Narrative Discourse

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Chapter 1

Who Is Speaking to Whom

The Communicative Discourse of Narrative Art

Narrative appears in a range of contexts and forms. In many cases, stories are told only once or twice because they concern events of interest to the speaker and perhaps the addressee, but to relatively few people beyond that. In other cases, stories may have greater general appeal and may be repeated by a range of tellers to a range of addressees because of their humor, pathos, or other engaging qualities. Narratives of verbal art are, prototypically, works that are widely disseminated beyond their initial teller and his or her associates to a broad and various audience. In keeping with this, they are recounted for their emotional and thematic impact, not for their direct relevance to some current situation. In line with these purposes, a narrative of verbal art is likely to have been rehearsed and revised, made more thematically nuanced and more emotionally powerful as the author generated and evaluated details of the story and ways of telling it. This is particularly clear in written narratives or literature (as opposed to orature). As a result, both what is told in literary narratives and how it is told tend to become increasingly complex. But that complexity is not random. It is the product of the human mind and human social interaction. Thus it follows the general principles that guide human cognitive processing, human emotional response, human interaction, and so on. It is the purpose of the present chapter to outline some basic components of this complexity in the case of narrative discourse.
As already noted, within narratology, “story” refers to the events recounted in a narrative, events as they, so to speak, “really” occurred. “Discourse,” in contrast, refers to the way in which they are told. As Seymour Chatman puts it, “In simple terms, the story is the what in a narrative that is depicted, discourse the how” (Story 19). In David Herman’s words, it is “the difference between the chronological series of events recounted . . . and the manner in which those events are organized in the recounting” (Story 214).

Discourse may be divided into two broad categories. The first concerns who speaks to whom. The second concerns what is said. The former is sometimes termed “narrational,” but that is somewhat misleading, as it may suggest only the operation of narrators and narratees. It is perhaps better referred to as the “communicative” part of discourse. The other part of discourse—thus, what is communicated—is often referred to as “plot,” but is perhaps better thought of as the “representational” component. This and the following chapters are concerned specifically with the communicative part of discourse, though of course the two parts overlap, and one cannot discuss who speaks to whom in a particular case without also talking about what is said. In Jakobson’s terms, who speaks to whom is a matter of a sender relaying a message to a receiver (see 66). But, in narrative discourse, who speaks to whom is somewhat more complicated than the division between sender and receiver may suggest.

The Basic Components of Narrative Discourse

Though there is certainly disagreement about parts of the structure, narratologists generally see the communicative part of narrative discourse as involving the following basic components:

- Real Author [Implied Author [Narrator [Focalizer [story [embedded discourse [embedded story]]]]] Narratee] Implied Reader] Real Reader

The real author is, of course, the flesh-and-blood person who composed the narrative. The real reader is any given flesh-and-blood person who reads the narrative. The real author and the real reader are commonly seen as being “outside” the text. This is marked by the fact that they are outside the square brackets. Thus the outermost square brackets in some sense mark the bounds of the text, or perhaps more properly
the textual world. The implied author and the implied reader are, then, commonly understood as part of the textual world (rather than the real world) in the sense that they may be inferred (at least primarily) from what is given in the text. (The following discussion will complicate and, in significant ways, alter this standard characterization.)

There has been considerable controversy over just what an implied author is and whether such a thing exists. Some writers see the implied author as just what a reader construes from a text. For example, Bal writes that “the implied author is the result of the investigations of the meaning of a text, and not the source of that meaning” (18). But this would seem more appropriately termed an “inferred author,” as Chatman points out (Coming 77). “Implied” suggests a norm that defines the validity or invalidity of readers’ inferences—what Bal tacitly presupposes when she refers to investigating “the meaning of a text.”

In keeping with the suggestions of the word “implied,” it is common to see the implied author as a complex of norms. Thus the implied author is often understood as the standard against which one may judge the reliability of narrators. But then there is controversy over whether those norms are to be understood as “anthropomorphic,” or more accurately whether they are to be understood as tied to a person or as somehow purely textual. Put differently, there is controversy over whether linking norms to an author, in whatever form, simply reintroduces an intentional fallacy. Moreover, if one opts for “tied to a person,” then one faces the further problem of distinguishing the implied author from the real author. Some writers, such as James Phelan, see the implied author as “a streamlined version of the real author, an actual or purported subset of the real author’s capacities, traits, attitudes, beliefs, values, and other properties” (Living 45). Other writers see the implied author as an idealized version of the real author (see, for example, Dan Shen’s summary of Xiangjun She’s work [172]).

The following section will present an argument for a close relation between the implied author and the real author. The distinction between them will be drawn not in terms of personal traits, but in terms of types of intent. A crucial part of that intent is the author’s understanding of his or her readership—which leads to the implied reader.

In any act of communication, the speaker has a certain conception of the addressee. Clearly, in literary works with any sort of success, the real author does not envision his or her real readers. Those readers are necessarily too numerous and diverse. But he or she does tacitly assume that the reader will have certain sensitivities, certain capacities, certain sorts
of knowledge. At minimum, the author conceives of a reader who will be able to follow the story, detect ironies, infer thematic concerns, and so forth. Put in terms of the model thus far, the author writes for a reader who will be able to infer the implied author. Just as the implied author is (primarily) an implication of the text, the implied reader is (primarily) an implication of the text. Implied readership is most obviously marked by anything that provides evidence for inferring the implied author. However, it is also marked by such communicative strategies as providing or not providing background information and highlighting or not highlighting important points. In, for example, explaining (or not explaining) a historical event, a text may suggest something about the implied reader and about (the implied author’s) expectations regarding that reader’s knowledge.

The implied reader and the implied author should not be taken as defined in all details. The implied author presumably involves a great deal of indeterminacy. Likewise, real readers may adhere to the norms of the implied reader but still maintain considerable leeway in just how they understand and respond to a given text. For example, a given story may present a narrator as unreliable. Suppose the character is a politician who makes certain campaign promises. Suppose he or she is defeated in the election so that no one ever finds out exactly what he or she would do in office. The implied author may indicate that the reader should not simply believe the campaign promises. He or she should expect that often the character would not follow through on the promises if elected. But there may be indeterminacy for the implied author as to whether the politician would follow through on any of the promises and, if so, which ones. Readers may adhere to the norms of the implied reader and still disagree among themselves on this issue. Indeed, this is one of those points where the difference between the implied author and the real author becomes clear as well. Specifically, the real author may have an opinion on this issue, which is not necessarily more valid than that of any other reader. Of course, to say that a particular aspect of the implied author/implied reader is indeterminate is not necessarily to say that the textual evidence for all alternatives is equal. Here, as elsewhere, there is a profile of ambiguity.

The next level of communicative discourse is that of the narrator and narratee. The narrator is the voice telling the story. Narratologists distinguish different sorts of narrator. For example, the narrator may be “homodiegetic,” thus part of the story, or “heterodiegetic,” thus not part of the story (see Abbott “Narration” for this and other ways of cat-
Egorizing narrators). The narrator also may be unreliable or reliable and, related to this, he or she may be treated with or without irony. Irony is commonly understood as a certain sort of discrepancy between the implied author and the narrator. A standard example is Jonathan Swift’s “A Modest Proposal.” In that work, the speaker (equivalent to the narrator) suggests that the problem of Irish poverty may be solved in part by using Irish babies for food. The speaker proposes the idea with apparent seriousness. However, based in part on the assumption that no English person of the time would seriously advocate cannibalism, and based on the common association of cannibalism with barbarism, one infers an attitude different from that of the narrator, an attitude that is critical of British policies in Ireland—so critical, indeed, as to view those policies as barbaric. That inferred attitude is held by the implied author, and it is relative to that implied author that one judges the text ironic. One does not need to read any other works by the real author (e.g., letters, a diary) to learn that he was not an advocate of cannibalism.

The narrator is, so to speak, on the cusp of the storyworld. As the names indicate, the heterodiegetic narrator is just outside the story. The homodiegetic narrator is inside the story, or rather inside a story. In this way, the narrator may be part of the represented storyworld or not—or both, if the narrator appears in a frame story but not in the embedded (perhaps main) story.

The narratee is the addressee counterpart to the narrator, just as the real reader is the counterpart of the real author and the implied reader is the counterpart of the implied author. On the other hand, there are some significant differences among the three. As already noted, the real reader is not in fact addressed by the real author, who cannot possibly envision even a fraction of his or her readers. Moreover, the implied reader is perhaps not so much an addressee for the implied author as a set of sensitivities that allow accurate construction of the implied author, or of the story as guided by the implied author as a norm. In contrast, the narratee is the addressee of the narrator. One important role of the narratee comes when a homodiegetic narrator tells versions of an embedded story to more than one narratee, thereby revealing different aspects of the embedded events and of his or her own character through differences among the tellings (or between one such telling and information about the event gleaned from elsewhere). On the other hand, one may infer implicit narratees as well. As will be considered in more detail below, it is sometimes possible to infer a narratee from the information
or attitudes presupposed by a narrator. In this way, the narratee too is marginal to the represented story. Like the narrator, he or she may be represented or only implied by the representation.

While the narrator and the narratee may be part of the represented discourse, they are part of the communicative discourse as well. This is not precisely the case for the focalizer. The focalizer is located more squarely within the storyworld. Moreover, the focalizer does not directly communicate story representations with anyone. The focalizer is still important for discourse and is appropriately studied within discourse analysis because the focalizing function is part of the selection and organization of information. Specifically, the focalizer is the center of consciousness that orients the narrator’s treatment of the storyworld. (There may be more than one focalizer, of course. But the same points hold for multiple focalization.) For example, the narrator may report only the information that bears on the condition of the focalizer. In a war, for example, the narrator may leave aside information on the battle except insofar as it has an impact on the focalizer (usually the protagonist). Going further, the narrator may report information only insofar as it is actually available to the focalizer, representing the focalizer’s psychological states, but not those of anyone else.

