The Return of the Omniscient Narrator

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CHAPTER 8

Real Authors and Real Readers

A Discursive Approach to the
Narrative Communication Model

IF NARRATIVE AUTHORITY is the contingent product of a relational exchange between textual agents, and of the institutional and cultural conditions of production and reception, I want in this final chapter to elaborate the broader narratological ramifications of investigating the formal category of narrative voice in a discursive context. In doing so I will discuss how narrative theory can address its most significant lacuna: attention to the role of real authors in the structure of narrative communication. Acknowledging authorship is crucial to the function of narrative authority in contemporary omniscient narration.

The foundational claims of *Narrative Discourse,* Genette's "essay in method," is that a narrative "can only be such to the extent that it tells a story" and "to the extent that it is uttered by someone" (29). This definition informs Genette's study of the ways in which a narrator reports information about the story in the narrative discourse. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction,* on the other hand, Wayne Booth is interested in "the technique of non-didactic fiction, viewed as the art of communicating with readers," in the "rhetorical resources" which writers employ to "impose [their] fictional world upon the reader" (xiii). Booth's study is concerned with understanding how fictional form conveys the values of (implied) authors.
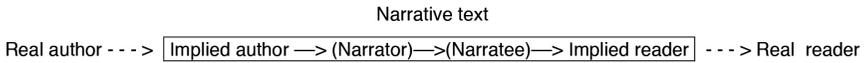
Narrative text

Real author - - - > | Implied author —> (Narrator)—>(Narratee)—> Implied reader | - - - > Real reader

FIGURE 1   Narrative text

Adopting Roman Jakobsen's linguistic account of the act of verbal communication—in which an addresser sends a message to an addressee—as its basic model, narrative theory incorporated Genette's narrator, Gerald Prince's narratee, and Booth's implied author and the reader he "makes" (named by Iser as the implied reader) to facilitate the study of narrative communication. Peter Rabinowitz's 1977 "Truth in Fiction" drew these figures into a typological account of the relations between narrative agents, focusing on the receptive roles a text invites, such as the narrative audience and the authorial audience. Seymour Chatman's diagrammatic model of narrative communication, proposed in his 1978 book, *Story and Discourse,* remains the standard (see figure 1).

Thus, classical narratology posited as its object of study a series of agents immanent to a work of narrative fiction while leaving aside the agents which bracket this formulation: the author and the reader. As Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan argued in *Narrative Fiction*: "the empirical process of communication between author and reader is less relevant to the poetics of narrative fiction than its counterpart in the text" (90).

There have since been any number of variations and revisions of this basic model, depending on the methodological focus of individual scholars. In a 2005 book chapter titled "Why Don't Our Terms Stay Put? The Narrative Communication Diagram Scrutinized and Historicized," Harry E. Shaw makes two points: first that "users of the diagram bring to it two different implicit models of the communication situation; and second that the terms the diagram seeks to describe necessarily become hazier as we move from left to right" (299). If the communication diagram evokes "the image of someone telling a story to someone else" (300), Shaw claims, the first model emphasizes the flow of information between the various communicative agents, while the second emphasizes the "effects and purposes the teller wishes to achieve" (300).

For me, two important points arise from this account. First, Shaw's distinction between an emphasis on the flow of information and an emphasis on the rhetorical features of telling can be seen as a difference

in analytical focus between focalization and voice. Information theorists would see the narrating as the *medium* by which a focalized story is accessed or constructed by readers. Rhetoric theorists would see the focalized story as a vehicle for establishing a narrative effect. Given critical consensus that story is an effect of discourse, I think the latter must be privileged. Secondly, despite Shaw's emphasis on the importance of the narrator, postclassical narratology has engaged primarily with the hazier right-hand side of the diagram. The story of postclassical narratology may be seen as an attempt to take up the challenge of theorizing the bracketing agent on the far right of the diagram, what is variously called the real reader, the actual reader, the empirical reader and the flesh-and-blood reader. Two prominent approaches to this challenge are the rhetorical-ethical and the cognitive. One focuses on the ethical judgments readers make in response to the rhetorical techniques employed in a narrative; the other investigates how readers process and make sense of narrative elements to construct mental storyworlds. Both betray a tension between academic and general readers even as they try to elide the distinction.

In the rhetorical approach, the critic stands in as a test case for this flesh-and-blood reader, one capable of entertaining a range of cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and ethical responses, while still asserting a final critical judgment. For instance, in applying his model of rhetorical poetics to Ian McEwan's *Atonement,* James Phelan writes: "I believe that flesh-and-blood readers who respond in these ways are missing some of the intricacies of McEwan's communication, but I also believe that in McEwan's strategies they have good reasons for their responses" (*Experiencing* 131). This emphasis on readers begs the question: how do we know the ways in which readers respond to a narrative?

This question has animated criticisms leveled at the related field of reader response theory, in which it has been pointed out that the reader under study is typically an idealized version of the (androcentric) critical self. For instance, in a 1982 essay Mary Louise Pratt argued that "given the autobiographical bent of his recent book, *Is There a Text in This Class?,* it is fair to see [Stanley] Fish's theoretical work partly as a personal quest to examine, and with any luck to validate, the bases of his own critical and pedagogical practice" (221–22). In a review of Phelan's *Living to Tell about It,* Michael Eskin claims that Phelan cannot generalize into a theory of narrative his claims about the range of readers' responses to narratives unless he incorporates an empirical approach into his critical practice. It should be pointed out, though, that in many instances Phelan is dealing with well-established public responses to narrative texts, evidence

for which can be found in reviews and essays about these texts. Responses to the revelation at the end of *Atonement* provide one clear example. At any rate, Phelan would legitimately claim that while his approach is reader oriented, it is nonetheless focused on the rhetorical strategies designed to evoke particular responses.

