form of free indirect discourse (FID), and trace the development of this technique from ironic narratorial distance in the nineteenth century to empathetic figural closeness in the twentieth. As Casey Finch and Peter Bowen claim, "the development in Austen's hands of free indirect style marks a crucial

moment in the history of novelistic technique in which narrative authority is seemingly elided, ostensibly giving way to what Flaubert called a transparent style in which the author is ‘everywhere felt, but never seen’” (3). In describing this elision of narrative authority as a key feature of the move away from the intrusive presence of the omniscient narrator in Victorian fiction to the effaced presence of the narrator in modernist fiction, these histories tend to present FID as a means of liberating character consciousness from that of their creator. “Imagine FID,” writes Kathy Mezei, “as an expression of the character’s bid for freedom from the controlling narrator” (68).

In *The Dual Voice*, one of the earliest comprehensive studies of FID in the novel, Roy Pascal takes up where Percy Lubbock left off, providing an historical account of the progression from indirect to direct means of representing consciousness, clearly echoing Lubbock in his account of Flaubert’s *Madam Bovary* as the historical touchstone. According to Pascal:

Flaubert wanted to hide the very function of story-telling, as it were, to allow the story to tell and interpret itself, as far as this was possible; hence the narrator should, as he put it, “transport himself into his characters.” Thus free indirect speech is not an occasional device, nor something employed for a specific situation or person; it is a major instrument for achieving the Flaubertian type of novel. (98)

Pascal is thus extending Lubbock’s preoccupation with point of view and the dramatization of consciousness to demonstrate, in greater analytic detail, how the aesthetic doctrine of impersonality is achieved by authors. For Pascal, what he calls free indirect speech “belongs essentially to the third-person novel in which the narrator, depersonalised and impossible to name, has the right to enter into every mind and every closet” (100). From Pascal’s “dual voice” to Bakhtin’s “double-voiced” language to Ann Banfield’s “unspeakable sentences,” the historical development of FID has been posited as a challenge to the singular voice of omniscient narration. Here the paradox of presence and absence in theories of literary omniscience is dramatized as a kind of struggle between narrator and character. On the one hand, the effacement of narratorial presence is figured as a rejection of authorial omniscience; on the other hand, the more an author’s presence is given over to the perspective and consciousness of characters, and the urge to comment is resisted, the more the key feature of access to consciousness comes to the fore. In this chapter I will address how the critical reception of contemporary omniscience is framed

by this scholarship on FID. In pointing out the limitations of this critical reception, I want to suggest the need to reconsider some of the ways in which we theorize the relation between narratorial report and character thought.

Grammatical Transformation and the Method of Attribution

FID is generally understood as a phenomenon of speech and thought representation which appears to merge the perspective of both narrator and character. Much of the scholarly debate over FID has been generated by different methodological approaches derived from narrative theory, stylistics and linguistics, governed by a taxonomic impulse which focuses on how this phenomenon is to be identified and defined. Debate centers on the range of possible indices, from the purely grammatical to the more interpretive semantic and contextual, with difficulties arising from attempts to reconcile two methods of study: the linguistic identification of individual sentences which are grammatically discrete from indirect and direct discourse; and the literary-critical analysis of techniques of thought representation along a continuum from diegesis to mimesis. Moreover, FID gains its dynamism as a literary technique and as an object of study by virtue of being placed within a tripartite model of representing consciousness: as a mediating technique between a narrator's report of mental activity on the one hand, and a direct quotation of a character's thought on the other.

FID is traditionally defined as a syntactic unit in which a character's "original" utterance or thought has undergone a pronominal and tense shift to the grammar of the narrative discourse, typically from first to third person, and present to past tense, and is marked by an absence of tag clauses or reporting verbs. The central method of analyzing FID is one of linguistic attribution, which functions by parsing sentences of thought representation and assigning a range of stylistic features to the subjectivity of the narrator or the character. Anne Waldron Neumann highlights the methodological difficulties that emerge from the hesitancy of attribution that the ambiguity of FID fosters: "Because free indirect discourse lacks attribution, how do we recognize it as possibly reported discourse? That is, how does a novelist foreground the subjective language and viewpoint of a particular character against the usually more objective narratorial background?" (367). The more salient problem arises, I suggest, when scholarship on FID is put in the service of interpretive criticism, where

aesthetic and ethical prejudices latent in novelistic theory are operationalized via the method of attribution.

This method is founded on the traditional idea of FID as the transformation of a character's utterance into the grammar of its narrative report. In her classic study, *Transparent Minds*, Dorrit Cohn describes FID, or what she calls "narrated monologue" as a "transformation of figural thought-language into the narrative language of third-person fiction" and suggests that "a simple transposition of grammatical person and tense will 'translate' a narrated into an interior monologue" (100). For Cohn, this translation is a grammatical "litmus test" for confirming the attribution of "a narrative sentence to a character's, rather than to a narrator's, mental domain" (101). Many scholars have rejected the derivational properties of FID which underlie this theory because in fiction there is no "original" utterance which can be recovered as a measure of reportorial fidelity: we have only the narrator's representation of a fictional act, in the same way that the fictional storyworld is constructed from the narrative discourse.

Despite this criticism, it is recognized that the hypothetical postulation of a character's direct thought derived from its narrative report is a useful analytic tool, precisely because such a possibility is an essential element of the mimetic illusion of fiction, and an intuitive cognitive process of readers. So those who reject what is called the "representational fallacy" or "direct discourse fallacy" often recuperate the transformational properties of FID via the notion of naturalization (McHale, "Free Indirect Discourse"; Sternberg, *Expositional Modes*; Fludernik, *Fictions of Language*). The argument here is that expressive elements may not be directly attributable to an original utterance, but we can *surmise* that a character would have used such language were they called upon to articulate their thoughts. Alan Palmer describes this as the hypothetical argument:

Although the discourse may appear to present the "actual" words of inner speech, it is in fact presenting a reconstruction by the narrator that is hypothetically based on what characters would have said that they were thinking, had they been asked; and although the discourse may appear to present an "actual" episode of inner speech, it is really presenting a summary of several possible such episodes. (71)

The phrasing of this passage implies the narrator hypothetically reconstructs a character's thought, although scholarship has emphasized the interpretive role of readers in identifying FID. Monika Fludernik's monumental study of FID in *The Fictions of Language and the Languages of*

Fiction provides a good example of this approach, offering a linguistically founded “anti-mimetic model of speech and thought representation in language” (398), and providing an exhaustive list of potential indices, before invoking cognitive theory to lend theoretical weight to the naturalizing tendencies of readers.