We might briefly consider where these components fit within an interpretation of Hemingway’s “A Very Short Story.” The real author is obviously Hemingway. An interpretation focusing on the real author would pay attention to the sources of the story in Hemingway’s own life. It would be a case of biographical criticism. The implied author is a bit more complex. Indeed, this case suggests that implied authorship may be understood at different levels—a point explored in the following chapters. The simplest is at the level of this story alone. But there is also at least the level of the book. This possibility is complicated by critical disagreement as to whether In Our Time (which includes “A Very Short Story”) should be considered a collection or something more like a novel (see Moddelmog for the second view; for discussion, see Barloon). There are several differences these levels might make. In this story considered alone, it is difficult to ascertain much of any attitude toward war in general or toward the First World War in particular. However, a more broadly construed implied author may contextualize the story in such a way as to make it less about relations between men and women generally and more about men and women in wartime. (For example, Barloon notes that the book “invites a question . . .—to what extent is In Our Time about the Great War, or war generally?” [5].)
In any case, the narrator here seems very close to the implied author (and, indeed, to the real author, as a number of critics have stressed [see, for example, Scholes Semiotics 121–26]). On the other hand, there are points at which the two are not identical, points at which the reader needs to infer an implied authorial view beyond what is stated by the narrator. Take, for example, the statement that “they agreed he should go home to get a job.” The verb “agree” can mean either “formally accept” or “genuinely share the conviction.” After being convicted of misconduct, Jones might “agree” to apologize to his opponent, but that does not mean that he genuinely shares the conviction that he should apologize. Similarly, here, the decision about the soldier returning home alone may suggest genuinely shared conviction or formal acceptance only. The narrator leaves the phrase ambiguous. Contrast, for example, “After some disagreement they agreed to her recommendation that he should go home to get a job.” One might begin to construct an implied author who understands the phrase in the sense of formal acceptance only, thus an implied author whose views go beyond what is stated by the narrator. Note that this does not say they contradict the narrator. We often think that there is a narrator/implied author difference only in cases of contradiction. The point of choosing an example such as this is in part to indicate that the differences may be more subtle.

More strikingly, the subsequent elaboration—“It was understood,” and so on—could mean that the two were of one mind on the issue. However, it could also mean that the dominant partner made it a tacit condition for the marriage. The reader gets some idea that the implied author may have the latter in mind after reading that the restrictions were entirely on the soldier, not on Luz. The suggestion, then, may be that Luz made it understood. Moreover, the restrictions are very extreme. The understanding is, first, that he will not drink. That seems fair and prudent. But it is not followed by, say, “and she would try to be brave.” Rather, it is followed by the rather difficult restriction that he would not “see his friends.” Though a bit extreme, it may be plausible in the context of giving up alcohol, if his friends were drinking buddies. But the extremity of the requirement is indicated by the extension of his isolation to include “anyone in the States.” In connection with this, we might infer an implied author for whom Luz is being overly demanding and even somewhat authoritarian (especially given her later behavior). Indeed, the exact phrasing of the sentence is even more extreme than just indicated. The precise statement is, “It was understood he would not drink, and he did not want to see his friends or anyone in the States.” He
could hardly want to condemn himself to solitary confinement. But the “understanding” goes so far as to govern not only his behavior, but even his emotional attitudes.

The issue of focalization in the story is complicated. Probably the simplest account makes this a case of dual focalization where the narrator alternates between Luz and the soldier. However, there is clearly a stronger orientation toward the soldier, since the reader is given some information about him that Luz does not have, but, it seems, no information about Luz that he does not have. In keeping with this, Scholes has demonstrated that the story translates easily into first-person narration from the soldier’s point of view (substituting “I” for “he”), but not from Luz’s point of view (substituting “I” for “Luz” or “she”). This bias in focalization may suggest a preference on the part of the implied author.

Most readers would probably say that there is no narratee in this work. However, there seems to be a narratee in the same sense that there is a (heterodiegetic) narrator. There are hints of this narratee from the information that the narrator presupposes, but that is clearly not presupposed for the implied reader. In other words, one can isolate a narratee through its difference from the implied reader. The introduction noted that “A Very Short Story” does not include an “orientation” explaining who the soldier and Luz are. Indeed, the reader is never given the soldier’s name. The phrasing from the start suggests that the addressee is supposed to know who “he” is and who “they” are. It seems clear that that addressee is not the implied reader because no reader, not even an “ideal” reader (e.g., in the Structuralist sense [see Eagleton 121]), could know who the soldier is at the beginning of the narrative. The addressee, then, is a narratee—a heterodiegetic narratee. The narratee presumably shares the narrator’s interest in the soldier prior to the beginning of the story. Indeed, the fact that the soldier is always referred to by a pronoun, while Luz is identified by name, suggests that this narrative may be viewed as implicitly part of a larger discourse. The topic of that larger discourse would not be Luz, but the unnamed (because familiar and unmistakable) soldier.

The implied reader is, again, different from the narratee. However, this implied reader is able to piece together the story background from the clues in the text. Thus he or she can arrive at the information already familiar to the narratee. The implied reader is also able to sense the ironic distance between the implied author and the narrator, drawing out the implications of such phrases as “It was understood.” Arguably, the implied reader is more closely aligned with the soldier than with
Luz—to use Murray Smith’s term for increased “access to the actions, thoughts, and feelings” of a character (220). This is what one would expect, given that the focalization of the text is biased in that direction. But it does not follow that one needs to have an allegiance with the soldier (again, drawing on Murray Smith’s distinction). The implied reader follows interpretive norms. Thus the implied reader understands the attitudes and evaluations of the implied author. But there is no requirement of sharing or not sharing those attitudes and evaluations. Put differently, a real reader can be mistaken about an implied author’s compassion for a character. For example, in my view, it would be mistaken to say that the implied author lacks sympathy for Luz. But a real reader cannot be spoken of as mistaken in his or her own compassion for a character. Thus I cannot say that a student is mistaken if he or she has no sympathy for Luz.

As the last point makes clear, the real reader of the story will differ from the implied reader in many ways. Most simply, the real reader is free to fill in or imagine indeterminate details as he or she wishes. More significantly, as just indicated, he or she can reject the attitudes and evaluations of the implied author (and the real author). The real reader can even decide to reject more fundamental aspects of the implied reader. He or she may decide that one part of the work is a fair representation of male–female relations, but that another part is guided by patriarchal ideology. In connection with this, real readers sometimes contradict the apparently clear determination of the story, saying things such as “No, Luz would never do that. She must have done . . . instead.” This does not, I believe, violate principles of the narrative as long as the reader realizes that he or she is contradicting the implied reader and implied author. (Needless to say, the reader does not have to formulate this realization in these technical terms.) On the other hand, a reader may fail to correctly infer the implied author and implied reader, or, more simply, the story. So it is indeed possible for real readers to be mistaken. Indeed, real readers usually are mistaken to some degree. Thus this model of narrative discourse suggests that there is genuine freedom of reader imagination and response in that readers are free to reject even the straightforward formulation of story elements. But that does not mean that there is no issue of getting things right or wrong. While there are, again, many indeterminacies, there are also aspects of the story that are indicated by the discourse with greater or lesser certainty.

Leaving aside a few theoretical ideas (e.g., the “profile of ambiguity”) and elaboration, the preceding outline is largely consistent with com-
mon views in mainstream narratology. However, there are difficulties that arise in connection with each of the preceding components. Moreover, there are aspects of narrative discourse that are not captured by this analytic. The remainder of this chapter will go through the components in greater detail reformulating them in response to some of these problems.

Real Author/Implied Author

Perhaps the most obvious question about the idea of the implied author concerns whether it is simply redundant. Isn’t the implied author covered by the real author? In one sense, the answer to this question is “Yes.” The implied author must, in some way, be the result of the goals and interests of the real author as he or she puts together the narrative. For example, if there is irony in a work, this is presumably because the real author put the work together in such a way that there is some untrustworthiness of the narrator. However, there is another sense in which the answer to this question is “No.” It is not necessarily the case that the untrustworthiness of the narrator is untrustworthiness relative to the real author himself or herself. In other words, there may actually be a difference, indeed an opposition between the real author and the implied author.

Consider the following variation on the case of Jonathan Swift. Imagine another author, call him Jonathan Sloe, a politician who is trying to appeal to a group of voters who are concerned about Irish poverty and object strongly to British policies. Sloe writes his “Modest Proposal” in which he recommends eating Irish babies. The irony is clear. Anyone reading or hearing the piece would grasp its irony immediately. They would rightly infer that the implied author is harshly critical of British policies in Ireland. But, in fact, Sloe wholly supports those policies. Sloe’s own feelings do not affect the irony of his pamphlet. However pro-British he may be, he has put together a treatise that is ironic and in which the author implied by the text is opposed to British policy.

As this indicates, the role of the implied author is easiest to isolate when a real author has written insincerely. One could give a technical definition of insincerity in terms of distance between the implied author and the real author, just as one can give a technical definition of irony in terms of distance between the narrator and the implied author. Indeed, generally, these distinctions become consequential to
the degree that there are differences. It is important to distinguish the implied author from the narrator to the extent that the implied author establishes a norm from which the narrator deviates. When the narrator adheres to the norms of the implied author, the distinction is not terribly consequential.

Indeed, there seems to be a general principle here. Readers seem to distinguish narrator/implied author/real author only to the degree that they diverge. Moreover, such readers judge them to diverge only when given reason to believe that they diverge. In other words, a basic principle of discursive interpretation is that the default assumption is congruence of narrator, implied author, and real author. Moreover, even when there is incongruence (thus irony or insincerity), readers generally assume this is limited to the points where there is evidence of divergence. Thus one may say that inference to incongruence is motivated and localized.

“Congruence” seems to be the appropriate term here rather than “identity” for the technical reason that the narrator may be spoken of as asserting certain situations or events to be facts, whereas, for many of those situations or events, the real author is asserting only that they are part of the story. On the other hand, the implied author is also usually making some claims about the real world. In this way, the implied author may be understood as always theoretically different from the narrator in part because he or she can make claims about the real world and not merely about the storyworld.

The difference between claims about the fictional world and claims about the real world is important in a number of areas, including understanding the relation between the implied author and the real author. For example, it seems that one only counts a work as insincere to the extent that it suggests certain implied authorial claims about the real world that the real author does not hold to be true. If there is a discrepancy between the implied author and the real author in a claim confined to the fictional world, readers would most likely consider that unintentional and thus some sort of flaw in technique rather than insincerity.

Consider again Hemingway’s story. One might first look at a claim that is particular to the fictional world—for example, the claim that Luz wrote a Dear John letter to the soldier. Obviously, the narrator communicates this. There is no indication in the text that the implied author has a different idea (i.e., that the narrator is unreliable on this). Suppose, however, it was discovered that, in Hemingway’s view, the letter was made up by the soldier. Since there is no indication of this in the story, most readers would probably consider it a flaw in the execution.
In contrast, the story suggests that attachment deprivation or loneliness can drive people (perhaps women particularly) into imprudent attachment relations. It also suggests that anger at attachment rejection can lead people (perhaps particularly men) into imprudent sexual relations. If it turned out that Hemingway did not believe either of these things about the real world (perhaps he just thought readers would like these ideas), readers might be inclined to see some sort of insincerity in the narrative.