The cognitive approach in narrative theory attempts to address this empirical shortcoming by overtly drawing its theoretical authority from research in cognitive science. In doing so, it collapses reader responses to a narrative into universal shared mental processes—such as "our evolved cognitive capacity for mind-reading" (10), in Lisa Zunshine's words— while still retaining a scholarly distance able to apprehend these processes in operation and articulate their relation to the narrative text. Manfred Jahn, in his cognitive approach to third-person narration, warns against the distinction between professional and general readers, arguing that to juxtapose "a sophisticated narratologist's reading and a general reader's reading highlights in a rather unflattering way the detrimental effect of mainstream narratology's failure to account for what should be one of its prime considerations, the cognitive mechanics of reading" (464). Jahn goes on to argue that narratological readers not only share the same cognitive mechanics as general readers, but they must embrace this shared process of reading in order to generate more sophisticated textual analysis:

> Despite the fact that recourse to readers, readers' intuitions, and reading plays an important part in narratological argument, the contribution of mainstream narratology is preoccupied with bottom-up analyses, often assuming determinacies in violation of the Proteus Principle and indeterminacies in the presence of established cognitive preferences. (465)

To what extent does a theoretical and empirical focus on real readers affect the validity and usefulness of the narrative communication model, and what sort of attention should be paid to real authors? While rhetorical approaches to the effects of narratives on readers necessarily require a theory of narrative communication which attends to the agential function of narrators and (implied) authors, these occupants of the left-hand side of the communication diagram have been less important to cognitive studies. The overwhelming focus on the cognitive mechanics which enable readers to make sense of stories has shifted attention firmly onto the constructivist role of reception. David Herman's account of his cognitive approach in *Story Logic* makes clear this focus on reception. "In the approach outlined in the present book," Herman explains, "the real

target of narrative analysis is the process by which interpreters reconstruct the storyworlds encoded in narratives" (5).

We can see that a focus on how readers process narrative, rather than how authors construct them, would lend itself more easily to a concern with focalization or perspective because this will yield the ways in which information about the storyworld is conveyed to readers.[1] In cognitive narratology, the role of the narrator tends be subordinated to this function of narrative. I will focus here on two challenges to the concept of the narrator and narrative communication offered from cognitive perspectives. In the "psychonarratological approach" of Marisa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon, the narrator is seen as a reader construct, the mental representation of a speaker in the reader's mind derived from textual features. For Monika Fludernik's "natural narratology," the narrator is the illusory product of an interpretive strategy based on a false presupposition that a narrative must be told by someone. For both, the communication model of narrative which accepts the textual existence of a narrator must be discarded because the postulation of a fictional narrator derives from the application of real world frames of conversational storytelling to a written narrative.

"In our view," Bortolussi and Dixon claim in *Psychonarratology*, "it is common sense to analyze the words of the narrative as presented by a narrator, and a departure from this view strikes us as nonintuitive" (63). However, they are at pains to stress that the relation between readers and the narrators they construct can only be understood analogically: "although there is no real communication in the linguistic, conversational sense, we argue that readers treat narrators *as if* they were conversational participants" (73). Bortolussi and Dixon claim that focusing on "the essential communicative transaction between the narrator and reader" (69) is necessary because there is no actual communication between author and reader in written narratives, there is no "direct contact between interlocutors" and hence no "feedback loop and progressive interchange of utterances" (70).

The inapplicability of oral conversation to narrative fiction would appear to be obvious and common sense. Bortolussi and Dixon take the odd position of claiming author–reader relations cannot be understood in terms of a communicative model of oral conversation, before asserting that narrator–reader relations operate precisely according to this model. Yet if reader and author "do not share common perceptual ground" and "cannot engage in the communicative process of confirmation and error correction" (74), these problems surely also apply to the reader and the

narrator. So if, as they postulate, readers construct narrators as interlocutors, why can they not do the same with authors? Bortolussi and Dixon will admit that they do, and it would seem remiss to disregard this aspect of the reading experience.

Bortolussi and Dixon seem to be quibbling over an analogy they themselves have introduced, particularly in regard to the question of intentionality: "suggesting that readers can be concerned with the historical author's intention is not the same thing as suggesting that there is a substantive communicative interaction between the author and the reader analogous to what transpires in conversation" (70). But what proponent of narrative fiction as communication has made this suggestion? James Phelan defines his rhetorical account of narrative as "somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened," but he emphasizes a double communicative situation in fictional narrative, with both author and narrator addressing different audiences. Bortolussi and Dixon claim that "readers perceive that the narrator addresses them for some purpose, and they feel naturally motivated to discern this purpose" (73). This would seem to tally very much with Phelan's conception, yet while Phelan focuses on the intentionality behind "textual features," they would like to keep reading at the solipsistic level of an imagined communication.

The problem is a conception of reading as a private individual act analogous to a conversation unfolding in real time. To say that narrative fiction is not a form of communication because it is not the same as conversation is to operate with a very restrictive definition of communication. As I will argue later in this chapter, if we conceive of narrative fiction as a mode of public discourse, "real" communicational exchange between author and reader does in fact take place extratextually in interviews, reviews and responses to reviews, and so forth, which calls for a different formulation of communication.

In the case of Bortolussi and Dixon, the analogy of the narrator as a conversational participant has analytic force for the empirical study of how readers engage with the narrator. Fludernik's concept of a natural narratology, first proposed in *Fictions of Language and Languages of Fiction* and elaborated in *Towards a "Natural" Narratology*, is far more complex and sophisticated than psychonarratology, while still retaining the central focus on how readers apply cognitive frames to make sense of texts, or, in Fludernik's words, to narrativize them. Fludernik describes narrativization as an interpretative practice by which readers process a work as a narrative. She defines narrative, at the base level, as the presen-

tation of experientiality through the mediating function of consciousness, whether a character's or a narrator's.