In other words, the rejection of a derivational approach to defining FID has had little effect on the analytic practice of attribution. Now, the method of attribution is essential to the study of FID—in the sense that a method constructs its own object of study. The problem resides in what signals of subjectivity are privileged by this method. Besides pronominal and temporal shifts, as well as deictic adverbials which establish the “here” and “now” of a character’s subjective center of perception, the most prominently analyzed indices of FID tend to be expressive features, especially idiomatic markers of a character’s “voice” in the narration. Identifying examples of FID, then, often relies as much upon psychologizing assumptions about the lexical range and intellectual capacities of characters (would a character use this word, or think this way?), and upon stylistic assumptions about narratorial diction (would a narrator, or author, use such language?) as it does upon linguistic evidence. For instance, in analyzing a passage from Flannery O’Connor’s “Good Country People,” Lucy Ferriss writes:

The hint is slight, but unmistakable. *Though she was thirty-two years old and highly educated.* Mrs. Hopewell would never use this expression, nor would Mrs. Freeman. Nor is the description neutral; it passes a judgment on Mrs. Hopewell for which the story has provided scant evidence. Such judgment comes—and has to come—from Joy herself. (182)

Here, the narratological analysis of FID is inseparable from character evaluation. FID is not just recognized by its context, but by the reader’s subjective attribution. I myself can easily imagine both Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman, or the author, using such an expression.

FID, Voice, and Focalization

“By leaving the relationship between words and thoughts latent,” Dorrit Cohn argues, “the narrated monologue casts a peculiarly penumbral light on the figural consciousness, suspending it on the threshold of verbalization in a manner that cannot be achieved by direct quotation”

(*Transparent Minds* 103). Cohn thus recognizes FID as the evocation of an un verbalized consciousness. Two pages later, however, she says that narrated monologue imitates “the language a character uses when he talks to himself” and thus superimposes the two “voices” of narrator and character (105). This “voice” is thus largely identified by idiomatic attribution, backed up by Cohn’s claim that narrated monologue “may be most succinctly defined as the technique for rendering a character’s thought in his own idiom while maintaining the third-person reference and the basic tense of narration” (100). The emphasis on the presence of a character’s idiom as a key textual marker of FID, even in its hypothetical formulation, can be found in this well-known definition by Anne Waldron Neumann: “that mode of indirectly reported speech or thought which quotes what we feel could be at least some of the *words* of a character’s actual utterances or thought, but which offers those words interwoven with the narrator’s language” (366, my emphasis).

The privileged method of lexical attribution means that FID is often taken to be an instance of, or even synonymous with, the broader phenomenon of stylistic contagion, or what Hugh Kenner, in *Joyce’s Voices*, dubbed the Uncle Charles Principle, where any word in the narrative discourse which seems to “belong” to a character’s lexicon can be taken as an example of a character’s voice “infecting” the more formal or sophisticated language of the narrator. For instance, in a recent study of narrative authority in Jane Austen’s *Emma*, Daniel Gunn argues: “But why, in a narrative situation such as Austen’s, should such ‘coloured’ or ‘infected’ passages be seen as a phenomenon distinct from FID. I would propose that, in Austen at least, what happens in ‘stylistic contagion’ is the same thing that happens in FID” (37). The conflation of FID and stylistic contagion makes sense in literary critical analysis which is less concerned with identifying discrete syntactic units of FID than with analyzing overall passages of thought representation in terms of their relative closeness to a character’s consciousness. However, this is part of the problem. There is a difference between a narrator imitating figural subjectivity by deploying language associated with a character, and a narrator yielding deictically to a character’s perspective through a range of strategies for which characterological idiom is but one indice.¹ It is a difference recognized by the distinction between voice and focalization.

The method of attribution in the study of FID, as I pointed out earlier, is typically a means of answering questions such as: Whose language is this? Whose voice is this? and Who’s speaking here? In the phraseological formulation of these questions we can see that the difficulties of

theorizing FID are apparent precisely in its capacity to manifest the analytic interdependence of voice and focalization. However, there is also a tendency to collapse the distinction between the two categories and thus return to the “regrettable confusion” between who sees and who speaks which Genette set out to remedy. This confusion can be found in Pascal’s book, which is a study of point of view in the Anglo-American tradition, of the relative presence of narratorial subjectivity in the representation of a character’s perspective. According to Pascal, FID can operate in passages of description which record a scene entirely through a character’s impression and subjective response to her environment. “Perhaps it is stretching the concept of free indirect speech too far to apply it to such writing?” he asks, before concluding that the “essence of the free indirect form” is the “reproduction of the inner processes of the character, expressed in the same syntactical form as objective narrative and embedded firmly in the narratorial account, but evoking the vivacity, the tone and gesture, of the character” (108). On this basis he describes the technique of FID as the “dual voice” of narrator and character, even though the character cannot be said to be “speaking” in any meaningful way.

When employed to represent thought, I suggest, FID is primarily a question of focalization, what Genette calls the regulation of narrative information, dictated by degrees of restriction on a narrator’s reporting of character’s thoughts. Genette’s brief discussion of FID (what he calls transposed narration) is included in his chapter on mood, thus establishing its relationship to focalization. The presence of idiom or other expressive features attributable to a character may indicate a “deictic shift” which is a feature of focalization, but it does not alter the narrating instance, the generating instance of the narrative. The relationship of FID to other modes of thought representation is more properly a question of distance. However, most scholarship on the phenomenon of FID departs from Genette in categorizing this phenomenon as a feature of voice.

Part of the confusion in the study of FID, then, stems from the combination of several different concepts of voice, all designed to demonstrate the structural dispersal of the narrating instance and the stylistic fragmentation of authorial voice. In these approaches, narratives become populated with a variety of voices, from the stylistic infections of characterological idiom to the polyphonic clashing of living social languages in a dialogic novel. Or, in its ultimate manifestation, FID effects the modernist ideal of impersonality in the negation of any narrator, as in Ann Banfield’s notorious formulation of the unspeakable sentence: “Es with a third person SELF cannot also contain a SPEAKER” (111). Banfield’s

work is the extreme version of scholarship on the empathic or neutral relation of narrator to characters, while accounts of stylistic contagion and dialogism emphasize the ironic relation between narratorial and other “voices.”

Whether FID is understood as the grammatical transformation of a direct thought, or the hypothetical postulation of what a character might have said were they called upon to articulate their thoughts, it rests conceptually upon the potential of a character to take on the act of narration and speak for him or herself. As a result the study of FID often tends to elide the terminological difference between “language” and “voice.” So when the method of linguistic attribution is described in terms of voice we see a tendency to equate the presence of *language* which is indicative of a character’s subjectivity with a *speaking position* for that character within the narrative.