If one were to try to isolate objective rules here—following the example of Rabinowitz— one would probably come up with something along the following lines. A real author may be judged sincere or insincere for any implied authorial claim about the real world. These claims need not be articulated explicitly. Rather, unless there is specific reason to believe otherwise, one generally assumes that the real author is claiming truth for general causal principles, for ethical norms, and for explanations and evaluations of actual events, as well as some particulars bearing on actual events (e.g., when a fictional film about an actual war massacre suggests that superior officers were aware of the massacre). “Reason to believe otherwise” would include, for example, genre conventions (e.g., those of fantasy) that allow for the changes in physical, psychological, historical, or other principles.

As just indicated, the Hemingway story provides an example of general causal principles—in this case, general psychological causal principles (perhaps gender-based). But some readers may have been inclined to question the extent to which such psychological generalizations could really justify a judgment of insincerity (if it turned out that Hemingway did not believe them). It certainly does not seem to be as strong a case as that of Jonathan Sloe, with his misleading implications of anti-imperialism. In connection with this, one would probably have to hierarchize these components. It is probably the case that, on the whole, readers consider discrepancies in ethical/political principles or judgments to be more insincere than discrepancies in ethically and politically neutral facts or empirical generalizations. Readers also seem to be more inclined to label an author insincere if he or she gains materially by the discrepancy, as in Sloe’s case. To capture this, one would need to further qualify the rule.

On the other hand, all of this may suggest that a very different approach is in order. In judgments of insincerity, people are probably not guided by objective rules at all. Rather, such “rules” approximate something else—feelings and the cognitive developments that are connected
with those feelings. Specifically, a reader has an emotional response to a story. Part of that emotional response is to fictional aspects of the story. But part of that response bears on the real world. This is manifest most significantly in one’s attitude toward the world after one finishes reading the fiction and resumes daily life. That attitude may involve one’s judgment of political policies, one’s understanding of other cultures, one’s view of historical events, one’s expectations about romance, or many other matters.

In this context, a plausible hypothesis is that readers tacitly judge a real author’s sincerity by reference to their own emotional response to the real world, as that is affected by the narrative at issue. In other words, readers tacitly react to certain aspects of the work as if they were claimed true about the real world in ways that those readers care about. Those reactions guide readers in evaluating the author’s sincerity. Specifically, one judges an author to be insincere—or, rather, condemns an author for being insincere—to the degree that one feels one has been misled by the author on some issue of emotional significance.

However one understands the nature of insincerity, the very possibility of real authorial insincerity leads back to the more general issue of the relation between the implied author and the real author. On the one hand, the possibility of insincerity indicates that the implied author is not simply the real author. On the other hand, it also indicates that they cannot be entirely different. If they were entirely different, one would not judge the real author by reference to the implied author at all. Moreover, there are cases where knowledge about the real author has consequences for one’s understanding of the implied author. For example, suppose Jonathan Sloe is a well-known imperialist politician. He publishes his “Modest Proposal” in the context of many anti-Irish speeches and votes. Readers would certainly take this into account in interpreting the work. Readers would probably not conclude that he is really advocating cannibalism. However, readers may infer that the implied author is trying to create mirth by dehumanizing the Irish.

These points are related to the disagreement among narratologists regarding the nature of the implied author. As Nünning notes (“Implied Author” 240), there is a conflict between the view of the implied author as “a construct inferred and assembled by the reader” (Rimmon-Kenan 87) and the view of the implied author as “a streamlined version of the real author” (Phelan Living 45). The preceding discussion has already pointed out a problem with too close an identification of real and implied authors. There are cases in which the implied author is directly opposed
to the real author. It might seem that this leads to the reader-response version of the implied author. It is certainly true that the implied author has existence only as imagined by readers. But the issue is whether the implied author is wholly constructed by readers or, so to speak, reconstructed by them. The difference is that, in the case of “reconstruction,” there is a norm, a possibility of getting the implied author right or wrong. This leads back to the connection with the real author, since the real author would seem to be the obvious place where that norm could be defined. Moreover, the example of a publicly anti-Irish Sloe suggests that readers do commonly understand the implied author in relation to the real author. In certain contexts, a change in one’s understanding of the real author produces a change in one’s understanding of the implied author. But still the possibility of insincerity indicates that the implied author cannot simply be the real author, even part of the real author.

To complicate matters even further, there is a longstanding tradition in literary study that the author’s self-conscious ideas about a work—even the most sincere ideas—have no special status among possible interpretations. If the author’s interpretation of his or her work is not necessarily valid, then it would seem that the real author cannot stand as a norm for the implied author or anything else. At the same time, some theorists (e.g., E. D. Hirsch) have maintained that the only reasonable norm for interpretation is authorial intent, while Knapp and Michaels have gone so far as to maintain that we always interpret for authorial intent no matter what we think we are doing.

These problems may be at least partially resolved by refining ideas about authorial intent and the processes involved in meaning. The crucial, fundamental distinction here is between “productive” and “receptive” meaning. Most people have probably had the experience of saying something that they thought would be clever or funny, but that sounded crude or silly once actually uttered. Sometimes, one is able to sense this before committing the faux pas. In that case, one does something like hearing the words in one’s mind before actually saying them. These are instances of a conflict between one’s own productive and receptive meanings. More complicated cases of this come in revising something one has written. When I revise a book chapter, I am often trying to align my productive and receptive meanings, my sense of what I want to say and my sense of what I am likely to be understood as saying. In fact, my revision may go further. As I experience my text receptively, I may see connections and implications that I had missed initially. I may reject some of those, and elaborate on others. I may also change my mind about
some of my initial ideas. In this way, one may distinguish my initial productive intent from my subsequent, receptive intent.

This simple division provides a way of speaking about real authors and implied authors more clearly and with greater explanatory rigor. Specifically, the implied author may be understood normatively as the final receptive meaning of the real author, the receptive meaning of the author when he or she feels satisfied that the work is complete or “right.” This has several beneficial consequences.

First, it indicates that the meaning is indeed understood from a reader’s point of view. However, it does not thereby avoid norms (thus the possibility of saying that a particular interpretation is inaccurate), since it makes one particular receptive or reader-based meaning the standard. Indeed, this form of authorial intent preserves the central cases of determinacy that almost everyone sees as relevant. For example, critics generally believe that interpretations of a text should be confined to the meanings of words at the time the text was produced. Within most reader-oriented approaches, there is no reason for the reader not to bring in current meanings (e.g., twenty-first-century meanings when reading a medieval tale). From the perspective of authorial receptive intent, however, then-current word meanings are crucial. At the same time, however, this account largely filters out idiosyncratic meanings, such as personal associations that may have led an author to choose a particular word or image when producing the text initially.

In keeping with these points, this account has the advantage of giving particular importance to the text of the literary work. Various sorts of information will be significant and consequential for the receptive intent of the author, thus for the implied author. These would include what the author assumes to be common knowledge, including common knowledge about his or her own political views (as in the case of a publicly imperialist Sloe). But the bulk of the relevant information is almost certain to derive from the sentences that compose the narrative, from the utterance itself. In this way, it still makes sense to take the “implied author” as implied by the text—though it is now necessary to qualify that as “primarily” or “largely,” not wholly. Moreover, this allows one to conclude that some interpretations are warranted by the text and others are not—again, with the proviso that interpretation cannot be a matter of “the text alone,” even if it is primarily a matter of the text.

It is also worth noting that this division does provide a place for biographical criticism. Biographical criticism would have particular relevance for the productive intent of the work. Specifically, it is perhaps
the best way to isolate the causal antecedents of productive intent (e.g., in idiosyncratic associations). In this way, it is valuable for the comprehension of literary “making,” the psychology of creation, the particular generative processes of individual writers, and other topics. It is usually not as important to the interpretation of the literary work, since its focus tends to be on aspects of an author’s experience that were not public and thus not part of his or her receptive intent. On the other hand, it may be interpretively relevant insofar as it informs the reader of parts of the author’s life that were public but have been forgotten. Again, such public aspects of an author’s life may bear on the implied author.

In relation to this, such a receptive account also helps to filter out the author’s self-conscious statements about his or her meanings. In other words, it helps to explain and avoid the “intentional fallacy.” It might at first seem that authors must have direct introspective access to the reasons why a particular work feels right, thus why they receptively accept a particular revision as the completed work or final version. But, in fact, people are fairly bad at isolating such reasons for their feelings and evaluations. Even for some fairly simple responses, one’s stated reasons are often more akin to rationalizations. The problem becomes much worse for a highly complex behavior such as literary creation and evaluation. Consider the far simpler operation of forming regular plurals in English. Whenever an English speaker hears or utters a regular plural, he or she follows a rule. Thus any English speaker can fill in the plural of “gerb”—one gerb, two ____—even though he or she has never heard of a word “gerb.” However, if asked what the rule is, he or she is almost certain to get it wrong. He or she has self-consciously learned an orthographic rule—“add s.” This rule is therefore available to working memory. However, he or she processes English utterances by a more complex rule. Specifically, in regular English plurals, one adds [s] after unvoiced nonsibilants (as in cat/cats), [z] after voiced nonsibilants (as in dog/dogs or gerb/gerbs—spelled “s,” but pronounced [z]), and [əz] after sibilants (as in bush/bushes—spelled “es,” but pronounced [əz]). How likely is it that an author can formulate the reasons governing his or her receptive satisfaction with an entire novel when he or she probably cannot even formulate the reasons governing his or her receptive satisfaction with the plural “gerbs” or even “dogs”? Thus a receptive intent account of implied authorship fits well with current accounts of cognitive processing in such a way as to avoid the intentional fallacy.
Narrator and Narratee

In some ways, the situation with the narrator and narratee is much simpler, since there is no issue of a real person. But in some ways the issue is more complex for the same reason. The narrator and the narratee are part of the communicative discourse structure. But, of course, they are not actually communicating with one another. They are a fiction. How such fictional entities function to mimic communication is clear enough when both are overt. But things are much less clear when one or both are implicit, as in “A Very Short Story.”

To address these issues, one must first consider the basic function of a narrator. Perhaps here too it is helpful to compare the narrator with the author—not only the implied author, but the real author. Of course, the real author exists as a person in the material world and the narrator does not. But that is not functionally relevant here. From the perspective of the reader, the narrator, the implied author, and the real author are imagined people. Readers, of course, know that narrators are not real. But in order to respond to a narrator (e.g., to trust or distrust him or her), readers need to imagine him or her as a person. Thus the key difference here is not that authors are real and narrators are not. There has to be some other difference, a difference that is relevant to the response of readers—including the normative response of the implied reader.