On this basis, Fludernik claims, cognitive frames allow us to establish a continuum from naturally occurring spontaneous storytelling to experimental postmodern fiction, and this continuum can be the basis of a diachronic account of the ways in which new modes of narrative develop throughout history. This enables her to trace the development from oral to written narratives, and the absorption of non-natural modes of storytelling into narrative fiction. The model of natural narratology thus allows her to criticize the narrative communication model as a theoretical fallacy produced by the reification of cognitive frames. Like Bortolussi and Dixon, however, Fludernik criticizes a model for which she has provided an explanation, claiming for example that "one can now comprehend Stanzel's narrative situations as a direct development from natural categories" (47).

In relation to the concept of teller figures, Fludernik writes: "One can thereby explain the entire communicative analysis of fiction as an (illicit) transfer of the frame of real-life conversational narrative onto literary personae and constructed entities (such as that of the notorious 'implied author')" (47). This supports her argument, along the same lines as Ann Banfield in *Unspeakable Sentences,* that the persistent investment of narratologists in this illicit transfer operates against the grain of their own theoretical distinction between author and narrator, and, crucially, of the implications of modernist fiction:

> Even more absurd, since the earlier (script-logical) tendency to identify the non-personalized narrator with the (historical) author has become untenable in the wake of the Modernist aesthetic, the responsibility for the telling has now been transferred to the (covert) narrator, or the implied author, and that even in narratological circles. The persistence of this preconceived notion that *somebody* (hence a human agent) must be telling the story seems to derive directly from the frame conception of storytelling rather than from any necessary textual evidence. (47)

If Fludernik devotes four hundred pages to explaining how narratives are interpreted according to cognitive frames derived from real-life storytelling, why criticize narratology for doing the same thing which "readers" do? At stake seems to be a supposed misreading of the privileged mode of modernist fiction. Fludernik deploys cognitive science and linguistics to provide theoretical grist for the modernist aesthetic mill that

Lubbock codified in *The Craft of Fiction,* from his idea of the creative reader reconstructing a fictional world from the shadowy phantasm of the book, to the ideal of an effaced authorial presence deriving from the distinction between telling and showing. The difference being that what Lubbock addressed in terms of an author's methods Fludernik describes as scripts and schema brought to bear on a text by readers:

> Figural or reflectoral narrative allows them [readers], instead, to experience the fictional world from within, as if looking out at it from the protagonist's consciousness. Such a reading experience is structured in terms of the natural frame of EXPERIENCING, which includes the experiences of perception, sentiment and cognition. (48)

Two points must be made in relation to these cognitive approaches to narrative. First, postulating a narrator is not simply an interpretive strategy of readers that narratologists have illegitimately replicated; it is a viable method for addressing the rhetorical features of narrative, and it is surely strengthened by the very fact that "readers" approach narrative in the same fashion. Hypostasizing the narrator as a formal element of narrative strikes me as no less viable than arguing that we can understand narrative in terms of how readers construct narrators as conversational participants. Most importantly, like cognitive narratology in general, the paradigm of the natural is based on a study of the private individual reading experience as a cognitive processing reliant on a facsimile of one on one communication, neglecting the crucial public dimension of the reception of literature in which narrative fiction is understood as a written artifact to be discussed. It cannot help address the interrelation of narrative voice and authorial discourse that is at the heart of omniscient narrative authority.

Defining the Reader: How "Real" Is Real?

The cognitive study of narrative most reliant on empirical research is the psychonarratological approach offered by Bortolussi and Dixon. This approach is founded on their view that "[h]ow readers process narrative is essentially an empirical question that can only be answered by systematic observation of actual readers reading actual texts" (13). In distinguishing between "textual features (i.e., objective and identifiable characteristics of the text) and reader constructions (i.e., subjective and variable mental

processes)" (37), Bortolussi and Dixon make a series of hypotheses about how readers will respond to a particular text feature and then test out these hypotheses by conducting "*textual experiments,* in which particular features of a text are identified and manipulated by the researcher" (51). This method provides the bridge between narrative theory concerned with "real" readers and broader empirical studies of readers and the process of reading.

In a 2006 article titled "Empirical Approaches to Studying Literary Readers: The State of the Discipline," David Miall locates the work of Bortolussi and Dixon in this field, claiming that the "serious commitment to the examination of reading and the testing of hypotheses about reading with real readers . . . differentiates it clearly from the reader-response studies of the last thirty years, from Fish to Wolfgang Iser" (307). An important part of this differentiation, for Miall, is that real readers are to be sharply distinguished from "professional" readers who produce published interpretations of literary texts. Real readers are "nonprofessionals" whose "ordinary literary reading" (294) may not be concerned with interpreting literature. Significantly, while acknowledging the importance of "a reader's particular identity and cultural situation," Miall claims that that the processes which precede and support any act of interpretation "themselves are constituted by the cognitive and affective equipment that we possess in common with our reading ancestors" (293).

For Miall, "empirical studies of readers and reading" offer the potential to "provide new landmarks for a more socially responsible and ecologically valid form of scholarship" (307). The problem with this sort of claim, I would argue, is that the empirical approach remains open to the charge that it does not study real readers so much as lab-rat readers. Miall points out that "often experimental methods involve laboratory conditions in which acts of reading can be controlled and monitored" and that "typically, the readers studied will be drawn from the student population" (292). The category of the "real" reader can then be seen as a *virtual* construct of literary theory, which seeks to corroborate and universalize the professional theorist's critical response to a text under the guise of testing how readers *actually* read.

The limitations of this approach are taken up in a 2009 special issue of *Language and Literature* which collects articles devoted to a more ethnographically oriented and thus, it is claimed, more ecologically valid study of reading. In this issue, Joan Swann and Daniel Allington distinguish between two approaches to the empirical study of real readers: the "experimental" and the "naturalistic." The first, they suggest, involves

"the artificial environment of a reading experiment," generally taking students and testing "pre-specified and isolated aspects of reading" (248). The second approach, which they favor, involves observing readers "in their usual environment, engaged in habitual reading behaviour" (248). The case study of "social reading" which Swann and Allington provide in this article is of reading groups, and their focus is on the interpretations and evaluations of literary texts which readers make in these environments. This allows them to emphasize the importance of interpersonal discussion and the "culturally and historically contingent" nature of specific reading contexts.