As an example of how this works in interpretations of contemporary fiction, I refer again to Timothy Aubry’s article on the “politics of interiority” in contemporary American middlebrow fiction, which claims that “most third-person narrators, at least within American mainstream literary fiction, report the action of the novel almost entirely from the standpoint of the character or characters through free indirect discourse” (85). Aubry’s analysis is thus predicated on a standard assumption about the natural relationship between FID and focalization. His case study is Anita Shreve’s Oprah Book Club selected novel, *The Pilot’s Wife*. This novel, Aubry writes,

is written entirely in free indirect discourse, exclusively from Kathryn’s perspective, without a single statement of authorial wisdom or entry into another character’s consciousness. And it is all written in Kathryn’s voice. Moreover, in certain moments, Kathryn actively assumes the narrator’s function. (90)

Here is the passage which Aubry provides as evidence:

The camera slid back to the old man and moved in close to his face. He looked shocky around the eyes, and his mouth was hanging open, as though it was hard for him to breathe. Kathryn watched him on the television, and she thought: That is what I look like now. Gray in the face. The eyes staring out at something that isn’t even there. The mouth loose like that of a hooked fish. (11)

This quotation only demonstrates the hyperbole of Aubry's claim that the novel is written "entirely" in FID. It may be a passage of internally focalized narration, and perhaps the second sentence could be described as narrated perception, but, beyond the word "shocky" potentially indicating stylistic contagion, there is no evidence of FID. "Kathryn watched him on the television" is obviously narratorial report. Furthermore, the last four sentences, supposedly evidence that the character Kathryn has assumed the narrator's function, are clearly lines of direct discourse or quoted monologue. Aubry's assertion is that the "style Kathryn deploys in her self-description is identical to the overall style of the book" (90). Here we have the idea of stylistic contagion, described by Hugh Kenner as "the normally neutral narrative vocabulary pervaded by little clouds of idioms which a character might use if he were managing the narrative" (17) extended so far as to be meaningless, because if the novel is all written in Kathryn's voice there is no narrative voice to infect.

The equation of language with voice has led many critics to champion stylistic contagion or the dual voice or double-voiced language as a liberation of the character from the governing ideology of authorial discourse. Or if not a liberation, a site of conflict between textual agents, as if characters had some kind of cognizance and control over their modes of representation. In a book chapter titled "Who is Speaking Here? Free Indirect Discourse, Gender, and Authority in *Emma*, *Howard's End*, and *Mrs. Dalloway*," Kathy Mezei claims that in these three novels "a struggle is being waged between narrators and character-focalizers for control of the word, the text, and the reader's sympathy" (66) and "[t]he site for this textual battle between author, narrator, and character-focalizer and between fixed and fluctuating gender roles is the narrative device 'free indirect discourse'" (67).

Hence the practice of linguistic attribution is used not just to identify the perspectival orientation of the narrative, but to reconstruct a character's voice from the narrative discourse, and this voice becomes both mimetically and politically representative of the character's autonomy. FID is thus one of the key elements in what Dorothy J. Hale calls the "aesthetics of alterity" which informs and unites novelistic theory from James to Bakhtin. Hale describes this strain of theory as social formalism, a belief in the capacity of novelistic form to instantiate social relations which generate a sympathy for otherness.² Hale points out that "Pascal's brief overview of the discovery and early theorization of FID shows how, from the outset, this syntactical form was associated with an all-consuming appre-

ciation of alterity” (92), before demonstrating that “Pascal’s own account of ‘dual voice’ is primarily interested in a single question: has an author been able to represent a character in his own terms?” (93). This sort of ethical investment in recuperating the representative voice of a character’s alterity is at the heart of theoretical discussions of FID.

Free Indirect Discourse and the Interpretive Frame of “Alterity”

From a pragmatic and cognitive perspective, Monika Fludernik writes: “What makes speech and thought representation recognizable as such, then, is its interpretability as an evocation of linguistic or mental alterity within the current discourse” (“Linguistic Illusion” 108). From a Bakhtinian perspective, Richard Aczel claims “in the narrative representation of speech and thought, voice is best identified contextually as an alterity effect” (494). Although differing in their methods, and their stance on the dual voice thesis, both Fludernik and Aczel define alterity as the projection of a subjective textual presence different from that animating the narrating instance. This embeds in formal terms the philosophical concept of alterity as a self defined in relation to its other, providing the methodological basis for ethical evaluation in terms of the aesthetics of alterity. Furthermore, the emphasis on context, particularly in Fludernik’s formulation, shows how FID is as much a heuristic strategy as it is an analytic category, an interpretive frame which informs the search for alterity and the method of attribution as an evaluative practice: the extent to which a character is given a “voice” by the narrator.

In his discussion of some of the “theoretical problems arising from free indirect speech,” Pascal writes:

The first difficulty arises from the interweaving of FIS and narratorial description. Once FIS has become of frequent incidence in a novel, once we have become used to descriptions that are projections from the viewpoint of a character, we tend to expect it everywhere, and may find it confusing if the objective, narratorial mode is used instead. This is especially likely when few and unobtrusive indicators accompany FIS passages. (103)

Here Pascal is claiming that the use of FID establishes a cognitive frame of reception—an invitation to identify a passage of writing as generated

by the perspective of a character—which is ruptured if the passage displays a narratorial style too sophisticated for the character or for that character’s mental state at a particular moment. Pascal describes this as a kind of “usurpation” of a character’s language and perspective (110). This usurpation is not simply narratorial presence, he is careful to explain, for the constant presence of the narrator in passages of FID is necessary to the “dual voice” effect of irony or empathy. Usurpation occurs when an author’s concern with style, rather than the perspective of the character, dictates the language of narration. And although he discusses narratorial usurpation as a theoretical problem, he displays an evaluative bias in also describing it as a “stylistic flaw” (108) because “the lure of fine writing . . . may infect the passages in FIS themselves” (119). Here we see stylistic contagion is lauded when a narrator’s style is infected by the idiom of the character, but when a focalized passage of FID is infected by narratorial language it becomes inartistic, intrusive, and dictatorial. My point is that scholarship on FID retains this evaluative bias by establishing the cognitive frame of alterity as a default effect and the motive for the practice of attribution, and by mobilizing the historical narrative of novelistic development in support of this frame.

Here we see the metatheoretical explanatory value of Fludernik’s pragmatic account of FID as an interpretative strategy of readers made possible by a set of syntactic conditions. Fludernik writes:

According to my own model, FID can be defined by means of the conjunction of an interpretative intervention on the part of the textual recipient, who posits a discourse alterity (that is, a notional discourse SELF different from that of the reportative SELF of the current narrator-speaker), with a minimal set of syntactic features, which constitute a sort of necessary condition, a mold that has to be fitted. (“Linguistic Illusion” 95)

The two minimal syntactic conditions, as I understand them, are the capacity for a sentence to be contextualized by anaphoric reference to a previous instance of character perspective (which could include the back shifting of tense), and the traditional absence of tag clauses or reporting verbs.