As a first approximation, one might say that the basic function of a narrator is to report the story, to represent (or misrepresent) a storyworld that is in some way separate from the narrator’s representation of it. The author, rather, creates the story, defines a storyworld that is not separate from his or her definition. The narrator chooses what to say about what happens in the storyworld. In contrast, the author chooses what actually does happen in the storyworld.

As it turns out, things are slightly more complicated than this suggests. Authors often assert that their characters act independently, take over the story, force the author to follow a certain path. As Mey puts it, “Authors frequently complain that their personae assume independent lives and voices, and that the plot starts to develop by an inner logic of its own, with the author as a bemused spectator on the sidelines, following the antics of his or her creatures and chronicling them as best he or she can” (794). This has a certain point and, indeed, complicates the relation between the author and the narrator. It is therefore worth considering in greater detail.
Once the author has imagined the personality and circumstances of a character, his or her normal cognitive processes will produce a relatively automatic anticipation of that character’s action. Again, when people create fiction, they use ordinary cognitive architecture. This architecture includes structures and processes for anticipating one’s own and other people’s actions. I know Smith; I have a sense of how he acts in various situations. I am thinking about asking him to observe my teaching and write a letter of recommendation. I try to imagine how Smith would respond to my class, how this would affect a letter, and so forth. Note that the entire (evolutionary) function of such imagination is lost if I simply make up Smith’s response to suit my preferences. Indeed, that is precisely the difference between such hypothetical imagination and fantasy. Rather, the imagination has to be constrained by my understanding of Smith. In order to proceed with adequate speed, particularly in pressing circumstances, imaginations of this sort have to be more or less automatic as well (i.e., they are not usually or primarily matters of effortful calculation). For that, the understanding and familiarity must be largely implicit—based, for example, on memories that I do not inspect self-consciously, but that give me an implicit sense of how Smith would act. It is also important to stress that my understanding of Smith and my inferences about his likely behavior are both open to dispute. Thus it may be quite reasonable for someone to tell me that I am, say, crazy to trust Smith with a teaching evaluation.

It seems extremely likely that this is just what occurs with real authors and fictional characters. Authors create a character by imagining traits, a history, interests, and current conditions. These are partially considered self-consciously and partially remain implicit. Moreover, they are bound up with complexes of authorial memories. These memories need not concern the character’s (fictional) history, but may bear on other, real or fictional individuals who are parallel to the character in some way. Such memories are almost entirely un-self-conscious. Those imagined properties and conditions, along with the associated, un-self-conscious memories, produce the sort of semimechanical trajectories of character action that one finds in everyday hypothetical imagination (as in the case of Smith observing my class).

By this analysis, there are two sets of inputs to the imagination of character trajectories. One set is textual—including the character’s traits and conditions. But the second set derives from an author’s or reader’s own memories. Those memories will, of course, differ. As such, various readers may imagine the arc of a character’s actions differently. Often,
readers’ imaginations will be vague enough to fit with authorial imaginations. However, sometimes they will contradict authorial imaginations. When this contradiction results from divergence in noncharacter memories, it seems there is no reason to believe that the author is necessarily correct or normative. Indeed, in some cases one may say that, given what is known about the character from the text, the author’s imagination is less plausible than a given reader’s imagination. In other words, many people have the intuitive sense that readers can reasonably criticize an author’s character development—saying, for example, “Oh, Mr. Gallstone would never have accepted a bribe to marry Lucinda—at least not such a small one” or “The screenwriter and director simply don’t understand Lucinda. She would certainly have boarded the boat for Buenos Aires, at least after she found her evil stepmother’s letter to Gallstone.” This analysis suggests one way in which such statements can indeed have force, and why it is possible for authors to misunderstand their characters. Character trajectories are a function of the characters’ own histories and conditions, supplemented by the author’s memories. Those memories, used tacitly as models for the characters, may be biased or otherwise misleading.

Here, it is possible to treat the functional relation between narrators and authors more precisely. First, there is a crucial similarity. Both authors and narrators to a certain extent represent a storyworld that is beyond their control. In other words, authors also to some extent report—rather than choose—what their characters do in imagined trajectories. But authors do choose the conditions of the storyworld, select from the possible character trajectories, and fill in further details that are undefined by the initial conditions and trajectories. In contrast, the narrator is the witness and communicator of the trajectories produced by authorial imagination. But, of course, the narrator may be—usually is—more than this as well. Specifically, as communicator, the narrator manipulates that information.

There is, presumably, certain information that the implied author takes to be crucial for the reader. There are two primary ways in which that information may be manipulated—through the sequence and manner in which it is given. Thus some piece of information may be given early or late in a narrative, directly or by implication, and so forth. The narrator may be understood as the speaker who determines this sequence and manner of the communication, with the caveat that the narrator may be trustworthy or untrustworthy. If the narrator is untrustworthy, then the
relevant information must still be communicated, but it must be communicated, not only indirectly, but, so to speak, inadvertently relative to the narrator. (This issue will be considered in chapter 4.) Note that the narrator can be unreliable precisely because the narrator is not the author. If the author changes the story, then the story is actually different. If the narrator changes the story, then that is a misrepresentation. Even in cases where the author misunderstands his or her characters, that misunderstanding affects one’s evaluation of the story, not one’s interpretation. In the preceding hypothetical narrative, for example, Gallstone did accept the derisory bribe in the storyworld, however inconsistent that is with his character.

Many narratologists take the fundamental division of narrators to be that between those who are within the story and those who are outside the story. This is certainly important. However, it does not seem to be the most crucial for one’s understanding of communicative discourse. Rather, a different, if partially related, distinction seems to be the essential one. Specifically, one question arises immediately when one speaks of a narrator describing a trajectory—is there really an agent there who can be spoken of as doing such describing? Clearly, there is such an agent in the case of a first-person narrator. However, one may wonder what sense it makes to speak of such an agent in the case of a third-person narration. The issue here does not seem to be one of whether the narrator is inside the story or not. Rather, the issue seems to be whether the narrator is the sort of entity one would think of as making choices, selecting the order and manner of information. In other words, the difference seems to be between whether the narrator is personified or nonpersonified.24

Of course, if there is a narrator, then there is some choice, some selection. However, that choice is not invariably accompanied by an imaginative objectification or constitution of the narrator, to use the Phenomenological term. (Constitution is the mental integration of information to form an object of thought—as when one synthesizes different glimpses of, say, a chair to form an image of that chair.) Put differently, narration implies a constituting subjectivity, but it need not involve any self-objectification of that subjectivity—thus the presentation of any physical or psychological attributions, even the minimal attribution contained in the personal pronoun “I.”25

Generally, it is easy to envision a personified narrator as selecting information, phrasing it in a certain way, and so forth. Indeed, an author’s imagination of personified narrators is just like his or her imag-
ination of characters. The author both explicitly and implicitly envisions properties, histories, interests, and circumstances for the narrator. The author’s mind tacitly associates these with memories and allows imagination to produce behaviors and circumstances for the narrator—in this case, behaviors of storytelling. Thus what the personified narrator says or writes is the result of imaginatively generated trajectories of the same sort that one finds in the story itself.

Indeed, the narratee fits here as well. The narratee is, fundamentally, the addressee for the narrator. The function of the narratee, however, is somewhat different from that of the narrator. The narratee does not operate so much as an independent agent. Rather, he or she operates as a sort of regulative principle for what information the narrator has to provide, what sort of rhetorical techniques he or she has to use, and so forth. In other words, speakers always aim at some sort of audience. A speaker cannot communicate everything about any topic. He or she assumes certain sorts of knowledge. Moreover, a speaker does not adopt the same rhetorical strategies with everyone, since a speaker does not assume that everyone begins with the same prejudices or emotional propensities. The narratee is the imagined guide for the narrator’s information and rhetoric.

In this sense, the narratee is embedded within the imagination of the narrator. This is just what one would expect, since this is the way people speak. People formulate descriptions, adopt a certain tone, press certain judgments for a particular addressee as they imagine him or her. In keeping with this, one’s imagined trajectories of communicative behavior routinely embed “theory of mind” ideas, which is to say, simulations of other people’s imaginations of speakers and addressees (sometimes along with some more self-conscious inferences). Suppose I know that Professor Jones, an academic advisor, will be speaking with Ms. Smith about satisfying her mathematics and science requirements. In imagining how the conversation will go, I implicitly take into account what Jones believes about Smith and vice versa. I will imagine the conversation differently if I know that Jones believes Smith is unmathematical, if Jones believes that Smith is considering a major in physics, and so on. It is important to note that part of this simulation is emotional. I imagine Jones’s emotional attitude to Smith as well as his conception of her. For example, I may imagine that Jones likes Smith and genuinely wants to help her plan out the best course of study for her future, or that he finds her an irritating pest.
Again, people’s usual imaginative practices carry over to literary imagination. This occurs most clearly when authors simulate characters. For example, Hemingway embeds Luz’s understanding of the soldier in her speech to him, just as he embeds her emotional response to the major—not only romantic interest, but trust—in her response to him. The former embedding comes out clearly in her letter to the soldier. She “finally wrote to the States that theirs had only been a boy and girl affair,” and so on. The first sentence indicates that Luz is envisioning him as young, immature, inexperienced. She makes the same statement about herself, since she refers to them as a “boy” and “girl” respectively. But it is clear that, at least since her relationship with the major, she considers herself to be an adult, a woman, whereas—in her imagination—he is still a boy. This embedded imagination continues throughout the rest of the letter, as when she writes that “he would probably not be able to understand,” as if his level of intellectual maturity is too low. On the other hand, it is difficult to say if one should fully believe Luz’s expression of her imagination. One might, rather, infer that she has a more complex, tacit imagination of the soldier, but has developed a self-conscious idea of his immaturity as a rationalization of her actions. In other words, one might interpret her imaginations as both ambivalent and ambiguous.

In the middle of the letter, there is an indication of Luz’s imagination of the major. But it too is an indication that is rhetorically oriented toward a particular audience. It is an indication aimed at the understanding of the soldier. Specifically, she writes that her engagement was “absolutely unexpected.” The suggestion here is that she did not envision the major as a possible spouse until he proposed to her. Clearly, this is not a claim one can trust. Rather, it is a claim made to affect the soldier’s imagination of Luz and thereby to guide his subsequent response to her. The idea is that he would not imagine she had in any way anticipated any of this. This, in turn, suggests a much more complex imagination of the soldier than is overtly expressed in the letter. He is not merely a naïve youth who will grow to see the wisdom of her decision. He is, rather, a potential accuser. He is also someone for whom she still has some feelings, so that she cares about his potential accusations.