While Swann and Allington draw a contrast "between experimental and naturalistic studies of 'real' readers in terms of research design and focus" (260), what these two empirical approaches share is their attention to a certain type of reader, which they characterize as "'ordinary readers'—i.e. readers other than academic critics and professional reviewers" (248). However, if we are serious about the "ecological" value of empirical studies of reading, it would seem unproductive to dismiss published "interpretations" by professionals in favor of ordinary acts of reading by nonprofessionals, especially given the influence of "unreal" professional critics and reviewers on the publication and reception of literature, and hence upon practices of social reading. Swann and Allington do acknowledge this briefly, pointing out how reading group participants respond to reviews of the books they are discussing. Therefore, a comprehensive account of the ecology of literary reading might distinguish between different types of readers, but it would then need to incorporate all these types in its analysis.

Public Readers

Ultimately it must be recognized that the reader is a methodological construct, emerging out of the specific research questions being posed. So how would I theorize the real reader when trying to account for the narrative authority of contemporary omniscience? The empirical approaches outlined above are concerned with the cognitive and affective mechanics of reading and the social interpersonal discussions of reading. My concern is with the public reception of literary works. This derives from my intention to reconsider the narrative communication model by articulating an approach to the study of narrative founded on the recognition of fictional narratives as public statements in a broader discursive formation,

and therefore as vital elements of public discourse. By doing so, I wish to proceed not from a distinction between what is inside a narrative text and what lies outside, but from an approach to the narrative *discourse* of fictional texts *alongside* other nonfictional and nonliterary discourses in the public sphere. Here I am betraying the influence of Bakhtin and, especially, Foucault. In one sense I'm trying to negotiate a link between Bakhtin's belief in authorial agency, that person who orchestrates public discourses *in* the novel, and Foucault's claim that we must avoid seeing literature as a substitute or "general envelope for all other discourses" ("Functions" 308). This leads to my second aim: to investigate the ramifications of this discursive approach for a narratological theory of authorship, particularly one which takes into account the question of authorial responsibility and narrative authority in relation to contemporary omniscient narration.

Recognizing the literary ecology which I outlined in the introduction makes it necessary to approach fictional narratives not as a medium for private or abstract communication between the individual entities of author and reader, but as a public "zone of transaction" between a range of subject positions. In doing so, I wish to develop a model of narrative communication which situates the various agents of this model as subject positions anchoring textual utterances in the public sphere. In "Estranging Unreliability, Bonding Unreliability, and the Ethics of *Lolita*" James Phelan proposes to discuss the unreliable narration of *Lolita* in order to "account for two especially notable groups of readers": those who are seduced by Humbert's narrative voice and those who are not (223). What is implicit in Phelan's rhetorical approach to readers' responses is what I want to make explicit. I'm interested in the actual public textual responses of readers as concrete evidence to be situated alongside the narrative discourse. The *textual* forms of this public response would range across three overlapping forums: the *literary establishment* in the form of reviews and feature articles; *academia* in the form of scholarly essays and monographs; and the *general public* in the form of letters, blogs, online forums, and customer reviews. This would constitute empirical textual evidence of the reader as a *public* reader, a figure which has the most material impact on the survival of a book. Such an approach is important for understanding that narrative authority is not something which is purely immanent to a text, to be recuperated from a formalist study of narrative conventions such as privilege or level. And if, culturally speaking, narrative authority must be granted by readers, it must not reside only in the cognitive processes of readers as individual agents of textual perception. This authority

is contingent upon the collective public textual response to the narrative in question.

The Author in Narrative Theory

The corollary of this approach is that to understand the modes of narrative authority specific to contemporary omniscient narration we must investigate the rhetorical strategies employed by authors as public figures, not just those employed by narrators. Narratology has long eschewed consideration of authorship, except in the controversial guise of the implied author, originally proposed to unyoke the question of "intentionality" from its relation to authorial biography. The implied author is a way of providing an anthropomorphic center for a narrative, even if there is no narrator or an effaced narrator, for it attributes implicit personal values and norms to the design of the narrative itself, or at least acknowledges that readers construct a sense of the authorial persona out of the text. Theories of implied authorship have undergone a range of permutations since Wayne Booth's original formulation, and in many cases have moved so far from questions of authorial *agency* that we can have claims that each reader constructs a different implied author to guide and affirm his or her reading. For instance, Wolf Schmid writes in his survey of debates over the concept: "it must be remembered that, like the readings of different recipients, the various interpretations of a single reader are each associated with a different implied author" (161). We can even have a claim such as Ansgar Nunning's that "a pederast would not find Humbert Humbert, the fictitious child molester and narrator of Nabokov's *Lolita,* unreliable" (97). Such claims leave us with the problem of weighing up the relative significance of the individual private act of reading, and the general public reception of a text.

My question here is: when readers infer an authorial persona from a fictional text do they "know" that this persona is only that of an implied author? That is, are they complicit in their own construction of an imagined entity, or do they infer what they think *is* the real author? If we wish to posit an implied author as a mediating entity between author and narrator, we need to define what we actually mean by a *real* author. We typically define the author as the historical figure who wrote the book, and then spend our time debating the existence of narrators and implied authors.[2] The author emerges as an aporia, granted both an existential solidity and an epistemological evanescence, disappearing from our knowledge in the

act of reading. The problem, I think, is that we're dismissing a straw man concept of authorship: a figure with singular intentions and coherent values and norms.