If we accept the claim that FID is an interpretive act, a decision on the part of the reader to attribute a statement to a character, then we can see FID not simply as a choice which individual readers make, but a kind of overarching critical paradigm fostered by the modernist aesthetic with its emphasis on impersonality and the erasure of narratorial presence, a paradigm in which our default position is to assume the existence of FID

whenever Fludernik's minimal syntactic conditions occur. "If a passage contextually signifies discourse alterity," Fludernik argues, "and if it fits the minimal requirements for a prototypical FID form, then—in a flexible account of forms of speech and thought representation—one can categorize it as FID" (111). The question is: why would one want to? My argument is that when omniscient narrators in contemporary fiction provide access to the consciousness of a character through internal focalization, critics look for indices of FID, not necessarily because it is a feature of the work, but because they are deploying the interpretive frame of alterity. In other words, since the "discovery" of FID by scholars such as Charles Bally in the early twentieth century, and the linking of this discovery to theories of point of view, we now search for FID *instead* of other modes of thought representation. As Alan Palmer claims, in a critique of the verbal bias of the speech category approach which leads to a privileging of consciousness as inner speech: "I would also dispute the weighting given to free indirect thought and would suggest that it can only be arrived at by classifying a good deal of coloured thought report as free indirect thought" (62). And when FID is invoked in textual analysis, it is with the aim of constructing alterity as an aesthetic and ethical ideal, thus condemning writing which complicates this interpretative intervention.

I now turn to ways in which the interpretive frame of FID as an alterity effect operationalizes the historical, aesthetic, and ethical prejudices of modernist criticism in the reception of contemporary fiction, specifically via the method of linguistic attribution. A good example can be found in a 2004 article by Brian Phillips, called "Character in Contemporary Fiction." In this essay Phillips argues that contemporary prose style has inherited from Hemingway an impulse for plainness and efficiency which has become stale, not so much at the level of syntax, but in terms of the capacity to create character. He goes on to claim that Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections*, and Don DeLillo's *Underworld* are all examples of books where characters have been buried by the style of contemporary fiction. Phillips claims that the characters in *The Corrections*, for instance, often "speak and think like Franzen, whose management of indirect discourse is compromised by his enthusiasm for narratorial incursion, and who places too much faith in the comedic and analytical properties of his crude interruptions" (640). As evidence, he cites this passage of thought representation in the novel:

With a pounding heart Enid made her way to the bow of the "B" Deck. After the nightmare of the previous day and nights she again had a con-

crete thing to look forward to; and how sweet the optimism of the person carrying a newly scored drug that she believed would change her head; how universal the craving to escape the givens of the self. No exertion more strenuous than raising hand to mouth, no act more violent than swallowing, no religious feeling, no faith in anything more mystical than cause and effect was required to experience a pill's transformative blessings. *She couldn't wait to take it.* (324)

Phillips then employs the analytic method of attribution to ask: "Whose thoughts are these? They are certainly not Enid's" (640). And by virtue of asking these questions, he must conclude that Franzen's style is incapable of fully rendering Enid's character. He "adjourns to analysis and the ease of his own vocabulary. And so Enid disappears. . . . Her words are the wrong words, because they are not hers" (640). Hence the governing method of FID analysis—the attribution of language to either narrator or character according to the psychological measure of plausibility, the mimetic measure of verisimilitude, and the aesthetic measure of authorial style—underpins an interpretive frame animated by ethical evaluation of the relative "alterity" of the character. Phillips isolates the phrase "givens of the self" for censure on the grounds that it is incompatible with language we might expect from Enid. Yet it is clear that the passage quoted is not FID, besides the last italicized line; it is psychonarration or thought report. Indeed, the phrase resonates with one used earlier to describe the mental state of her husband, Alfred: "The dream of radical transformation: of one day waking up and finding himself a wholly different (more confident, more serene) kind of person, of escaping that prison of the given, of feeling divinely capable" (272).

One of the most significant features of contemporary fiction in the wake of postmodern experimentation, as I have pointed out, is the trend away from the impersonality of limited third-person narration, and toward an aesthetic of maximalism in which the presence of the narrator is constantly foregrounded. I turn again to the work of James Wood, who has relentlessly excoriated contemporary fiction for its stylistic excesses. Wood codified his critical principles in his 2008 book, *How Fiction Works*, which is significant for being the modern successor to Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction*. Wood follows Lubbock in his commitment to modernist psychological realism, the importance of "point of view" as the means to show rather than tell, and in his reliance on Henry James as his aesthetic touchstone. However, whereas Lubbock and others such as Joseph Warren Beach historicized modernist fiction as a move toward

dramatization which eradicated the intrusive authorial presence of earlier omniscient narration, Wood rails against postmodern fiction as the debasement of these achievements. His critique of authorial presence as a rupturing of verisimilitude rests less on overt evaluative commentary than on “annoyingly authorial” (23) style resulting from technical mishandling of FID.

What is important to note is that Wood draws upon many of the established principles of FID to underpin his evaluative denunciation of what he calls “the contemporary writing project” (27): an authorial style committed to evoking the “debased language” of today’s media-saturated world found in writers such as DeLillo and Wallace. First, if Lubbock described the development of novelistic method as an ongoing refinement of point of view, Wood notes that “the history of the novel can be told as the development of free indirect style” (58). Modernist impersonality, achieved by the development of FID, thus becomes the aesthetic standard by which to judge subsequent experiments in writing. Secondly, Wood upholds the “transformational” theory of FID, such as when, in a discussion of Nabokov, he writes: “As usual, if we turn it into first-person speech, we can hear the way in which the word ‘thing’ belongs to Pnin and wants to be spoken” (22). This quote, which concerns a passage of narrated perception, also demonstrates the third principle: a willing conflation of thought with speech, and hence indicative of a “verbal bias” which allows the equation of character language with a character’s “voice.” Fourthly, Wood extends the category of FID beyond its grammatical limits and privileges lexical features of expressivity when he claims: “The Uncle Charles principle is just an edition of free indirect style” (17). Fifthly, all of these principles are brought into play by the key methodological tool of linguistic attribution. In fact, Wood’s most common critical strategy is to scour passages of thought representation and weed out for condemnation any expressive elements that indicate intrusive authorial style. Often Wood is in fact criticizing novelists for employing psychonarration or thought report because they are unable to manage the empathetic subtleties necessitated by FID.