The case of Luz illustrates some of the ways in which authors imagine characters imagining addressees—including imaginations of those addressees’ imaginations—thereby embedding levels of simulation. As usual, the same principles hold for narrators and narratees. Indeed, in her letter, Luz is an embedded narrator. This leads to several points.
First, recognizing Luz’s role as an embedded narrator imagining the soldier shows an ambiguity in the notion of a narratee. Within the story, the soldier is actually not a narratee, but a real reader. The narratee is, most importantly, the addressee imagined by the narrator. Ordinarily narratees are not developed in enough detail for this to be an issue. In keeping with the general principles governing narrators and authors, one assumes a congruence of readers and narratees within stories unless one is given reason to distinguish them. But one may be given such a reason—sometimes in embedded narrations, such as Luz’s letter.

This example also leads back to the issue of personification. It is clear that behind this personified narrator (Luz), there is a nonpersonified narrator, the narrator of the entire story. The point appears to be generalizable. In other words, the point holds not only for such localized, embedded narrations, but for larger personified narrations as well. This would be in keeping with Nielsen’s view that “behind every homodiegetic narrator is a ‘nonpersonified voice’ of the fiction and that sometimes the homodiegetic narrator gives way to this voice” (as Phelan and Booth [“Narrator” 391] put it; see Nielsen).29 Perhaps more importantly, it is also in keeping with the Phenomenological understanding of constituting subjectivity as necessarily underlying constituted subjectivity (as well as the Lacanian idea of a subjectivity underlying the ego and the cognitive view of a self as underlying any self-concept). Of course, here too there is a general presumption of default congruence. Nonetheless, there is always a possibility of incongruence.

Needless to say, this does not solve all problems about the nature of narrators. Most obviously, it leaves the task of understanding the nonpersonified narrator. Indeed, the preceding discussion leads to positing a nonpersonified narratee with this nonpersonified narrator, which intensifies the difficulty. In the case of Hemingway’s story, one may envision the soldier as embedded within the imagination of Luz in writing her letter. That is parallel to what one does in ordinary life. But how does one embed a nonpersonified narratee in a nonpersonified narrator? That does not seem parallel to anything one does in ordinary life, since people at least seem to imagine only personified speakers, themselves simulating only personified addressees.

In fact, the issue of the nonpersonified narratee might be fairly easily resolved. People do alter their speech and writing for fairly amorphous addressees—such as particular individuals whom they do not know, or groups (e.g., one may write a report for an archive without any sense of who might read it, but one still tries to give necessary information, not
to give unnecessary information, and so on). As long as one has a personified narrator, a nonpersonified narratee may not be a problem.

But what about that nonpersonified narrator? It might at first appear that such an entity is not even possible. But literary works clearly do incorporate nonpersonified narrators, with embedded nonpersonified narratees. One sees this, for example, in presumptions about knowledge. The point is obvious at the start of Hemingway’s story, as already noted. But it continues all the way to the end, when the addressee is tacitly expected to know that the soldier was in Chicago. Again, the implied author has organized everything so that real readers are able to infer this. But the information is not foregrounded in the way it would ordinarily be if the addressee were not already familiar with the soldier and his hometown. Thus there is a clear discrepancy between whoever is speaking and the implied author, since the latter recognizes that the reader does not have such prior familiarity.

For a cognitive account, one primary way of resolving such a dilemma is isolating a real-world situation in which people engage in a process of understanding or imagining a nonpersonified narrator. In fact, people frequently engage in understanding or responding to such a situation along these lines—when they overhear conversations, specifically conversations in which the speaker is telling a third-person narrative. The general relation between everyday overhearing and one’s response to literature has been developed by Richard Gerrig and Deborah Prentice in their concept of the reader as a “side participant” (“Notes”). However, it does not seem that narratologists have recognized the relation of such overhearing to the understanding or imagination of a nonpersonified narrator (and embedded, nonpersonified narratee). This is somewhat surprising, given that many overheard conversations are genuinely nonpersonified in the sense that, other than what one gathers from his or her speech, one does not know anything about the speaker beyond his or her being a person (perhaps in a particular location). Rather, one begins with a fairly minimal sense of this being a speaker, a speaker who has some addressee in mind. From here, one is able to follow what the person says more or less well (despite the fact that there is no implied author checking this narrator for communicative problems).

If there is in fact continuity between overhearing, on the one hand, and understanding a nonpersonified narrator, on the other, this indicates that the nonpersonified narrator is, in principle, a full person.
Again, as far as one’s explicit knowledge goes, he or she is simply a voice—hence the label “nonpersonified.” But he or she is a voice that is tacitly imagined as part of a communicative scenario, thus a voice that has knowledge and motivation—even though one does not initially know much about what these are, as in real cases of side participation or overhearing.

The preceding analyses have considered the nonpersonified narrator only from the reader’s perspective. Again, this is the crucial perspective, since it includes the receptive intent of the author. However, it is worth turning briefly to the perspective of the author as creator. The author can generate a nonpersonified narrator’s voice in many different ways. One way is by simulating an overheard conversation. However, that is probably very rare. It seems more likely that authors unreflectively take up an emotional orientation, presumptions about narratee knowledge, a vocabulary, and so forth, through the priming of a range of narrative models stored in memory. (Priming involves partially but not fully activating some mental content or process, which is to say activating it below the threshold of self-conscious awareness.) These models, drawn from a range of precursor works, may guide the production of the narrator’s voice without the author reflecting self-consciously on them. Of course, the effects of these different imaginations and memories are not all the same. Thus there are different degrees and kinds of influence. What is crucial overall is that the author probably does not have a developed character self-consciously in mind. As a result, his or her relation to the nonpersonified narrator’s voice is comparable to one of overhearing.

More generally, people do things like this when they shift into, say, a regional dialect (e.g., a Boston accent) or imitate technical speech (say, deconstructive vocabulary) for comic effect. They are taking up the voice of a narrator—one distinct from the “author” (themselves)—a narrator who is clearly following principles of some sort, even though the speakers do not really know anything about the “personality” of that voice. In other words, the speakers are, in effect, adopting the voice of a nonpersonified narrator.

In the case of literature, of course, the assumption of a voice is far more prolonged. Throughout its extended development, the assumption of that voice is repeatedly subjected to the constraint, organization, and direction of the implied author. This in effect makes the production—or at least revision—of such a nonpersonified voice in fiction into
something even more like a case of overhearing or side participation. Specifically, the author has to receptively respond to the narrator’s voice in such a way that it consistently unfolds the story in an appropriate way (i.e., in a way appropriate to the experience that the author wishes to produce or feels is right for a particular work). This is necessarily a process of (tacitly) understanding a nonpersonified narrator’s knowledge, interests, imagination of a narratee, and so forth.

In isolating the operation of the nonpersonified narrator and nonpersonified narratee in Hemingway’s “Very Short Story,” the preceding discussion considered how one may infer some beliefs of the narrator about the knowledge of the narratee. But there are important issues surrounding the narrator’s own knowledge (as narratologists have stressed), as well as his or her interests. It is important to consider some of these in the context of focalization.

Before going on, however, we might note the expansion of part of the diagram of narrative discourse. That diagram now includes the following:

Real Author [Implied Author [Nonpersonified Narrator {Personified Narrator {Focalizer} Personified Narratee} Nonpersonified Narratee] Implied Reader] Real Reader

Again, the nonpersonified narrator is often congruent with the implied author, and the personified narrator is often congruent with the nonpersonified narrator. But this does not mean that the status of all these discourse agents is the same. Personified narrators and narratees, as well as focalizers, are optional elements of a fiction. By the preceding analysis, there is always a narrator and a narratee, even if they are congruent with the implied author and the implied reader. This is because there is always some manipulation (at least selection and phrasing) of information from a storyworld. That manipulation is a function of the narrator oriented toward a narratee. Finally, there is a difference in degree of story embedment between the nonpersonified narrator and narratee, on the one hand, and the personified narrator and narratee, on the other, just as there is a difference in narrative or textual embedment between the real author and reader, on the one hand, and the implied author and reader, on the other. (Roughly, square brackets indicate implication by the text, thus embedment within communicative discourse, while curly brackets mark representation in the text, thus embedment in a storyworld.)
Focalization and Topicalization

As is well known, Gérard Genette distinguished focalizers from narrators. The narrator is the “agent who produces a narrative” (Herman “Glossary” 280). Focalization, in contrast, “denotes the perspectival restriction and orientation of narrative information relative to somebody’s (usually, a character’s) perception, imagination, knowledge, or point of view. . . . Hence, focalization theory covers the various means of regulating, selecting, and channeling narrative information” (Jahn “Focalization” 173).

“Perspectival” is the key word here. It indicates the relation of the narrator to some point of view on which that narrator focuses his or her attention. For example, narrators sometimes confine their narration to what a particular character experiences or thinks. Suppose a story includes the following lines: “Jones was feeling apprehensive. Smith seemed preoccupied and distant all morning. Jones walked out of the office, worried about what Smith might be thinking.” Jones is not the narrator. But the perspective of the narrative is at least quite close to that of Jones. The narrator reports what Jones sees, thinks, and feels. The narrator does not report what Smith sees, thinks, and feels—except insofar as these are inferred by Jones. Jones is, then, the focalizer.

Genette distinguished three types of focalization. The first is “zero-focalization.” In this case, there is no focalizer. The narrator relates events and scenes without any filter from a character in the story. The second is “internal focalization,” which restricts the narrator to the experiences (perceptual, imaginative, etc.) of one or more characters. The third is “external focalization,” where the narrator does not have access to inner thoughts, but reports only external facts about the story-world insofar as these are available to the focalizer.

Mieke Bal and others have criticized this distinction, arguing, for example, that “even typical ‘non-focalized’ passages are rarely entirely free of point of view” (Jahn “Focalization” 101). Jahn cites an example from James Michener’s Hawaii as an example. The passage begins, “Across a million years, down more than ten million years [the island] existed silently in the unknown sea” (qtd. in Jahn “Focalization” 97). Jahn’s point is that even this small piece of narration involves selection. It is not simply a part of a statement of everything. Thus it is focalized.

But this seems problematic. If “focalization” becomes so broad that it encompasses all forms of selection, then it has ceased to serve its initial theoretical functions, both explanatory and descriptive. Perhaps this is a
point where it is valuable to return to an older distinction, that between omniscient and limited narration. It is true that focalization is not identical with limited narration and that the isolation of focalization is an important advance in narrative theory. However, that does not mean that the omniscient/limited distinction should simply be discarded. It addresses something different from focalization—and perhaps, when adequately refined, it may help clarify focalization and the issue of zero focalization.