Sometimes, in defense of the idea of an implied author, we have the claim that of course an author is assuming a particular persona when writing a book, in the way that we assume a professional persona when we are writing a job application, and that we must therefore be careful to distinguish this ideal, or at least different, self from the real author. Discussing the implied author as a way of thinking about how authors present themselves, Peter Rabinowitz writes: "think of your own implied authors as you write letters of applications, ads for dating services, thank-you notes, even academic articles" ("'The Absence'" 102). In promoting the continued ethical importance of the implied author, Wayne Booth writes: "In every corner of our lives, whenever we speak or write, we imply a version of our character that we know is quite different from many other selves that are exhibited in our flesh-and-blood world" ("Resurrection" 77). This, for me, is a kind of endless deferral of the "real" to a zero point of an essentialized private self, only ever accessible in the "flesh and blood." Or, it is the opposite, evacuating any sense of a knowable self in favor of a series of performative selves which we all construct for different social occasions. In which case an authorial persona cannot be any less "real" than any other self that writers adopt in their lives, or those of a real reader. Either way, surely the figure which readers infer is that of an *author,* a public figure whom they hold responsible for the book which they are reading, rather than simply a private citizen whose personal values and norms underpin the narrative. And readers construct a sense of this public figure not only from the narrative text, but from extratextual elements.

The rationale for positing an implied author is that communication between authors and readers is mediated by the narrative text, and hence there is no direct access to an author's intentions. But, as I have pointed out, in the actual world of the public sphere such access is available, and there is enormous interest in hearing the voice of the author, from writers festivals and readings through to interviews and essays. These are part of the empirical reading experience. So, what James Phelan (*Experiencing*) calls the "recursive relationship" between authorial agency and reader response is facilitated not just by textual phenomena, but by the author's and readers' extratextual statements which circulate alongside the fictional text in the public sphere. If readers do construct an implied author, I'm suggesting, it is only to facilitate their response to the real author. Once

we accept this, it means we need to attend to the crucial function of real authors, not simply as producers of a narrative text, but as active participants in the process of reception.

A Discursive Narratology

A discursive approach begins with the assumption that a key challenge of contemporary narratology is how to negotiate methodological relations between formalist approaches to textual features, and contextualist approaches to the contingencies of textual production and reception. Proceeding from an understanding of fiction as public discourse, how might we incorporate extratextual public statements of authors and readers in the narrative communication model to develop a theory of authorship? My aim is to achieve this by refining the two major narratological approaches to fictional texts as published books active in the public sphere, rather than static formal artifacts: that proposed by Susan Lanser in *The Narrative Act* and that proposed by Gerard Genette in *Paratexts*.

The authority of a published text, Lanser argues, is vested in what she calls its extrafictional voice, "the most direct textual counterpart for the historical author," which "carries all the *diegetic authority* of its (publicly authorized) creator and has the ontological status of historical truth" (122). Now this formulation, as Lanser points out, is very similar to the implied author; however, she locates its manifestation not in the narrative discourse, but in extrafictional elements of the material book itself, from chapter divisions to authorial prefaces and publication details. Lanser is content to speculate about how readers respond to this extrafictional voice, but the very concept, I think, provides the methodological point of departure for theorizing authorship more broadly in relation to the narrative communication model. It enables us to approach the author not as a private citizen speaking to readers through the narrative text in order to convey personal values and norms, but as a public intellectual discursively engaging the reader via the link between narrative and extrafictional voice. "The extrafictional voice," Lanser argues, "is the most immediate vehicle available to the author, and although most novelistic communication does not take place on the extrafictional level, the extrafictional voice carries more than its quantitative proportion of impact" (128).

Lanser indicates that this extrafictional voice, which can be reconstructed from textual information within the book itself, is different from "*extratextual* sources of information about the author or the book" (124,

original emphasis). I would argue, however, that if this extrafictional voice frames the text and its narrative discourse, it also turns the text outwards to the broader public sphere and its range of extratextual sources. Here we find other vehicles of communication available to authors: public statements ranging from essays to manifestos to interviews and opinion articles, which together constitute a rhetorical strategy to establish their literary authority in public discourse. For Lanser, the "author" is "a textually encoded, historically authoritative voice kin to but not identical with the biographical person who wrote the text" (152). In which case, this textually encoded authorial voice must be constituted by both the extrafictional voice of a book, and the author's extratextual material. But it is also constituted by the narrative voice of the author's various fictional works, for these feed back into the author's status as a public figure. Here we see the value of Foucault's author function, not necessarily as the basis for a critique of authorial criticism, but as an anatomization of the ways in which an author's name "points to the existence of certain groups of discourse and refers to the status of this discourse within a society and culture" ("What Is an Author?" 123).

A founding premise of the "discursive narratology" I'm attempting to elaborate is that a work of fiction is a public statement which circulates in the same discursive formation as its author's nonfictional statements. Furthermore, narratives are not static for they are read differently each time according to their context of reception. Narrative authority, then, operates via a continuum between narrative voice, extrafictional voice and authorial voice, and establishes a dialogue with the public response. These voices have different textual forms and diegetic levels, but they co-exist as public statements in the same discursive field, and operate as interrelated rhetorical strategies for asserting the cultural significance of the novel to public life which establish a dialogue with the public response.

A theoretical framework for studying this continuum of voices can be derived from Genette's theory of the paratext.[3] For Genette, the "verbal or other productions" that frame and present a literary work to its readership constitute the paratext: "what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and more generally, to the public" (*Paratexts* 1). This paratext is a threshold between the text and its frame "that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back" (2). Genette works with a spatial relationship between text and paratext, so that the location of a paratextual element "within the same volume" (4) can be defined as a peritext, while the elements which are "located outside the book, generally with the help of the media" (5) can be defined as the

epitext. "In other words," Genette writes, "for those who are keen on formulae, *paratext = peritext + epitext*" (5; original emphasis). Genette also works with a temporal relationship between text and paratext, pointing out prior, original, and later or delayed paratexts, defined in relation to the date of the text's original publication.