In condemning the intrusive features of authorial style, Wood is ultimately betraying an ethical judgment about how characters *should* be represented in fiction. In his review of Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*, he writes: “And what of that phrase, ‘he was going to beat but he wasn’t going to eat’? ‘Beat’ is not Samad’s word; he would never use it. It is Smith’s word, and in using it she not only speaks over her character, she reduces him, obliterates him” (“Human” 45). When it comes to the representation of

speech this sort of naturalization might make sense, but when applied to the representation of consciousness we have what I think is an unproductive assumption that characters must think in the same linguistic register in which they would speak or write. What follows is that if a passage of thought representation contains language which does not seem to “belong” to a character it becomes marked as a sign of narratorial intrusion into their interior monologue. This leads to a collapsing of the distinction between authorial style and narratorial reportage, glossed as an instance of aesthetic failure on the part of the author, an inability to fully imagine characters in their own idiom, or an unwillingness to refrain from evaluative commentary, rather than a deliberate rhetorical strategy of the narrator.

In an interesting inversion of the idea of stylistic contagion as an idiomatic deviance from a formal style of narration, Wood here assigns the colloquialism “beat” in the passage from *White Teeth* to the narrator, indeed to the author, rather than the character. This is indicative of the linguistic register of much contemporary fiction, and here we find the challenge to many of the assumptions underlying theories of FID which inhere in the privileged method of lexical attribution. I would suggest that if we eschew the transformational presupposition of the “direct discourse fallacy,” and see FID as a mode of represented thought without necessarily being a translation of the verbal form of that thought, then the emphasis on lexical attribution should become less important to analysis. We might then see FID not as an indirect report of a mental utterance, or even as a mediated representation, but as a performative statement, a narratorial performance of the kinetic flow of a character’s thought, incorporating the rhythm of the thought process into the syntactic structure of narration.

Here we would foreground indices which evoke the activity of thinking rather than its verbal form, indices such as hesitations, ellipses, and intonations, alongside the more common exclamations and interrogatives. In which case, language which cannot be attributed to a character may be understood less as an intrusion in the character’s interior monologue, than an element of the narratorial performance which highlights the speculative nature of verbalizing thoughts. That is, we can see the hypothetical approach to FID—this is what a character would have said were they asked—not only as a theoretical explanation of the cognitive reconstructions of readers, but as a rhetorical strategy of narrators, invoking doubt about the linguistic nature of a character’s thought processes. The hypotheticality of FID might also then be construed as an example of what the

narrator would say were he or she to adopt the character's perspective. Rather than presenting a transparent mind or knowable self, contemporary omniscience suggests we can only know the self through the otherness of the narrator.

We would then be in a better position to see how the use of FID in contemporary fiction displays a reflexive awareness of the technique itself, by overt reference to its artificiality or by deliberately stretching its boundaries: collapsing the linguistic borders between narrator and character which inform the principle of stylistic deviation, or parodically highlighting these borders, shading the already hazy distinction between authorial psychonarration and figural narrated monologue, and producing what might be described as a kind of immanent psychonarration: with commentary or analysis embedded in the stylistic evocation of character thought (this is what the character would have thought if they had the narrator's insight), or invoking a deictic center of consciousness but verbalizing the thought in narratorial language.

Narratorial Self-Reflexivity

In discussing a passage of FID in *Pride and Prejudice* which is included in quotation marks, Anne Waldron Neumann writes: "The quotation marks in this passage—Austen did not know that free indirect discourse is supposed to omit them—ensure that we are reading Mrs. Bennet's 'actual' reply to Mr. Collins (with the usual grammatical transformations)" (371). The first thing to remark about contemporary omniscience is that it manifests a high degree of authorial awareness regarding FID as a convention of writing: authors today know what FID is "supposed" to do. Here are some examples of narratorial self-reflexivity in contemporary omniscient narration which highlight the arbitrariness of grammatical and expressive features derived from modernist literature:

Richard looked at his watch and thought: I can't tell him yet. Or rather: Can't tell him yet. For the interior monologue now waives the initial personal pronoun, in deference to Joyce. (Amis, *The Information* 11)

But how can he *possibly* make his mark in any of these (William frets as he finds his favourite bench in St James's Park) when he's being virtually blackmailed into a life of tedious labour? How can he possibly be expected. . . . But let me rescue you from drowning in William Rackham's

stream of consciousness, that stagnant pond feebly agitated by self pity.
(Faber, *The Crimson Petal and the White* 57–58, original ellipsis)

Here is an example of a narrator mocking the representation of thought in verbal form:

You know what they are feeling. They are feeling enjoyably fucked. It is what they are thinking that is the problem. You already know what would be written inside Moshe's thought balloon. "Nana," he would be moaning in this sketch, "darling Nana." His thought balloon was soppy and romantic. Anjali's thought balloon was different. (Thirlwell, *Politics* 201)

I have already pointed out in my chapter on the pyrotechnic storyteller how authors such as Nicola Barker and Rick Moody play with the conventions of thought representation, asserting linguistic control over characters' own modes of self-description by staging hypothetical dialogues between narrator and character regarding lexical choices, and hyperbolically extending in the narrative discourse metaphors attributed to characters. I will focus here on two other features of FID in contemporary omniscience: shared linguistic habitus (the self-reflexive mixture of stylistic contagion and narratorial usurpation); and characterological cognitive self-awareness (the concept of self animating this deployment).

Shared Linguistic Habitus

Shared linguistic habitus operates when narratorial colloquialisms and syntactic rhythm disrupt the sense of a neutral or formal diction against which to measure stylistic deviation. It also operates in the sense of characters and narrator sharing a professional language (Charlotte Simmons studying neuroscience, Gary Lambert reading books on clinical depression, Russell Stone reading books on happiness and genetic science, Richard Tull being a writer of fiction) which complicates the projection of alterity.

To demonstrate the first case, I return to Nicola Barker's *Darkmans*. On the whole, this novel eschews interior monologues, but it has multiple instances of diegetic summary of a character's past which function as what Alan Palmer calls thought report of states of mind rather than a single mental event or series of events. A good example is this passage:

Progress, *modernity* (all now dirty words in Beede's vocabulary) had kicked him squarely in the balls. I mean he hadn't asked for much, had he? He'd sacrificed the Spider Orchid, hadn't he? A familiar geography? He'd only wanted, out of *respect*, to salvage . . . to salvage . . .

What?

A semblance of what had been? Or was it just a question of . . . was it just a matter of . . . of *form*? Something as silly and apparently significant as . . . as *good manners*? (12)

Employing the method of attribution, we could read the first sentence as an example of FID, particularly due to the presence of the colloquial expression, marking the parenthesis with its proper noun as narratorial intrusion. However, given the informal nature of the narrative voice, we could easily assign the colloquialism to the narrator and see the sentence as psychonarration. The hesitancy of attribution which arises from the ambiguous nature of FID itself leads me to see this simply as a narratorial performance of the character's mental state.

