

### 3 Narrative Situation: Who's Who and What's its Function

This chapter introduces the basic elements of narrative situation, the combination of narrator, perspective (point of view), and narrative level involved in first-person and third-person fictional narration.<sup>1</sup> A separate final section treats second-person narration and points readers to the growing bibliography on this unusual kind of narrative situation. This chapter deals exclusively with prose fiction, since the extent to which films have narrative situations, implied by the gaze of the camera, operates by rough analogies to the possibilities in prose fiction. Most films adopt the equivalent of third-person omniscience.<sup>2</sup>

Though characters and narrative levels are treated in depth in their own chapters (Chapters 4 and 8 respectively), they appear here first as ingredients of narrative situation. Briefly, characters, the active agents represented within narratives, may possess perspectives or points of view, or they may be depicted externally through reports of their speech and actions. Narrators, who are responsible for acts of telling, can be characters when they are positioned inside the story world, but often narrators are located outside the story world. A narrator positioned outside the story world can convey sufficient information to assume the status of a character, but unless the writer has a frame-breaking surprise up her sleeve, that kind of overt narrator still usually isn't a character within the story. These distinctions reflect the basic conception of narrative level, as comprised of (at least) a discourse level, a realm of narrated words-in-order, and the story level, a realm of imagined actions and agents.

Narrative situation describes where the narrator is located, how overtly or covertly the narrator makes his or her presence felt, and what relationship the narrator has to the characters, in one or more of whom perspective may be invested. In other words, narrative situation describes the nature of the

mediation between author and reader, and it encompasses extremes: those narratives that seem to be the autobiographical outpourings of a narrator who closely resembles the author, as well as those that appear to record with perfect neutrality the actions of a set of figures moving on a remote stage, and those that have the feel of a first-person perspective while actually employing third-person reference—the 'center of consciousness' made famous by Henry James. Accurately using the language of narrative situation prevents two rudimentary errors: referring to a character in a third-person fiction whose perspective provides the central point of view as 'the narrator'; and calling an omniscient narrator by the name of the author. Understanding narrative situation offers far more than avoiding errors of terminology, however. The various combinations of narrators and reflectors (perspective-bearing characters; also called 'filters' or 'focalizers')<sup>3</sup> suggest different degrees of authority and reliability, and they profoundly affect the way readers interpret stories.

Virtually the first thing narrative theorists seek to ascertain about a text is its narrative situation. They ask themselves questions such as: Who tells the tale? (What kind of narrator does the writer create?); Does the telling imply speech, writing, or thought? (and a matching narratee—listener, reader, or self-auditor?); Who sees the actions? (Does a narrator provide the perspective from the outside, or do character(s) within the story view the events? Does the perspective of a single character or set of characters dominate the view of the fictional world?) Where do the functions of narration reside in relation to the story world? (Does the narrator perch outside or above the story world, or within it? Is the narrator also a character in the story?) Answering these and other questions about a text can be done handily with the vocabulary discussed in this chapter.

For some narratologists, the application of technical language in the accurate description of narrative situation may seem to be an end in itself. Taxonomy is indeed one of the aims of classical narratology; good taxonomy requires elaborate naming. The strength of narratology in this area, however, becomes its gravest weakness. Some of the most irritating jargon ever devised was invented for the purpose of discussing narrative situation, and accuracy does the literary critic no good if readers refuse to attend to insights produced by the use of difficult terminology. This chapter thus takes on a double task. First, it explains in relatively plain terms an aspect of narrative form most completely described by narratologists in hyper-technical language. Readers wishing to master the terminology can use the references in the notes and the bibliography to find their ways to the most technical narratological works (see especially

Genette and Prince). Second, this chapter makes a case for the immediate usefulness of narrative situation to the critic and teacher. In the classroom and in critical writing about narrative fiction, accurate observations about narrative situation lead to fruitful discussions of critical and interpretive problems. Form and content, structure and theme: these are not artificially bound together by critics seeking significance in incidental matters of narrative art. The manipulation of narrative situation is one of the most useful strategies possessed by fiction writers to elicit sympathy, to command respect, and to unleash the complicated effects that go by the name of irony. Furthermore, a reader attentive to narrative situation will be better able to interpret those occasions when a writer alters a narrative's perspective, or changes narrators, or even appears to 'break the rules' about what a narrator or reflector can do.