The significance of the paratext to my work is the emphasis Genette places on its pragmatic status as a form of authorial communication in which the addressee is the public. "By definition," Genette claims, "something is not a paratext unless the author or one of his associates accepts responsibility for it, although the degree of responsibility may vary" (9). Of most importance is Genette's emphasis on the functionality of the paratext, arguing:

> Indeed, this fringe, always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction:* a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that—whether well or poorly understood and achieved—is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies). (2)

My approach has two crucial points of departure from Genette's model. First is the claim that this paratext is not only the author's attempt to frame a positive interpretation of the fiction, but an attempt to establish the fictional text as the basis for the cultural authority of the author as a public figure. For my purposes, Lanser's extrafictional voice will be located within the peritextual elements of the book, and linked via a discursive continuum to the authorial voice that is manifested in what Genette calls "the public authorial epitext," comprised of interviews, essays, etc. Secondly, I will define paratext more broadly than Genette in the sense that if it constitutes "a zone of transaction," an attempt to influence the public, this zone must also include textual phenomena produced by the reading public as the other party in this transaction. The interview, for instance, a key feature of the "public authorial epitext," necessarily includes readerly responses in the form of the interviewer's questions, and itself is an example of a transaction between author and reader over the significance of the text. The paratext, then, I am arguing, is a type of discursive formation, a set of textual statements in which the relations between these statements construct the text as its object. This leads to my

Paratext

epitext (Author) <—> peritext (extrafictional voice) <—> text (narrator > narratee) <—> epitext (reader)

FIGURE 2   Paratext

discursive reformulation of the diagram of narrative communication, as shown in figure 2.

A discursive approach to the narrative communication model situates the narrative text in a broader discursive formation to investigate how narrative authority emerges out of the relations between subject positions within this formation. So the epitext (author and reader), the peritext (extrafictional voice) and the text (narrative voice) contain the discursive sites at which these subject positions are articulated, and together the three sites constitute the paratextual zone of transaction, the discursive formation, in which what is being "transacted" is not so much textual meaning, but the significance of the text to public discourse. I have excluded the implied author and the implied reader from this model because, while they may be legitimate critical/cognitive constructs which facilitate reading, they are not concrete subject positions within or without the text so much as they are anthropomorphic postulations of the act of reading. I have retained the narratee as a fictional subject position because, especially in omniscient narration, it is given textual form by virtue of a specific narratorial address. The two-way arrows indicate that each discursive site facilitates a dialogue between the subject positions, that communication is always ongoing, drawing into play the temporal relations of a zone of transaction, and that the text itself always gestures outwards or beyond to public dialogue on the paratextual level.

Omniscient Authority

A key reason for postulating an implied author has been the need to retain the valuable theoretical distinction between author and narrator. Susan Lanser points out, though: "If an author–narrator separation is true in the abstract, it is nonetheless not abstractions that determine the reading of literature, but the conventions governing linguistic and literary use" (*Narrative Act* 149). She goes on to argue that "in the absence of direct markings

which separate the public narrator from the extrafictional voice, so long as it is possible to give meaning to the text within the equation author = narrator, readers will conventionally make this equation" (151). Omniscient narration is one fictional form for which such an equation is traditionally made, and recognizing this is crucial for understanding omniscient narrative authority beyond that of a literary convention. Hence the need to frame the relationship between narrator and author in pragmatic and flexible terms beyond the binarism of formalist distinctions if we are to understand the historical contingency of omniscient narration. The narrator and the author may be separate entities, but the act of narration, while fictional, nonetheless constitutes a statement within public discourse which is attributed to the author. The intrusive commentary of omniscient narration draws attention to this relationship, so that the "fictionality" of its discourse can be seen as a rhetorical device for asserting the importance of the novelist in public intellectual life, particularly when this narrative voice resonates textually with the extrafictional and extratextual voices of the author. As Lanser points out, "the equivalence of author and narrator implies an authorial responsibility that is similar to an author's responsibility for his or her nonfictional work" (153).

So if omniscient authority is not so much a textual phenomenon, the narrator's complete knowledge of the fictional world, but a type of narrative performance articulated through commentary, it gestures outwards, extratextually, to a particular figure of authorship. And if the narrative authority of contemporary omniscience no longer relies, as it did in previous centuries, on the consonance of its formal conventions with the cultural authority of the novel itself, this performance must necessarily operate with a tension between its form and its status. The narrators of contemporary omniscience, I am suggesting, must gesture outwards to the broader realm of public discourse, in which less "universal" modes of public address circulate, in order to gain traction for their commentary. And here a knowledge of authorial voice becomes important, not for anchoring a biographical reading of a book, but for understanding how contemporary omniscient narration engages with the very question of novelistic authority.

The Paratext of David Lodge's *Author, Author*

I will conclude with a discussion of David Lodge's *Author, Author*, which provides a good example of how contemporary omniscient authority

operates along a discursive continuum from narratorial to authorial voice, and of a narrative text whose paratext stages an ongoing debate over the status of contemporary fiction. This book, which operates in the mode I have labeled the *literary historian,* self-consciously situates itself in the generic boundaries between novel and biography as it reconstructs a period in the life of Henry James: his relationship with George Du Maurier, and his forays into writing for the theatre. The rhetorical purpose of the narrator is clear: to demonstrate the influence of James's catastrophic attempts at writing for the theatre on both his life and his novelistic output. This is in the service of demonstrating the importance of James to the history of the novel. *Author, Author* opens with a present-tense account of James on his deathbed, immediately establishing the narrator's diegetic authority through historical detail and asserting his moral authority through commentary:

> London, December 1915. In the master bedroom (never was the estate agent's epithet more appropriate) of Flat 21, Carlyle Mansions, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, the distinguished author is dying—slowly but surely. In Flanders, less than two hundred miles away, other men are dying more quickly, more painfully, more pitifully—young men, mostly, with their lives still before them, blank pages that will never be filled. The author is seventy-two. He has had an interesting and varied life. (3)