The second sentence is a very interesting example: "I mean he hadn't asked for much, had he?" What should be a clear instance of FID is complicated by the inconsistency of pronoun and tense. On one hand you could say the author had no choice but to retain this inconsistency because a full grammatical "transformation" into "He meant he hadn't asked for much" wouldn't make sense. However, the fact that the sentence is *not* rendered in direct discourse demonstrates to me a willingness to court confusion in order to retain the presence of the narrative voice. In fact because this passage is part of a much longer section of analeptic summary, and not a scenic report of Beede's reflection, we could easily assert that here the *narrator* is fumbling for the words to articulate Beede's mental state, highlighting the hypothetical nature of FID. "I mean" is in fact a recurring phrase in the thought representation of virtually all the characters, such that it becomes a stylistic device associated with the narrator, rather than something idiosyncratic to the characters. It is often used as a parenthetical supplement to dialogue in sentences of thought representation which effect a backshifting of tense while retaining the pronoun. Here are two examples: "No *salad*?!" Kelly's jaw dropped (no salad?! I mean where'd he think this *was*? Fucking *Ethiopia*?)" (221); "'Okay.' Gaffar nodded (registering Kane's inner turmoil, but taking it all with a pinch of salt: I mean, how hard could life be for this spoiled, flabby,

Western pup?)” (85). In the following passage the narrator seems to summarize collective thought: “The whole party was quiet for a moment, as if jointly considering the most feasible solution to this perplexing dilemma (I mean what *could* Kelly do?)” (107). Here we have a sense of the narrator intruding to agree with the characters. The following passage occurs in an expositional summary of the character Gaffar, a Kurd who barely speaks English: “An epiphany. Or this was the mythology. The truth was much simpler. Things didn’t actually change all that much in Turkey (I mean, the Kurds were persecuted everywhere, weren’t they?). The fabric of his life remained virtually identical. He’d simply crossed over (or turned inside out, like a polythene bag)” (66–67). These passages all echo the narrator’s device of parenthetical elaborations of descriptive metaphors, carrying the stylistic presence into the performance of FID.

The most reflexive example of linguistic intrusion or narratorial usurpation as a conscious stylistic technique is Tom Wolfe’s *I Am Charlotte Simmons*. Here is a passage from a scene where the virginal eponymous heroine is making out with a frat boy called Hoyt and trying to stop him from going any further:

Slither slither slither slither went the tongue, but the hand—that was what she tried to concentrate on, the hand, since it had the entire terrain of her torso to explore and not just the otorhynolaryngological caverns—oh God, it was not just at the border where the flesh of the breast joins the pectoral sheath of the chest—no, the hand was cupping her entire right—*Now!* she must say “No Hoyt” and talk to him like a dog—. (369)

This is clearly a passage of internal focalization, but how much of it is rendered in FID? In narratological terms, we might say that the passage opens with narrated perception, shifting to psychonarration after the dash, and perhaps into narratorial comment with the explanatory conjunction, “since.” The ejaculation, “oh God” is a clear instance of FID, along with the anaphoric pronoun “it,” but the deictics of the rest of the sentence (*the* breast, *the* chest) suggest a narratorial perspective. We could then say that the passage shifts into a line of narrated perception and concludes with a line of FID, marked by the ejaculation “Now!”. Thus, a lexically oriented analysis of the micro-shifts between narrator and character might yield only the two exclamations as instances of FID in an overall passage of psychonarration or narrated perception rendered in the anatomical discourse of the narrator. However, the most important quality of the passage is the syntactic structure which is not indicative of an original mental

utterance so much as it is expressive of the rhythm of Charlotte's hyper-conscious mental activity. This, along with the third-person pronoun and back-shifted tense, is why the passage as a whole can be defined as free indirect thought.

Now if we employ the method of lexical attribution we are clearly going to see a term such as "otorhynolaryngological" as evidence of narratorial usurpation and claim that the mimetic effect of FID has been diluted because Charlotte would never use such a word, particularly at this time of heightened emotion. The whole passage can be condemned as an example of reverse stylistic contagion, the author writing over the character's thoughts. Yet this seems to be the wrong judgment to make, because it is based on an assumption of what FID *should* do.

The key line for me is the one which begins with the ejaculation, "oh God." There is an obvious irony in the juxtaposition of phrases such as "Oh God" and "pectoral sheath" in a single sentence, highlighting the anthropological distance from the characters which the narrator adopts throughout the book. But I don't see why irony, with its implication of narratorial distance, is any less *mimetic* than empathetic figural closeness. Do we not get a clear sense of Charlotte's thought processes? Rather than dramatizing this sentence as an uneven conflict between "voices," I see it as the clearest example of what I mean by describing FID as a self-conscious narratorial performance of the process of characterological thought, mimicking the character's own disembodied perspective on the action.

There are several passages throughout the book in which the omniscient narrator relays what characters don't know about themselves—which, for Dorrit Cohn, is the prime feature of psychonarration—but nonetheless employs the conventions of FID. Here is a passage concerning the nerdy Adam Gellin and his crush on Charlotte Simmons:

He had no way of knowing it, but he was filled—suffused—with a love for a woman that only a virgin could feel. In his eyes she was more than flesh and blood and more than spirit. She was . . . an essence . . . an essence of *life* that remained tactile and *alive*—his loins certainly remained alive at this moment, welling up beneath his tighty-whiteys—and yet a . . . a . . . a *universal solvent* that penetrated his very hide and commandeered his entire nervous system from his brain to the tiniest nerve endings. If he could only embrace her—and find that she had been *dying* for him to do just that—she, her tactile *essence*, would come flooding into every cell, into all the billion miles of spooled DNA—he couldn't

imagine a unit of his body so minute that she would not *suffuse* it—and they would . . . *explode* their virginities in a single sublime ineffable yet neurological, all too neurological, moment! (379–80)

The first line in this passage could be described as what Cohn calls dissonant psychonarration, revealing an aspect of Adam's mind which he is not conscious of, and cannot express, establishing an ironic distance between narrator and character. Phrases which follow—such as “In his eyes,” “If he could only embrace her” and “he couldn't imagine a unit of his body”—indicate internal focalization, but the passage offers a mocking neurobiological explanation of his supposed “love” for Charlotte embedded in the form of FID, with hesitations and emphases tracing the flow of Adam's thoughts, and pronouns and tense in the grammar of the narrative report: “She was . . . an essence . . . an essence of *life*.” To read this passage as FID, however, we cannot hypothesize that this is how the character would narrate his thoughts. Instead it is a kind of immanent psychonarration, not simply representing his “thoughts” in narratorial language, but performing them from the basis of the narrator's omniscient insight.