### Terms

Narrative tells or shows a story. Whether it appears in the written verbal forms that are the central subject of this book, or in one of many visual or hybrid narrative forms (films, computer games, operas), narrative communicates. This communication works on different levels simultaneously, with several mediating figures performing different, albeit overlapping, functions. The author communicates with the reader; the narrator directs its discourse to a narratee; characters interact with one another. The actions, thoughts, and speech of characters occur inside the story world, or at the level of action. The narrator and narratee (recipient of the narrative) may also share the space of the story world with the characters, but they often occupy a distinct level separate from the story (often conceived spatially as existing 'above' the story). This realm, which is implied by the existence of the discourse, as the zone from which speech or writing emanates, may be elaborately or very lightly represented: it is the imaginary neutral zone from which a covert 'omniscient' narrator spins out language, or the cozy library in which an overt narrator props up his or her feet and 'speaks' to his or her guest. Outside the text itself, the author writes words to be read by other people; narrators may be represented as existing either inside or outside the story world, where they 'write,' 'speak,' or 'think,' but they can never escape their location in their own narrative discourse, which is the substance of their existence.

Conventionally, 'real' people such as authors and readers are firmly distinguished from the textual creations—narrator, narratee, and characters. Though many narratives endeavor to persuade readers of the roundness or

psychological depth of their narrators and characters, these entities are usefully differentiated from real people. E. M. Forster called characters 'word masses,' representatives of the species 'homo fictus.' Roland Barthes named them 'paper beings.' These estranging labels help us to avoid treating characters as if they possessed lives independent of the words which constitute them. Narrators whose views and attitudes appear to mirror those of their creator should also be distinguished from the real people who crafted their narration. This practice helps preserve terminological consistency when we are confronted with narrators whose opinions obviously differ from the recorded views of their makers.

real author → I implied author → (narrator) → (narratee) → implied reader | I → real reader

Figure 1

Figure 1 reproduces Seymour Chatman's paradigm for narrative structure (*Story and Discourse*, 151). This model usefully identifies all the figural positions located around, contained in, and implied by a narrative text. Chatman draws on work by both Wayne Booth (in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*) and Wolfgang Iser (in *The Implied Reader* and *The Act of Reading*) to create a model naming the participants in narrative transactions, when narrative is understood as an act of communication, with a sender and a receiver. Thus the diagram flows from left to right, from the real author to the real audience or readers. In between those individuals, who necessarily exist outside the world of the text, Chatman places the entities projected by or implied by the text. Thus, drawing on both Booth and Iser, Chatman shows two additional extra-textual positions, the implied author and the implied reader. The following paragraphs briefly define these terms from Chatman's paradigm.

The author is the actual historical person who wrote the text. For instance, Charles Dickens is the author of *David Copperfield* (1849–50); Anonymous, an unknown woman or man of the Middle Ages, composed the ballad 'Sir Patrick Spens.' The implied author is the version of the author projected by the text itself and sometimes also conditioned by our knowledge about the actual author's life and career. Thus we can speak of the Dickens of *The Pickwick Papers* (1836–37), as contrasted with the Dickens of *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65), or the Mark Twain of *Tom Sawyer* (1876) versus the Mark Twain of *Huckleberry Finn* (1885). This use of implied authors invokes contrasting characteristics, distinct temperaments, and narrative styles implied by the different books, without denying the historical Charles Dickens or Samuel Clemens their roles as the actual or real authors. The use of pseudonyms in publishing distinguishes the actual

author (Mary Ann Evans) from the implied author of her creation, projected by the text (George Eliot). Similarly, we can characterize the practices of the author of an anonymous narrative without knowing his or her historical identity. In these cases, the name given to the implied author ('the Pearl poet,' 'the Gawaii poet,' 'the author of *Primary Colors* (1996)'), doubles as the name of the actual author until historical research or revelations in the news produce evidence of the real author's identity. The actions, intentions, aesthetic decisions, and motivations of the implied author, so often the subject of speculation in literary criticism, take present tense in formal writing. Thus the historical Dickens *lived*, *suffered* the indignity of the blacking factory, *wrote*, *made* loads of money, *left* his wife, *went* on reading tours, and *died* exhausted, whereas the implied author, 'the Dickens of *Bleak House* (1852–53),' perpetually *experiments* with a mixture of first and third person, *continues* to employ characters to do his bidding, and permanently *abides* in the realm of the present tense. It makes no difference whether an author is living or dead; the real author's actions belong to literary history, which takes the past tense, and the actions of the implied author belong with other projections or contents of the text, to which we conventionally refer in the present tense. Because literary critics and readers are free to attribute all sorts of motivations, qualifications, and aptitudes to the implied author of a text, it is axiomatic that implied authors are smarter and more capable than any ordinary flesh and blood human being who writes.<sup>4</sup>