A biographical summary completes the paragraph, underpinning the right of the narrator to place James's comparatively rich life in immediate historical context. The rest of this opening frame narrative is variably focalized through James's deathbed companions, but the bulk of the novel, which revisits his life, is internally focalized through James, although the preponderance of summary means the guiding presence of the narrator-biographer is palpable. The major exception to this structure is a chapter covering the key scene of the opening night of James's stage play, *Guy Domville.* The chapter begins: "In his practice as a novelist and short story writer, Henry had developed a firm faith in the superior expressiveness and verisimilitude of the limited point of view" (230). The narrator amplifies this comment with an account of the technical means by which James felt the limited point of view could be realized. "The antithetical method," the narrator continues, "was well exemplified by *Trilby,* in which the authorial narrator, in Thackerayan fashion, took out his puppets from the box, and set them capering, and told you

in his own confiding ruminating voice exactly what they were all thinking at a given moment" (230). The narrator, then, is highly self-conscious of James's position in literary history, his contribution to the diminishment of the authority of the nineteenth-century omniscient narrator.

This discussion of narrative form serves to justify a structural shift to multiple focalization, providing a comprehensive account of the fateful opening night of *Guy Domville* from the perspective of a range of different participants. The narrator has James speculating that to do justice to the events of the evening which he later pieced together from second-hand information, he would have to imagine that "while his story, with its drastically limited point of view, was proceeding, other connected stories were in progress, other points of view were in play, at the same time, in parallel, in brackets as it were" (231). The narrator dutifully provides readers with these stories, replete with brackets and amplified by his omniscient knowledge.

The novel concludes by returning to the present-tense frame narrative of James's death bed. In this last section the narrator intrudes overtly to draw attention to the narrating instance: "*as I conjure up this deathbed scene, looking at it as through the curved transparency of a crystal ball*" (373, original emphasis). It is obvious then that the narrator's omniscient knowledge is a conflation of historical research and fictional speculation, and his authority relies not only on making this manifest, but on explaining why. In one of these italicized interpolations, the narrator clearly establishes his temporal distance from the story:

> *It is therefore tempting to indulge in a fantasy of somehow time-travelling back to that afternoon of late February 1916, creeping into the master bedroom of Flat 21, Carlyle Mansions, casting a spell on the little group of weary watchers at the bedside, pulling up a chair oneself, and saying a few reassuring words to HJ, before he departs this world, about his literary future.* (375)

Omniscient commentary in this novel is not geared to a moral evaluation of character so much as it is to James's contribution to literary history, and the "communal mind" invoked is that established by the evidence of canonization, scholarly interest and popular cultural adaptation. The obvious conflation of narratorial with authorial voice encouraged by this commentary, linking the narrator to the extraliterary world, is given weight by the prefatorial comment in the extrafictional peritext:

Sometimes it seems advisable to preface a novel with a note saying that the story and the characters are entirely fictitious, or words to that effect. On this occasion a different authorial statement seems called for. Nearly everything that happens in this story is based on factual sources. With one insignificant exception, all the named characters were real people. Quotations from their books, plays, articles, letters, journals, etc., are their own words. But I have used a novelist's licence in representing what they thought, felt, and said to each other; and I have imagined some events and personal details which history omitted to record. So this book is a novel, and structured like a novel.

Here Lodge claims the authority of the historical record as well as that of novelistic convention in his biographical treatment of Henry James's life. Clearly the omniscient authority of this narrator is bound up in the contemporary "postmodern" debate about the generic boundaries and discursive status of history and fiction. The extrafictional voice operates not only to underpin the narrator's omniscient knowledge, but to link it with the professional status of Lodge himself, a well-regarded critic and theorist of the novel. The peritextual acknowledgments which follow the text shore up this status, providing bibliographic references and archival sources, as well as identifying the invented sections of the novel. The acknowledgements conclude by pointing out that only when he had completed the manuscript of *Author, Author,* did Lodge discover that Colm Tóibín's novel about Henry James, *The Master,* would be published in the same year. "I leave it to students of the zeitgeist to ponder the significance of these coincidences" (389). Hence Lodge anticipates the reception of his novel by "real" readers in the epitextual public sphere.

A survey of the reviews of *Author, Author* indicates that the novel was received and evaluated according to the coordinates established by Lodge's extrafictional voice: its hybrid generic status, and its comparison with Tóibín's *The Master.* Here I turn to James Wood's review as an exemplar because it provides a critique common to many reviews: the novel's lack of convincing interiority resulting from the language and form of biographical writing. Wood goes further, though, and links this problem specifically to the question of point of view. Like many reviewers, Wood points out the dilemma of writing a novel about Henry James, the "novelist of consciousness," before asserting:

It is not only that Lodge's prose must be judged by James's. The larger

> difficulty is that it is not always clear from whose point of view Lodge is writing. "Point of view," of course, was an obsession for James, because he had come to the conclusion, rightly, that there is no such thing in fiction as "omniscient narration." ("The Spoils" 3)

Ultimately, then, his aesthetic critique of Lodge's craft as a writer is based on an ideological critique of the narrator's omniscient presence, his display of unfocalized knowledge. Wood criticizes this omniscience not only for violating James's own aesthetic creed, but for being based less on accepted novelistic convention than on an appeal to an extraliterary figure of authorship: the biographer. On these grounds he compares Lodge's work unfavorably to Tóibín's, arguing that "Tóibín's willingness to take his novel seriously as a novel fruitfully detaches it from its historical referent; but Lodge's unwillingness to do so manacles it to mere record" (1).

One might say, then, that on balance, Lodge's extrafictional bid for the omniscient authority of his narrator was unsuccessful, with his novel generally seen to have failed in comparison with that of Tóibín, who employs the more favored internal focalization to explore James's interior life. As Wood points out, though, Tóibín is inventing a fictional character (while still historically grounded, as evidenced by his own list of references), whereas Lodge is attempting to imagine the real historical figure. Wood's review is a defense of the novel over any generic incursions on its terrain. And yet *Author, Author,* it could be argued, is concerned more with asserting the cultural authority of the novelist to contribute to contemporary critical and biographical scholarship on James than with simply drawing on this scholarship for verisimilitude.