As seen in the preceding section, when one speaks of a narrator, even a nonpersonified narrator, one is not speaking of a mechanism or an abstract principle, but tacitly simulating a human or humanlike agent. That humanlike agent—as one simulates him or her—should have certain properties. The properties do not have to be precisely the same as those that characterize real humans. But they should presumably be of the same general sort. Humans gain information about the world through sensory perception, thus without direct access to other minds. Moreover, human perception is limited spatially and temporally. If one takes a narrator to be humanlike, one may assume that he or she has some way of gaining knowledge about the world. That way may be limited to sensory perception or it may not. It also may or may not be spatially or temporally limited.

This already begins to solve some of the problems. One could use the phrase “internal focalization” to refer to cases where the narrator’s knowledge of the storyworld is not confined to sensory perception but is focalized by one or more characters. One may use the phrase “external focalization” to refer to cases where the narrator’s knowledge is confined to sensory perception, and is also focalized by one or more characters. Cases of the latter sort are fairly common in film. For example, a romantic comedy may involve dozens of characters. But it may show only scenes where one of the lovers is present. If one is given no internal thoughts of these characters (e.g., through voice-overs), then one is probably dealing with an external focalization.

But what about “zero focalization”? That does not seem to be a matter of limited knowledge. Indeed, that is presumably why Genette’s distinction has intuitive appeal. On the other hand, it seems clear that, even if some narrators know everything, no narrators say everything. In this way, there is some limitation. Of course, if one defines every form of limitation as a form of focalization, then this means there is focalization. However, if one wishes to keep the sharpness of the concept, one should probably confine use of the term “focalization” to characters (or charac-
terlike components) in a story. In that case, it seems clear that passages such as Michener’s are not focalized. But how then does one describe their limitation?

In fact, this problem is already in effect solved. Again, if one spontaneously simulates narrators as humanlike, one tacitly understands their minds as having the same sorts of structures that human minds have. Human minds include not only knowledge—perception, memory, language, inferential capacities, and so on (thus the omniscient/limited distinction). They also include emotion. Without emotion, one would not speak or listen, direct one’s attention to one thing rather than another, select some information as being of interest and ignore other information. Zero-focalization, then, is a situation in which there is a narrator with emotions—emotions that lead him or her to select certain facts of the storyworld and not others—but whose reports are not focalized to any character in the story.33

What about cases such as The Great Gatsby, where there is a homodiegetic narrator, Nick Carraway, who focuses a great deal of his attention on another character, Gatsby? In other words, Gatsby is in some sense a “focus of interest” for the narrator. But it is clear that the narrator is not in any sense confined to Gatsby. This arises as a possible issue due primarily to an accidental coincidence of terms—“focus” and “focalizer.” There seems to be no focalizer in Gatsby other than the personified narrator, Nick. But what is the status of Gatsby, then? Though not a focalizer, he is not simply a character at the same level as the others. One might say that Gatsby is the protagonist of the novel, since much of the plot is organized around his goals and their possible fulfillment. But this does not suggest his relation to the narrator.

Borrowing (and altering) a term from linguistics, one may refer to Gatsby and similar characters as topicalizers. Topicalizers guide narrative development, but do not constrain narration. Put differently, they have intrinsic interest for a narrator. In other words, the narrator attends to one set of characters because their attitudes, perceptions, ideas, and so on, have instrumental significance for other characters. Thus the villain may be important because he or she has an impact on the hero. In contrast, the narrator attends to another set of characters because they are significant on their own. Thus the hero’s ideas and attitudes are valued in their own right as productive of narrative trajectories. In consequence, the hero is commonly topicalized.

Focalizers are often topicalizers, but they need not be. They are clearly of interest to the narrator. But their interest is perspectival. As
such, the focalizer’s ideas, attitudes, and so forth, may or may not drive the story line.

In addition to differentiating focalization from topicalization, the preceding analysis suggests the possibility that focalization may come in two varieties. Given that narrators select according to interest and preference, it may be that focalization—internal or external—is not always a matter of limitation in knowledge. It may equally be a matter of limitation in interest. In other words, one may distinguish between epistemic and affective focalization. This may, in turn, have interpretive implications regarding a narrator’s emotion-based encoding sensitivities. For example, suppose there is a love story with dual focalization on the lovers. One may consider asymmetries in the selection of information for the two focalizers, exploring these in both epistemic and affective contexts. This may have social and political consequences insofar as such asymmetries relate to gender or other social hierarchies.

Here it is valuable to return once again to Hemingway. The precise nature and degree of the narrator’s epistemic limitations, if any, are not entirely clear. However, there are suggestions that he or she has internal access to characters. For example, he or she reports that the patients “all liked Luz” and that Luz and the soldier both “felt as though they were married.” Moreover, the narrator knows that the major never married Luz, “in the spring, or any other time.” (Though stated in the past tense, the narrator’s claim presumably covers the all possible story time. To avoid this suggestion, Hemingway could have written something like “The major did not marry her in the spring. Eventually, they broke off the engagement.”) Though ambiguity remains, these points suggest that the narrator may not have epistemic limits. Whatever limits he or she has, then, are presumably affective.

In part, this limitation is the result of the topicalization of the narrative to the lovers—just what one would expect in any romantic narrative. But it goes beyond topicalization. The internal access we have to others is very limited. For example, we know merely that the patients liked Luz—a very general attitude. In contrast, we know that as the soldier “walked back along the halls he thought of Luz in his bed.” This is a much more specific internal access. It is also far less ambiguous (i.e., it is far more difficult to understand this as inference). It therefore suggests internal affective focalization.

Here, the issue arises as to whether there is internal affective focalization on both characters or on only one. The narrative seems ambiguous on this score. As already noted, it is possible to read the narrative
as having only a single focalization on the soldier (recall Scholes’s point about rewriting the work in first person). But it is not necessary to read the story that way. Indeed, as already noted, there are points at which we seem to have internal access to both Luz and the soldier. At the same time, however, those moments may be reinterpreted as inferences based on overt statements. For example, they presumably both said that they felt as though they were married. Overall, then, single focalization seems more likely. Nonetheless, a profile of ambiguity remains. This is almost certainly consequential—to both one’s interpretations and one’s emotional responses.

More exactly, even at points where there seem to be clear indications of two focalizers, there are discrepancies between the two. These discrepancies may be construed epistemically. But they are probably best understood as affectively motivated. For example, at times, an apparent focalization on Luz shifts to a focalization on the soldier. Consider the opening of the fourth paragraph, “Luz wrote him many letters.” This seems to involve a clear epistemic limitation. It is something known, first of all and for some time exclusively, to Luz. But the sentence continues—“Luz wrote him many letters that he never got until after the armistice. Fifteen came in a bunch to the front and he sorted them by dates and read them all straight through.” Retrospectively, one can see the opening of the sentence as focalized by the soldier, as he infers the unobserved process of writing. Either way, the crucial matter here is not knowledge of facts. It is affective orientation. Indeed, the focalization here is doubly affective, for the narration is guided by the narrator’s emotional interest in the specifically emotional perspective of the focalizer. When readers go on to learn about Luz’s feelings, reported in the letters, they do so in a context where the (emotionally saturated) reading presence of the soldier has been rendered salient. This at least makes possible an affective focalization on the soldier, even if the soldier’s own affective topicalization is on Luz.

The point is clearer when Hemingway repeats the technique later. He begins a sentence by treating Luz’s affair with an Italian major, apparently focalizing her, but then continues the sentence with a Dear John letter (“and finally wrote to the States that theirs had only been a boy and girl affair”). Here, again, there is an epistemic shift. What seems at first to be focalization on Luz becomes—or is revealed to have been—focalization on the soldier; the reader is told, not what Luz knows alone, but what the soldier knows through her report and perhaps his inferences from her report. More importantly, this has emotional signifi-
cance. As readers receive the rest of the letter implicitly filtered through the soldier's reading, it is difficult not to be aware of and affected by the soldier's anger and resentment. The light-hearted "she expected, absolutely unexpectedly, to be married" feels insensitive; the use of "boy" appears belittling, and the explanation that she "believed in him absolutely" seems patronizing. Presumably the epistemic content of the letter is equally available to Luz and the soldier. The focalization, then, is more a matter of emotion than of knowledge.

On the other hand, this is not to say that this affective focalization is absolute and determinative. First of all, one need not read the story as having a single focalization. Indeed, it is possible to read the story as concerning information shared by the lovers—Luz tells the soldier that the hospital administrators are "glad to let her" stay on night duty; the soldier tells Luz that he thinks of her in his bed as he walks back along the halls at night. In this respect, focalization on either lover would give information about both. Only at the end does the reader get information that is not shared—in keeping with their emotional alienation. First there is the report that Luz and the major do not get married, perhaps known only to Luz. Then there is the final sentence reporting the soldier's affair with the sales girl and his gonorrhea, presumably known only to the soldier. Of course, even this is not entirely clear, since the second sentence of the final paragraph is ambiguous. The narrator explains that "Luz never got an answer to the letter to Chicago about it." It is not clear what "it" is. "It" may refer to the initial engagement. In that case, there is only one letter and only Luz knows that the marriage does not occur. However, "it" may also refer to the fact that the marriage did not take place. In that case, there were two letters, and the soldier did know about the ending of the engagement, thereby allowing single focalization on the soldier.

In any case, the work's profile of ambiguity extends to narration. That ambiguity is not only a matter of aspects of the storyworld. It bears on the nature of the work's focalization.

Indeed, even an affective focalization of the story on the soldier embeds an affective topicalization of Luz. Specifically, the soldier's own affective focus is on the feelings and plans of Luz—her story, in effect. This leaves both the focalization and the topicalization available for interpretation and reader response—one as a "surface affective focalization"; the other as an "embedded affective topicalization." For example, many readers undoubtedly suspect that the soldier's affair with the salesgirl is not an expression of lust, but something more like revenge,
an attack aimed at Luz, even if it is never communicated to her. Perhaps more significantly, there is sympathy in the narrator’s treatment of Luz’s abandonment by the major and a lingering sense of attachment that highlights her loneliness after the soldier leaves. That, in turn, may complicate the understanding of the gender ideology of the work (thus the Critical Discourse Analysis of the work). This topic will come up again in relation to real readers and critics.