Toward the end of the novel, after Charlotte has been in a prolonged state of depression, Adam becomes exasperated and yells at her in attempt to break her out of her funk. This is the turning point for her, leading her out of depression:

There was also, unbeknownst to either of them consciously, a woman's thrill!—and that's the word for it!—her delicious thrill!—when, as before, a man expands his chest and drapes it with the sash of righteousness and . . . *takes command!* . . . upon the Heights of Abraham. (608)

The word “thrill” in this passage cannot be attributed to Charlotte or Adam, as the narrator makes clear, for they are unconscious of the thrill itself. Yet the narrator's account of the underlying implacable biological forces at play here, unconsciously governing their behavior, is nonetheless rendered in the same form as other instances of FID, including exclamations and ellipses, where the “vivacity, the tone, and gesture,” to use Pascal's phrase, evoke a narratorial rather than characterological subjectivity.

Throughout the novel there are different manifestations of a shared linguistic habitus: between narrator and character, from stylistic contagion to narratorial usurpation; and between characters and their social milieu. To take the latter phenomenon first:

A small matter, very small, for Charlotte was now transported! . . . not so much by the Olfactory Workers and their odors and music and dancing and singing as by the fact that this was something experimental, esoteric, cutting-edge (*she had picked up that term in the modern drama course*), one of the exciting, sophisticated things Miss Pennington had assured her awaited her on the other side of the mountain, the things that would open up her eyes to harness and achieve great triumphs with . . . (364, original ellipsis; emphasis added)

Later in the novel, the narrator describes “a skanky girl facing front at the far end of the table. ‘Skanky’ had slipped into Charlotte’s vocabulary by social osmosis; and this girl was skanky” (560). In both of these passages we have the narrator “borrowing” words from Charlotte’s lexicon to render her perspective, while pointing out that these words do not in fact “belong” to her. This reflexive reference to stylistic contagion in the service of focalization serves to undermine the linguistic unity of Charlotte’s consciousness itself.

He paused. The ensuing silence, in a roomful of drunks in an advanced stage of wreckage, was a tribute to the periphrastic performance he was putting on. *Charlotte wondered if anybody in the room other than herself knew the adjective “periphrastic.”* She doubted it. A smile of superiority stole over her face. And the coolest guy in all of Dupont, who has fallen in love with me, is massaging my back, and everyone in this room can see that. (466, emphasis added)

In this passage there is again a kind of reflexive use of stylistic contagion, in which the colloquial “advanced stage of wreckage” is juxtaposed with the more sophisticated “periphrastic performance,” but the following sentence indicates that not only has the narrator borrowed the term periphrastic from Charlotte’s linguistic field, she is consciously thinking it as she perceives the scene.

On the other hand, we have passages of textually identifiable narratorial usurpation. In a chapter titled “The Conscious Little Rock,” Charlotte meets up with the Frat boy, Hoyt: “So moved was she by the dreadful wounds, the awful beating he had taken for her sake, that she barely noticed the incidental bit of Fuck Patois” (335). This recalls the narrator’s elaboration of the grammatical forms of “Fuck Patois” in an earlier chapter focused on the basketball player, Jojo Johanssen. In the next chapter, Charlotte is waiting in line with other underage college students hoping to

gain access to a nightclub: “As usual, their nervousness took the form of the Fuck Patois, which they thought gave them a front of cool and confident twenty-one-year-old moxie” (348). The phrase then surfaces a page later in Charlotte’s interior monologue: “Momma. If Momma showed up right now and saw her, thought Charlotte, saw her in a line full of people talking Fuck Patios, about to sneak into a *bar* with a *fake ID* . . . Everybody does it, Momma . . . *Everybody?*” (349). Here, as if by another sort of osmosis, the narrator’s term has slipped into Charlotte’s vocabulary. She is the conscious little rock of his narratorial manipulation, and he is Charlotte Simmons.

Characterological Cognitive Self-Awareness

The broader argument I want to make is that the representation of consciousness in contemporary fiction is not just a device for rendering character’s thoughts with greater or lesser degrees of mimesis, but a means for interrogating the relation of language and thought. Which is to say, the question of how a character would articulate their thoughts is foregrounded as a technical challenge because it is a preoccupation of the characters themselves. In contemporary fiction, the classic interior monologue in which characters subject themselves to a self-scrutiny of their behavior, motivations, and beliefs, is often accompanied by an extra level of self-conscious awareness, a detached reflection on the act of cognition itself, including of their own lexical choices, and this becomes a way of highlighting the importance of language as a shared medium which structures thought itself, rather than “belonging” to an individual as a marker of their alterity. Here is a passage from another interior monologue in Wolfe’s novel, indicating Charlotte’s self-conscious awareness of her own changing linguistic habitus: “You . . . bastard! Sharp intake of breath—she had never used that expletive before, not even in her thoughts. Hoyt had done this just to torment her! Comes over as if to see her and veers off to some little . . . slut! Never even thought that word before, either . . . or had she once, about Beverly” (387).

This characterological cognitive self-awareness is highlighted in much of the fiction of David Foster Wallace. Here is a quote from the story “Mr. Squishy”:

At various intervals throughout the pre-GRDS presentation the limbic portions of Schmidt’s brain pursued this line of thinking—while in fact

a whole other part of his mind surveyed these memories and fantasies and was simultaneously fascinated and repelled at the way in which all these thoughts and feelings could be entertained in total subjective private while Schmidt ran the Focus Group through its brief and supposedly Full-Access description of Mister Squishy's place in the soft-confection industry. (31)³

Another example is David Lodge's "neuronarrative" *Thinks*, in which the protagonist attempts to dictate his own "stream of consciousness" to a tape recorder, and by necessity reflects upon his own cognitive processes: "Ah, a blank, a definite blank, for an instant, not more than a second or two, I didn't have a reportable thought or sense impression, my mind as they say went blank, I thought of nothing" (4). In this passage from Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, the narrator reports a character's assumption that language can infiltrate his prelinguistic consciousness: "It was his most shameful secret that whenever he opened a door—a car door, a car boot, the door of KEVIN's meeting hall or the door of his own house just now—the opening of *Goodfellas* ran through his head and *he found this sentence rolling around in what he presumed was his subconscious*: As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a gangster" (446, emphasis added).