In Chatman's scheme, the narrator, character(s), and narratee are textual creations. The narrator is the entity from whom the discourse comprising the story emanates. David Copperfield narrates the first-person novel of that name, while Dickens employs various unnamed narrators to do the telling in third-person novels. (Various kinds of narrator—first-person, third-person, internal, external, overt, covert, reliable, unreliable—are treated below.) The characters operate within the story world, where the narrator (and narratee) may also be located, especially when the story is self-narrated by a first-person narrator. See, for example, Edgar Allan Poe's 'A Tell-Tale Heart' (1843). However, the narrator and narratee often exist outside the story world. The communication of the narrator implies the existence of a narratee existing at the same narrative level. This is the entity to whom the narration is directed, overtly or covertly (implicitly). In some texts the narratee is given a name through direct address: 'O my Brothers' in Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*; 'Reader' in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847); 'Sir' and 'Madam' in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67).<sup>5</sup>

Whether named or not, the narratee differs from the implied reader analogously to the way in which the narrator differs from the implied author. The implied reader is the name we give to the profile of readerly traits that seems to be assumed by the text. A novel may project an implied reader familiar with popular culture of the 1980s, as does Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* (1985), with its frequent quotations of contemporary music videos. It may demand a reader of a certain age or level of education. Like the implied author, the implied reader is a projection of the text, and differs in every instance from actual readers, many of whom will not exactly match the profile suggested by the text. Some novelists deliberately exploit the gap between narratee (seemingly in sympathy with the narrator) and implied reader (assumed to be skeptical and alert to signs of unreliability, for instance). Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989) makes good use of that ironic gap between narratee, apparently a fellow butler, and implied reader. Furthermore, all novelists whose work lasts beyond its initial publication will be read by actual readers differing markedly from the implied readers projected by their texts. Peter J. Rabinowitz augments this model with the notion of the authorial reader, an actual reader who actively attempts to enter the implied readership projected by the text and live up to the expectations projected by the text.<sup>6</sup>

Real readers are easy to define—the people who read narratives—and difficult to analyze. Literary theorists working in the fields of 'reception theory' (following Iser), reader response criticism (see Tompkins), and cognitive science (see Herman) have deepened our understanding of the practices of actual readers. In traditional literary criticism, we privilege those actual readers whose reactions to texts have been preserved in print (in book reviews or critical articles) or collected in archives of personal papers (in diaries or letters). This means that the readers who count often differ from the majority of readers in their social class or educational attainments. Some reader response criticism works to mitigate this phenomenon by setting up experimental situations in which the responses of ordinary readers are collected. Whatever its source, the published testimony about a text becomes part of its history, though this history may tell us more about the changing tastes of readers than about the text itself. Through sales figures, bestseller lists, bibliographic accounts of editions, citation indexes, college course syllabi, and through the comments of readers published on internet sites (as for instance in the reviews that Amazon.com collects), critics can trace the activities of real readers. But evidence from the marketplace should be treated carefully, for one can never know for sure if a person who purchases a text, for education or for pleasure, actually takes the step of becoming one of its real readers.

## Narrators

The first distinction that the study of narrators demands is that of first-person from third-person narrators. New students who spot an 'I' here or there on the page may leap to the conclusion that the text must be a first-person narrative, but this isn't necessarily the case. As numerous commentators have pointed out, any overt narrator has the capacity to refer to himself or herself as 'I.' The use of the pronoun alone does not make a first-person narration. Instead, first-person narration, or self-narration, indicates those narratives in which the narrator is also a character, where the narrator and characters coexist in the story world, and the narrator refers to himself or herself as 'I.'