The Implied Reader, Sahṛdayas, and Gaps

As already indicated, the implied reader is parallel to the implied author. Indeed, one could see the implied reader, first of all, as a version of the implied author. (The afterword will show that the implied author–implied reader relation is more complex than this indicates, but the generalization is a useful starting point.) The implied reader is, in this sense, a receptive attitude that may be adopted by real readers in keeping with the receptive intention of the author. Put differently, when one studies literature and learns how to read more competently (to use Culler’s term [see Structuralist 113–30 and “Competence”]), one of the things one learns is how to approximate the experience of an implied reader/implied author. Fundamentally, this involves such things as encoding certain features of a text, drawing particular sorts of inference, paying attention to certain aspects of a work, and asking particular kinds of questions.

To examine this process more fully, one needs to consider some of the cognitive operations involved in reading and understanding/response. Like authors, readers tacitly encode and process some features of texts but not others. In part, this encoding is enabled by attentional orientation. Cognitive structures, such as scripts and prototypes, partially guide attentional orientation as well as the processing of encoded information (a point stressed by Herman; see chapter 3 of Story).

Imagine, for example, that Jones is watching a crime drama. One character is eating at an Indian restaurant, consuming delectable-seeming dum aloo and lamb saag. Having begun his slimming program that morning, Jones is famished after three meals of celery and radishes. He stares longingly at the steaming cubes of meat smothered in delicate, creamy spinach, the crumbling, crimson bits of potato, the crisp papadum (which, when it breaks, makes a sound like kisses). Someone enters and murders the character at his dinner (at least he died happy). But
Jones never lifts his eyes from the plate and thus does not know the identity of the murderer. As a result, he never understands the tension or the tragedy of the rest of the story, in which an innocent man is framed for the murder. In this case, he has failed to orient his attention properly, which is to say, he has deviated from the norm of the implied reader (or implied viewer) with respect to attention.

A less crude example might be the following. In watching detective stories, one general principle readers acquire is to pay attention to—thus encode and store—any distinguishing features of any characters. One character may have a tendency to use a certain phrase (e.g., “you know”). Another may sometimes make a particular nervous gesture (e.g., rubbing his nose). A third may drag his foot ever so slightly when he walks. It would be easy to ignore these features, particularly if they are not foregrounded. (If the filmmaker cuts to a close-up of a character’s nose when he rubs it in a nervous gesture, then one does not have to be paying particular attention to encode it.) But, having seen a number of detective stories, one learns that these are just the sorts of clue that may be important later in the story. One learns, furthermore, that the clues are likely to be covered up. This leads to more complex forms of attention—roughly, attention to absence (which is extremely difficult to maintain). If the criminal drags his foot slightly, then one should become more suspicious of any suspect who only sits or stands—but never walks—when the detective is present (and the viewer sees him or her).

The implied reader is, first of all, the norm (established by the implied author) that involves this sort of encoding and processing. But that is, so to speak, the mechanical part of the implied reader. The implied reader, like the implied author, also imagines and feels. As, for example, Roman Ingarden stressed, readers “concretize” what they read. Readers fill things in perceptually, and emotionally. Readers do not simply rely on the basic statements of a text. They expand and particularize. They imagine how a character feels at a particular moment, they tacitly envision what he or she looks like, and so on. Like the encoding of a text, this is only in part a matter of self-conscious reflection. For example, one may not realize that one has imagined a character’s appearance until one sees a movie version and says, “That’s not at all the way I pictured Gallstone.” Here as elsewhere this imagination is probably the result of a confluence of memories, a network of past perceptions that results in one’s tacitly assuming certain features. The same point holds for the simulation of character emotions.
Moreover, readers not only imagine appearances and simulate emotions, they experience emotions themselves. This is obviously true of real readers. But it is also true for implied readers. Stowe creates her portrait of Tom in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in order to produce compassion. That compassionate response is part of the implied reader. Of course a real reader may have any number of responses. He or she may find the portrait maudlin and be repulsed; he or she may delight in the suffering of someone else; he or she may be bored and indifferent. But the norm established by the text is one of compassion. Again, that norm does not mean that the real reader must actually feel what the implied reader feels. It means that the real reader should understand that there is a particular normative emotion. Moreover, it means that there is some failure when the real reader does not experience the same emotion as the implied reader. The failure may be in the reader or in the text.

Leaving aside the case where the fault is in the text, it is worth considering what is going on with the implied reader with respect to emotional response. Clearly, actual emotional response is not simply a matter of inference or encoding. Again, a reader may perfectly understand that Tom is supposed to inspire compassion, and yet not feel compassion. Compassion in these cases is the result of two primary factors. First, there is the imaginative effort to simulate the experiences of the character. I might know that Stowe wishes me to empathize with Tom, but I may simply fail to simulate Tom’s condition. Second, there is the complex of emotional memories that are cyclically activated by and, in turn, guide the further development of such empathy—such as memories of physical pain or discrimination.

This leads to a particularly interesting and complex feature of the implied reader. The implied reader has such memories. When the real author judges that the work has the right receptive impact—that is, when he or she is satisfied with the work as an implied author—he or she tacitly assumes that the reader will experience a range of emotional memories and that these will enable his or her emotional response to the work. Without those memories, the real reader will not be able to take up the emotional role of the implied reader. For example, when portraying someone suffering, an author tacitly assumes that readers will have their own memories of suffering that will contribute to their emotional response.

Of course, the particular memories of real readers are necessarily different. In keeping with this, one may distinguish a relatively fixed part of the implied reader. This part involves, among other things, encod-
ing, attentional orientation, and cognitive structures (such as scripts) that guide processing. Of course, this is not entirely fixed. But there seems to be relative uniformity here. In contrast, there is a more significantly variable part as well—memories and what follows from memories, including concretization. This variable part of the implied reader suggests, for example, why certain works are more likely to inspire an intense response at one age, but not at another. Some works rely on emotional memories that are most intense when one is young. Others rely on emotional memories that develop significantly only in later life.

On the other hand, to say that particular emotional memories and concretizations are variable is not to say that there are no commonalities. Indeed, the very possibility of the implied authorial response presupposes such commonality. In order to understand this, it is necessary to consider emotional response to fiction more fully.

First of all, to some extent, genuinely personal memories are not wholly idiosyncratic. For example, virtually everyone has experienced some sort of attachment loss and virtually everyone has experienced fear, anger, and sadness in connection with that loss. The precise proportion of those emotions may be different, and that may affect individual responses to a story treating attachment loss. However, it is not the case that one’s personal emotional memories all treat wholly individual types of experience.

Moreover, in treating emotional response in relation to emotional memories, I have been tacitly relying on the work of the great tenth-century Sanskrit theorist Abhinavagupta, along with more recent cognitive developments of his ideas. Abhinavagupta stressed that these memories are drawn not only from personal life but from literature—and, one might add, other aspects of culture—as well. In this sense, the memories presupposed by the implied author (for the implied reader) may also concern more directly common experiences. Crucially, they include a partially shared body of literature. This is part of the reason why lack of familiarity with a literary tradition may inhibit one’s ability to respond emotionally to works in that tradition.

In keeping with Sanskrit poetic theory generally, Abhinavagupta took up the term “sahṛdaya”—explained as one who enters “into identity with the heart of the poet” (Gnoli xlv; more technically, one might say “the implied poet”). He used this term to refer to the reader who has the appropriate cognitive orientation and emotional experience, both literary and personal, and who makes the right effort in responding to the literary work. One could in principle take the implied reader to be
a sahṛdaya. However, it is perhaps more useful to interpret the implied reader more minimally. Thus one might say that the implied reader correctly understands the storyworld, thematic concerns, and normative emotions of the work. The sahṛdaya, in contrast, feels the appropriate emotions in response to the work.

There are two things to say about the idea of appropriate emotions. First, these are related to the receptive response of the implied author. However, they are not necessarily determined by that receptive response. Just as one can reasonably complain that an author misunderstood his or her own characters, one can reasonably complain that an author has responded inappropriately to his or her storyworld. Thus the sahṛdaya is a sort of “ideal reader” in the sense that he or she is emotionally sensitive to the concerns of the implied author. (This usage obviously takes up a term used by earlier narratologists, such as Prince [see “Introduction”], while giving it a somewhat different meaning.) But his or her responses need not necessarily coincide with those of the implied author. Second, the necessary variability in individual emotional experience means that a range of responses may manifest emotional sensitivity. In other words, there is a, so to speak, profile of ambivalence in the sahṛdaya, with different readers fulfilling the function of the sahṛdaya somewhat differently. At the same time, the notion of a sahṛdaya suggests that there are norms. For example, regarding an antislavery novel, one may say that anger over the treatment of slaves, compassion for the slaves, disgust over collaboration with slave-owners and other responses are all part of the normative profile of ambivalence and different real readers may fulfill the role of sahṛdaya in feeling one or the other more strongly. However, most readers would probably be inclined to say that a response of complete indifference or of Schadenfreude at the slaves’ suffering would fall outside the norms defined by the sahṛdaya.

Up to this point, the analysis has focused primarily on spontaneous processes that may or may not reach conscious awareness. But readers also engage in self-conscious, effortful processes. This is important because readers’ processing of works is not straightforward, unproblematic, and uniform. It is often marked by bafflement, questions, reconsiderations. Moreover, that is not merely incidental. Such responses are a central part of one’s understanding of literature; the communicative discourse of literature does not occur without it.37

Drawing on Wolfgang Iser’s terminology, one may say that reading or viewing processes encounter gaps, points at which one’s sponta-
neous processing falters. Typically, this is due to a contradiction in or lack related to information or emotion. The real reader must then consider this contradiction or lack in relation to the implied reader/implied author. Specifically, he or she must determine whether the contradiction or lack is his or her own (i.e., whether it lies in the real reader), whether it is a matter of the implied reader (the case Iser had in mind), or whether it is a matter of the real author (thus some sort of error or flaw). It is worth considering each of these.

An informational contradiction or lack in the reader is probably the simplest case. For example, many readers of Hemingway’s story simply do not know what “arditi” refers to. Thus they come upon a reference to “arditi” and experience a contradiction between the implied reader assumed by the implied author (an implied reader who understands the reference) and their own knowledge. This gives rise to working-memory-based reflection. In this case, the problem is readily resolved by simply looking up the reference.

An emotional contradiction or lack is more complex. There is an emotional lack when one’s experience simply does not give one the emotional responsiveness to react appropriately to a particular feature of a narrative. For example, I recently read Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*. Lahiri treats the experience of a woman in labor. The manner in which the section is developed indicates to me that it is supposed to be highly emotional. However, I am largely emotionally indifferent to the passage. This suggests some sort of fault. Either Lahiri has failed to communicate the emotion of the scene adequately, or I am lacking in sensitivity to the events, due in part to an absence of emotional memories. Given the response of others to the novel, I am forced to conclude that the emotional lack is in me and the force of the section is different for women and men who have been more intimately involved with giving birth.