An example of how a character's cognitive self-awareness is self-reflexively performed by a narrator can be found in this passage from Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections*, which must be quoted in full:

He turned to the doorway where she'd appeared. He began a sentence: "I am—" but when he was taken by surprise, every sentence became an adventure in the woods; as soon as he could no longer see the light of the clearing from which he'd entered, he would realize that the crumbs he'd dropped for bearings had been eaten by birds, silent deft darting things which he couldn't quite see in the darkness but which were so numerous and swarming in their hunger that it seemed as if *they* were the darkness, as if the darkness weren't uniform, weren't an absence of light but a teeming and corpuscular thing, and indeed when as a studious teenager he'd encountered the word "crepuscular" in *McKay's Treasury of English Verse*, the corpuscles of biology had bled into his understanding of the word, so that for his entire adult life he'd seen in twilight a corpuscularity, as of the graininess of the high-speed film necessary for photography under conditions of low ambient life, as of a kind of sinister decay; and hence the panic of a man betrayed deep in the woods whose darkness was

the darkness of starlings blotting out the sunset or black ants storming a dead opossum, a darkness that didn't just exist but actively *consumed* the bearings that he'd sensibly established for himself, lest he be lost; but in the instant of realizing he was lost, time became marvelously slow and he discovered hitherto unguessed eternities in the space between one word and the next, or rather he became trapped in that space between words and could only stand and watch as time sped on without him, the thoughtless boyish part of him crashing on out of sight blindly through the woods while he, trapped, the grownup Al, watched in oddly impersonal suspense to see if the panic-stricken little boy might, despite no longer knowing where he was or at what point he'd entered the woods of this sentence, still manage to blunder into the clearing where Enid was waiting for him, unaware of any woods—"packing my suitcase," he heard himself say. This sounded right. Verb, possessive, noun. (11)

In this scene we find the faltering patriarch Alfred standing in front of his dressing table, in a haze of dementia. Alfred is interrupted by his wife, who asks what he is doing. His response—"I'm packing my suitcase"—is punctuated by a long paragraph of ostensibly iterative summary, employing the psycho-analogy of being lost in the woods to explain the intricacies of Alfred's thought processes when he is confronted with such neurological failures. When the elaboration of this psychoanalogy describes the darkness of the woods as "a teeming and corpuscular thing" we have a tangential comment about how from his teenage years, Alfred confused the words corpuscular and crepuscular. Here we have what seems to be a narratorial acknowledgement of stylistic contagion, of having borrowed the character's word. As the passage continues, however, it describes the self-conscious detachment that Alfred has in these moments, with the narrator inhabiting the cognitive space between one word and the next, and performing Alfred's own reflection as he "watched in oddly impersonal suspense." So the passage hovers between psychonarration and FID as a self-conscious narratorial performance of Al's own self-conscious reflection on his cognitive process, as if seeing himself as a character.

According to Dorrit Cohn, psycho-analogies are found in modern novels "most frequently in works where the narrated monologue is the prevailing method for rendering consciousness, but at moments when an author is for some reason unwilling to entrust the presentation of the inner life to the character's own verbal competence" (*Transparent Minds* 45). In this passage from *The Corrections*, the psychoanalogy performs this function because the character has momentarily lost his verbal competence,

but it also appears to be the case that the psychoanalysis is Alfred's. In this case, it is a mimetic rendering of Alfred's thoughts.

The Hypotheticality of Free Indirect Discourse

I don't want to suggest that any of these examples necessarily indicate new types of FID, because one can always find similar examples in earlier work. For instance, Dorrit Cohn draws attention to this passage in *The Magic Mountain*: "But for him and his relationship with Madame Chauchat—the word 'relationship' must be charged to his account, we refuse to take the responsibility for it" (qtd in Cohn, *Transparent Minds* 121). I make two claims, however. First, that there is a high degree of self-reflexivity in the use of FID in contemporary fiction, particularly in relation to idiomatic indices, highlighting a skepticism about linguistic difference as a marker of alterity; and secondly, that this self-reflexivity facilitates the representation of characters who themselves reflect on their own cognitive processes and the role of language in producing rather than expressing thought. I am also arguing that these features of thought representation require different ways of talking about the function and effect of FID than those offered by a method of linguistic attribution underpinned by the interpretive frame of alterity. In particular, that an interpretive frame which mobilizes the aesthetic and ethical prejudices of modernist criticism and its attendant history of novelistic progression is not suitable for the analysis of FID in contemporary omniscience.

Consider a passage from Richard Powers's *Generosity* which I quoted in a previous chapter: "She sits in the rocker for a moment, examining herself. It's not even an effort, really. Not even a decision. Just large molecules, passing their oldest signals back and forth across the infinite synapse gap" (179). This passage presents the syntactic conditions of FID and invites an alterity effect, before undermining it. One would normally read the last two sentences as narratorial commentary. Given the fact that this character, Tonia Schiff, is a television science journalist immersed in the world of genetic science, one might at least consider attributing the sentences and even their idiom to her thoughts. If we do, they then indicate characterological self-awareness of thought processes.

FID, then, is one of the major strategies which contemporary omniscient narrators employ to perform their narrative authority. My argument is similar to that of Daniel Gunn who demonstrates how, in Jane Austen's novels, passages of FID do not give voice to the autonomous

subjectivity of characters because they are always framed by the controlling presence of the narrator and hence must be understood as a “narrative mimicry of figural thought” (40). I use the term “narratorial performance” rather than “mimicry” to highlight the self-reflexive use of conventions of thought representation; the sense of acting a role, of performing a character’s lines rather than imitating them; and the connotation of pretense, in the sense that FID is a hypothetical projection of character thought. The hypothetical approach is best able to engage with the hesitancy of attribution that arises from the characteristic ambiguity of FID. The logic of this approach is not only that the verbal representation of character thought is a speculative adoption of the character’s mode of articulation, but that the represented thought itself may sometimes be a hypothetical postulation of a possible thought.

This conception of FID can be found in Michel Faber’s *The Crimson Petal and the White*. The global narrative frame of this novel has an intrusive omniscient narrator who persistently addresses readers via a form of autotelic second person, “introducing” them to characters and guiding them through the fictional world. In the following passage the narrator performs, as a direct address to readers, the thoughts of Sugar regarding how she might respond to the narratee’s presence as she eavesdrops on Agnes, the wife of Henry Rackham (a response which she may or may not be rehearsing to herself):

Don’t be judgemental: this is not the way Sugar usually occupies her Tuesday afternoons; in fact, it’s her first time. No, really! William Rackham is in Cardiff, you see, until Thursday, and Agnes Rackham is indisposed. So, rather than being idle, what’s the harm in following Clara, Agne’s lady’s-maid, on her afternoon off, and seeing what comes of it?” (354)

Given the potential counterfactuality of FID, I would conclude by suggesting we can profitably think about the relationship between FID and what David Herman calls hypothetical focalization. I will discuss this concept in more detail in the following chapter. For now I will quote Herman’s general explanation of hypothetical focalization as “the use of hypotheses, framed by the narrator or a character, about what might be or have been seen or perceived—if only there were someone who could have adopted the requisite perspective on the situations and events at issue” (“Hypothetical Focalization” 231). If we substitute here the phrase “what might have been thought in this way” we can see that omniscience provides the

“requisite perspective” for seeing into a character’s mind and that FID is the form the narrator employs to perform this character’s thoughts had they been able to adopt this perspective. This means that FID does not need to be an account of how the character may have articulated their thoughts, hence requiring a kind of lexical fidelity to the character’s linguistic habitus, but a kind of translation of these thoughts which is not “telling” as opposed to “showing” them but a performative inhabitation of a fictional mind.