In one variety of first-person narrative, the experiencing self is also the protagonist, or the central character. Often called fictional autobiographies, these narratives do not differ formally from actual autobiographies of real people about their own lives, except in the fictitiousness and preconception of the events narrated. In both cases a narrating self presents the earlier life-events of an experiencing self. Examples range from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) to Ernest Gaines's *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971), a novel that fooled some of its early readers into thinking it was really the work of an elderly ex-slave woman. First-person fiction of this kind may be either consonant or dissonant, that is, it may present the experiences of the protagonist-self as reported by a narrating self positioned very close to the experiences (consonant narration), or it may emphasize the altered perceptions made possible by a gap in time between experiences and narration (dissonant narration). Dissonant narration lets the narrating self deliver judgments or make reflections that would be impossible or highly implausible for a narrator cleaving close to the experiences: see for example some of the adult language about a boy's experiences in James Joyce's 'Araby' (1914). This kind of first-person narration may then contain sharply differentiated voices of the 'same' figure, the experiencing self and the retrospective narrating self, structurally analogous to the reflecting character and the narrator in third-person fiction. At the start of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861), Pip is presented in dissonant first-person narration. Throughout Don Delillo's *White Noise* (1985), by way of contrast, Jack Gladney narrates his own experiences consonantly. In first-person versions of the novel of development, or *Bildungsroman*, the narrator may show a modulation from dissonant to consonant presentation of his or her experiences, which can suggest or underscore the character's growing maturity.<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, first-person fiction can be presented in

sections with varying degrees of consonance or dissonance, depending on the fictional circumstances of the telling or composition, as in the separate depositions of Ned Kelly in Peter Carey's *The True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000).

As an alternative to first-person fiction in which the self is the central figure, some first-person narrators, while participating in the story, focus on the actions of others. The account this kind of narrator offers of the central characters is most often limited to what he or she could plausibly know, but there are exceptions, where a first-person narrator presents the thoughts and feelings of a character with whom he or she shares the story space. Though first-person narrators in general may reasonably be suspected of partiality if not of outright unreliability, many cases of unreliable narrators employ the narrative situation of a participating-self narrator who is not the central character. (Unreliable narrators are treated below.) Steven Millhauser's *Edwin Mullhouse: The Life and Death of an American Writer 1943–1954* (1972) presents a case in which the first-person narrator Jeffrey Cartwright acts as a highly unreliable Boswell to his childhood friend Edwin Mullhouse, the protagonist of Cartwright's fictional biography. Certainly not all first-person narrators who focus on other characters are suspect; Barry Unsworth's *Morality Play* (1995) employs reliable self-narration by one of a group of traveling players. Like self-narration in which the narrator is also the central character, this kind of first-person fiction can either be quite immediate in its reporting (consonant) or more retrospective (dissonant).

Plural first-person narration is uncommon but intriguing; William Faulkner's story 'A Rose for Emily' (1930) is considered a *tour de force* in its use of a communal, civic voice.<sup>8</sup> The better part of Joyce Carol Oates's novel *Broke Heart Blues* (1999) is narrated by communal voices variously comprised of the members of a high school class, sometimes speaking for the girls, sometimes for the boys, sometimes confined to an elite clique, and sometimes including the town's perspective. The use of the plural pronoun alone does not necessarily indicate a plural narrator, however. In Ayn Rand's novella *Anthem* (1938, 1946), the singular narrator Equality-7-2521 speaks of 'we,' but means 'I.' He has been indoctrinated to understand himself as a part of a group identity, and the novella reaches its climax when he discovers the forbidden concept of the individual and the sacred word 'Ego.' Perhaps because of cases like this, plural narrators can seem gimmicky; even more exceptional are the very rare cases of second-person narration, employing a singular or plural 'you.' I will return to these anomalous narrative situations after the next section, on the different varieties of third-person narration.

To say that a narrative employs third-person narration should immediately raise the questions 'What kind?' and 'How?' Further, a critical reader may inquire whether the narrator shares the space of the story world with the characters, or exists in a realm external to the events of the story. The capacities exercised by a narrator in either location ought also to be noticed: does the narrator provide an external view of events and characters, or does it give access to the thoughts and feelings of one or more characters? Does the narrator reveal himself or herself as an overt presence in the narrative, or does the narrator operate covertly, revealing no personality and avoiding direct address of the reader? The answers to these questions, when compiled, go a long way towards establishing the norms and potentialities of a work's narrative situation.