In other cases, informational or emotional contradictions may be attributed to the real author. There are many ways in which this may be the case. It is valuable to distinguish two. The first is a flaw in knowledge or craft on the part of the author. This bears on the aesthetic value of the work. The second is a broader, ideological contradiction, thus the sort of gap stressed by Marxist writers such as Althusser and Balibar (*symptomatic invisibility*; see, for example, 25–27) or Macherey (*incompleteness*; see, for example, 130–35). This sort of gap bears on the political or ethical value of the work.

Instances of the first sort include cases where one would say that an author misunderstood his own character. An example may be found in
Born of the Sun by Joseph Diescho (with Celeste Wallin). This novel concerns a Kavango man, Muronga, who travels from his village in Namibia to work in the South African mines. Diescho (with Wallin) makes a great deal of Muronga’s belief that airplanes are birds. This leads him to fear that he will be eaten by them and to believe that he is inside a bird when he boards a plane. Some readers may not question this. However, the sequence seems obtrusively implausible. First, Muronga is fully familiar with cars, carts, trucks, and trains. Thus he has some concept of man-made vehicles; he does not believe, for example, that trucks are some sort of elephant. Second, Muronga maintains his belief that it is a bird even after he boards and travels in a plane. These contradictions lead me as a reader to conclude that Diescho (with Wallin) has failed in the imagination of Muronga’s capacities for inference and understanding. As such, there is a flaw in the imagination of the character, which is to say, an aesthetic flaw in the novel.

In reflecting on the characterization in this way, I am confining myself to the text. However, one might also expand consideration beyond the text to, for example, the suggested inferential and imaginative capacities of illiterate African villagers. In this context, one might infer that, despite general political commitments and sympathies, Diescho (with Wallin) has been guided by an ideologically consequential misunderstanding of such villagers. Thus the gap is not only aesthetic, but also ideological.

For most students of literature, the most interesting and significant gaps in a literary work are not to be found in the inadequacies of the reader or the author. They are, rather, internal to the text itself. They are part of the experience of the implied reader. As such, they are moments where the text provokes hermeneutic reflection. This is broadly the sort of gap that Iser had in mind. As he explains, gaps give rise to a “frustration of expectations” that “blocks the flow of sentences” such that “we are led off in unexpected directions” and “bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections” (279–80). The reflection provoked by a gap may concern character motivation, the causes of a particular event, the nature of social relations within the fictional society, or a wide range of other topics. In this way, they affect one’s precise construal of the story from the discourse, as well as one’s emotional response to that story. No less important, such moments of reflective consideration often bear on the thematic concerns of a literary work, thus the ethical implications of the work for one’s daily life or its political implications for one’s social relations.
There are numerous gaps in the Hemingway story. One of the most obvious is the entire development of the marriage of Luz and the major. On first reading, I suspect most readers imagine that Luz’s engagement with the major was fixed. However, the phrasing is equivocal. The narrator says that the major courted Luz and Luz writes in the letter that “she expected . . . to be married in the spring.” Readers are actually given contradictory clues here. The word “expected” suggests that there has not been a formal engagement. However, the reference to a particular time for the wedding suggests that there has been such an engagement, since the time of the wedding would hardly be determined before the couple decided to get married at all. One can resolve this by interpreting the sentence to mean that they were definitely getting married, but that the uncertainty (indicated by the word, “expected”) only concerned the precise timing. On the other hand, this is qualified by the fact that the marriage never took place. There is, of course, no logical contradiction between a fixed engagement and no subsequent marriage. However, the latter does bear on one’s reflective interpretation and one may conclude that there never was a formal engagement. Perhaps Luz falsely inferred that they would marry, or perhaps they spoke informally about it, but never went through the formal process—for example, issuing the marriage banns mentioned earlier in the story.

The gap is not inconsequential. Thematically, it points toward a sort of contradiction in engagement and marriage themselves. On the one hand, marriage suggests equality of the partners—such equality that they can even be spoken of as, in some sense, “one.” But the real human relations of the couple almost always involve some degree of inequality or dominance. That inequality renders the union unstable. Indeed, in this story, the dominated partner apparently overestimates the stability of the relationship in both cases. In keeping with this, the dominant partner ends that relationship—Luz breaks things off with the soldier, and the major ends his relationship with Luz. Moreover, the inequality is itself unstable. When Luz is thrown over by the major, it may be that she writes to the soldier about it. In another gap, the reader is not told what she wrote (if she did write). But he or she might reflectively infer that Luz expressed penitence over her action, perhaps even hinting at a reconciliation. If so, she is no longer the dominant one in the relationship. As newly dominant, the soldier now forecloses the possibility of reestablishing his relationship with Luz, first by not responding to her letter and second by choosing a new partner.
It is important to note that gaps may be emotional rather than informational. Oliver Hirschbiegel’s film *Der Untergang* provides numerous examples. The film concerns Hitler’s last days and often portrays Hitler and his associates as much more normal and human than one would expect. Contradictions arise between the film’s cultivation of empathy with some of the characters and most viewers’ prior emotional attitude toward the historical figures they represent. Goebbels is perhaps the most striking instance. Goebbels had a central role in some of the most unspeakable acts of brutality in human history. Yet the film portrays him as a man with tender familial attachments and, most importantly, with a love for and devotion to Hitler that outweigh any self-interest. In contrast with some other prominent Nazi leaders, he remains committed to Hitler even when it is clear that defeat is imminent. The film portrays that loyalty as admirable, even though it is loyalty to perhaps the worst mass-murderer in history.

For many viewers, this portrayal is likely to generate a contradiction with their prior emotional response to Goebbels as a historical figure. As such, it produces a gap, something incompatible and unreconciled, that requires reflective consideration. In this case, the norm for this reflection is not entirely clear. One could view the film as partially rehabilitating some Nazi figures. Elsewhere in the film, there is a benevolent physician, also based on a historical figure, who could be cited as evidence for this view. My inclination, however, is to take the implied author/implied reader as simply assuming that nothing about Nazism should or could be rehabilitated. The thematic project is, rather, twofold. First, it is to suggest that even the worst atrocities committed by people are still committed by people. The Nazis were human, however much one would like to deny it. They were not some sort of mutants with no relation to people today. Thus we cannot so easily segregate their crimes from actions we ourselves undertake. Second, the film points to some of the reasons for these atrocities. It may or may not be accurate in the case of Goebbels, and that is not insignificant. But the point, I take it, is not to exculpate him. It is, rather, to indicate that one cause of a complete obliviousness to the cruelty of one’s actions—actions that, in the case of Goebbels, extend even to murdering all his children—can result from one’s complete emotional subordination to another person, a subordination in which all one’s motivations and understandings come to rest on the motivations and understandings of that other person.
The Real Reader and the Critic

The consideration of gaps and reflection clearly leads to both the real reader and the critic. The real reader, after all, is the one who engages in reflection, even if it is reflection that in part seeks to ascertain the norm of the implied reader—though it may also be reflection that evaluates the author or the real reader himself or herself. The critic, in turn, is the one who systematizes and elaborates the interpretive inferences, as well as the aesthetical and ethical evaluations, produced by reflection. Indeed, these are probably the central functions of the real reader and the critic, insofar as they are of general interest.

Nonetheless, there still are a few things that it is worth adding about both the real reader and the critic. First, it is important to stress once again that the norm provided by the implied reader is a norm of comprehension, not of actual response. Most critics would probably be inclined to say that a reader does not understand a work if he or she mistakes the implied reader—for example, if he or she sees Der Untergang as representing loyalty in a bad light, thus preferring the Nazi leaders who abandoned Hitler. However, readers are entirely free to diverge from the implied reader emotionally—or even inferentially, insofar as this bears on character autonomy and related matters. In other words, there is no need for viewers of Der Untergang to sympathize with Goebbels or even to understand his behavior as driven by loyalty (rather than, say, an inability to think of any way to save himself). The same points hold for the sahṛdaya. Readers may recognize and reject the emotional sensitivities assumed by the implied author. (As this phrasing suggests, one might think of such a rejection as denying the implied author’s assumptions about the ideally sensitive reader, rather than rejecting such an ideal itself. For example, one might say that a truly sensitive viewer would not sympathize with a mass murderer such as Goebbels, no matter what the film’s implied author may assume.)

Indeed, in recent decades, feminist and other politically engaged theorists have often advocated that a reader should be “resistant.” In terms of the present analysis, one could say that such a reader would not adopt the position of the implied reader, but would oppose it in certain key respects. Like response generally, such resistance can either be spontaneous or self-conscious. For example, sometimes theorists and critics suggest that women, directly as a result of being women, are resistant readers for patriarchal texts. This indicates that women will spontaneously reject the adoption of the implied reader’s ideas or attitudes inso-
far as these are guided by patriarchal ideology. In contrast, some critics would accept the basic Marxist view that class (or sex) origin does not determine class (or sex) stance. In other words, one’s membership in a certain group does not determine one’s attitude toward social issues concerning that group. Rather, a stance must be cultivated. In this respect, one might say that feminist resistance is a reflective opposition to the implied reader.

The culmination of reflective analysis is found in the systematic interpretive and evaluative practices of critics, in particular theoretically oriented critics. Critics set out to do two things. First, they examine and articulate features of a work to which readers respond un-self-consciously, features that readers encode and process, but do not formulate explicitly. In this way, critics are parallel to linguists, who describe and explain the features of speech spontaneously produced and unself-consciously understood by speakers and hearers of a language. But critics go beyond this also. They seek to isolate features of the work in order to change spontaneous readings, in order to produce either further encoding on the part of readers or different processing. In connection with this, critics often seek to make gaps salient in order to produce further reflection on the part of readers. These critical undertakings may contribute to the development of readers’ experiences of a work (e.g., their response to its emotional force), their interpretive comprehension of the story or its thematic concerns, their evaluative judgment of its aesthetic or political/ethical value, even their acceptance of or resistance to the norms of the implied reader.

In summary, it is possible to give a more complete version of the diagram presented earlier for the communicative part of discourse:

Real Author [Implied Author, guided by partially “autonomous” imagined agents [Nonpersonified Narrator {Personified Narrator {Focalizer {Topicalizer}}} Personified Narratee} Nonpersonified Narratee] Implied Reader/Sahṛdaya] Real Reader/Critic