Turning to academic articles as another form of paratextual public response by readers, we can see that these articles locate both novels within a particular discursive formation—academic scholarship on James—and argue that their form, the biographical novel, is what enables this link. Indeed, scholarly articles on these books tend to discuss them precisely in terms of the plausibility of their biographical speculation. In *The Cambridge Quarterly,* Max Saunders claims that

> the way for these novels was prepared by very specific developments in James biography and criticism. They didn't come out of nowhere, or out of a generalised "Zeitgeist," but out of recent rethinking of James's friendships with men and women. Where Lodge might be right, though, in that they might be a sign of our postmodern times, is in the fact that

these biographical explorations of James are presented as novels, not biographies, and that their autobiographical dimension is also emphasised. (125)

Saunders does, however, replicate Wood's aesthetic judgment on these novels: "where Tóibín allows fictional biography to do the work of literary criticism, Lodge increasingly fuses novel with lecture on literary technique in *Author, Author,*" suggesting that Lodge "is better at theorizing literary consciousness than representing it" (126). Again we see extraliterary claims to narrative authority established by Lodge's omniscient narrator judged in terms of the modernist aesthetic of impersonality.

John Harvey follows a similar line of comparison, in the *Yearbook of English Studies,* yet still discusses both novels in terms of their contribution to Jamesian biographical and critical scholarship, speculating as to whether they have captured the "real" Henry James or the myth of Henry James, whether they have managed to reveal anything about his works themselves. In the *Journal of Modern Literature,* Daniel Hannah treats the narratorial intrusions in *Author, Author* as a conscious intervention in current literary-critical discourse: "Against these two forms, Lodge calls on fictional biography as a form that might both more graciously reclaim (rather than merely expose) James on a popular stage and reposition "queer" James as an author of consciousness and style (rather than an author of erotic subtexts)" (80). Like reviewers in the mainstream press, these academic articles have little interest in a rigid distinction between author and narrator, and no theoretical need for the implied author. Saunders points out that Lodge concludes his novel "in his own authorial first person" (126), and Karen Scherzinger, in the *Henry James Review,* indicates that: "As his novel draws to an end, Lodge finally gives up all pretense of disguising his own presence and seeks to recuperate James one last time" (191).

If these reviews and articles constitute the readerly epitext in a broader paratextual discursive formation which constructs *Author, Author* as its subject, and circulate around the authority of Lodge's omniscient narrator, the other side of this zone of transaction is represented by Lodge's *The Year of Henry James: The Story of a Novel,* which was published two years after *Author, Author* appeared to "mixed" reviews. This book constitutes what Genette would call a "later epitext," and specifically an authorial response. If the narrative voice of *Author, Author* gestures outwards to the authority of its extrafictional voice, this discursive continuum can be traced further to the authorial voice in *The Year of Henry James*

where Lodge draws upon his authority as a literary critic to contextualize his aesthetic choices in relation to point of view. One of his strategies is to provide extracts from his private notebooks, demonstrating an awareness of the relevance of his choices beyond the artistic integrity of his treatment of the subject:

> A persistent theme in many of the notes, widely separated in time, is an anxiety that the novel should not read like a biography, and the hope that I could avoid this effect by foregrounding the machinery of narration itself, through abrupt time-shifts, switches of point of view and "postmodernist" authorial interpolations. (50)

Lodge proceeds to quote a section from his notebook which reads: "*On reflection I think it would be a mistake to draw attention to myself as the 'real' author in this way. I couldn't then 'invent' freely. The authorial narrator must have authority*" (52). He then comments that

> what this first attempt revealed to me was that I really wanted to write a novel in which the joins between documented facts and imaginative speculation would be seamless and invisible, and that drawing attention to myself as narrator would entail coming clean about the extent to which I was selecting from and embellishing the historical record. (52)

It seems, though, that Lodge did end up "foregrounding the machinery of narration itself" through his omniscient narrator, but saved coming clean about his embellishments for the acknowledgements, thus dividing the authorial narrator's authority between the narrative and the extrafictional voice of the text. *Author, Author,* by virtue of this epitextual authorial response, becomes a discursive site at which its narrative voice enacts the struggle of contemporary fiction for cultural authority, and part of the paratextual zone of transaction regarding the significance of the novel in public discourse.

I have argued throughout this book that the emergence of contemporary omniscience alongside cultural anxieties about the relevance of the novel in the new millennium can be read as symptomatic of a broader desire to reclaim the cultural authority of nineteenth-century novelists. At the same time, novelists aware of the legacy of postmodernism have developed new modes of omniscient narration. In another public authorial epitext, a 2005 interview for *Sources* magazine (Gallix et al.), Lodge provides a similar context for his novel:

There are lots of people who openly say that they cannot be bothered reading novels but they read biographies all the time. It is a pity but I think it may also have something to do with the lack of a coherent body of shared values in the reading community. If you think of the great nineteenth-century novelists, they could assume their readers shared basically the same beliefs, the same values, the same ideals of what the good life was, what evil was. In a much more relativistic age, a multicultural society with different ethical systems competing or coexisting, it is very difficult to create a fictional world in which you have the kind of moral authority which the classic novelists used to have. But if you say: "this is how it was, this is what happened," it does not raise the same expectations. Instead of trying to persuade readers to share your view of life, you just say: "this is a human record: make of it what you will. (21)

The rhetorical strategy of the omniscient narrator of *Author, Author* is thus simultaneously to draw upon the contemporary popularity and cultural authority of biography and to reassert the novel as a pre-eminent mode of exploring historical figures. This narrative voice cannot be understood in purely formalist terms, it must be located in a broader discursive context which recognizes the significance of extrafictional and extratextual subject positions to the performance of narrative authority.