The most familiar distinction made by students of the novel or creative writing differentiates 'limited' from 'omniscient' third-person narrators. 'Third-person limited (or restricted) narration usually refers to situations where a single character's perspective governs the perceptions included in the telling of the story. The writer achieves this effect by limiting the representation of consciousness or perceptions to a single figure (not the narrator). This limitation of perspective does not prevent the writer from employing the narrator to perform mundane tasks, such as providing the tagging of spoken discourse ('he said') that exists outside the central character's perspective. Even in limited narration, in other words, the narrator and the reflecting or focalizing character remain distinct: Henry James's 1900 story 'The Tree of Knowledge' provides one of many examples of this technique in use. The center of consciousness (Henry James's term for what is now often called the reflector, the filter, or focalizer) provides the perspective, while the narrator employs the third person. Omniscient narration usually requires a narrator who exists outside the story world and freely informs the reader about any and all details about a host of characters; the standard accounts associate omniscient narration with nineteenth-century (English) novelists. The temptation with omniscient narrators is to equate them and their opinions with their creators, a move that is rarely justified and often misleading. (A better strategy is to establish the nature of the narrator and assert that the implied author projected by the text receives strong coloring from the personality of the narrator.) If omniscient narration is supposed to be a Victorian way of telling, twentieth-century novelists, according to the usual story, prefer limited narration. The fact that many counter-examples to both generalizations exist only emphasizes the fact that a narrow canon of works are often taken to be representative of whole centuries of literary production. Finally, the most cursory survey

of third-person narratives quickly reveals examples that fit neither description—'limited' and 'omniscient' are most useful in indicating two ends of a spectrum of possibilities.

Franz Stanzel suggests the terms 'authorial' and 'figural' narration as alternatives to omniscient and limited narration, respectively. Stanzel's terms have the advantage of more neutral coloring: they suggest a narrator who functions above and outside his creations, like an author, employing an external perspective (authorial), or a narration focused on and reflecting internally upon individual figures (figural). The traditional terms suggest a narrator like a god (omniscient), and a narration stunted or blinded by its 'limits.'<sup>9</sup> In the *authorial narrative situation*, the narrator exists outside the story world of the characters and possesses capacities consistent with an external perspective—the narrator can offer panoramic descriptions and observations about events occurring simultaneously in the story world. In the *figural narrative situation*, the perspective of a reflecting character inside the story world (Genette calls this function focalizing) overwrites the narrator, whose presence is downplayed. Stanzel summarizes his three categories simply: 'What determines the nature of a particular narrative situation is, above all, the first person as a character in the novel in the first-person narrative situation, external perspective in the authorial narrative situation, and reflector-mode in the figural narrative situation' (*Theory*, 5). In Stanzel's own examples George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–72) employs an authorial narrative situation, whereas James Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* exemplifies (until the very end), the figural narrative situation. The fact that many readers regard Joyce's reflector, Stephen, as a thinly disguised version of Joyce's younger self, does not make the narrative situation 'authorial.' The internal perspective renders the technique 'figural.'

Authorial and figural narrative situations represent not absolute differences, but poles of a continuum (in Stanzel's original scheme the possibilities are represented as segments of a circle, shading into one another in border regions). While a purely external narrator, like the narrator of Ivy Compton Burnett's novels, who renders speeches and actions but keeps thoughts and commentary to a minimum, may be easily identified as authorial, an external narrator who takes the reader into just four perspectives, as Rohinton Mistry does in *A Fine Balance* (1995), can be seen as authorial in some ways (the narrator provides an overarching external perspective conveying information outside the experience of the central reflecting characters), or as figural within each section (the perspective of Dina dominates some sections, Maneck other sections, Ishvar and Om still other sections). Indeed, the central dilemma of the novel can be read in the

technique, as Mistry creates a fine balance between the perspectives of his characters as they break down the social barriers that would ordinarily prevent intimacy. Thus the decision to call a narrator authorial or figural can itself pose interpretive challenges.

Narratologists have developed an elaborate taxonomy of narrative situation to describe those cases that lie somewhere between 'figural' and 'authorial' narrative situations, but they have done so using vocabulary that confuses or puts off many readers of criticism (instead of 'authorial,' Genette uses the term 'extraheterodiegetic' narrator). If one is willing to describe a narrator using more terms rather than fewer, one can achieve much of the specificity afforded by narratology's taxonomies without sacrificing clarity. Having established the narration in terms of person (first- or third-person, figural or authorial, internal or external), the critic can then add several other observations to the description of narrative situation.

One of the most useful distinctions concerns the degree of personification of the narrator. Is the narrator overt or covert? An *overt narrator* announces his or her presence through self-reference; a *covert narrator* is the scarcely noticeable functionary who provides speech tags and indications of setting and temporal movements, identifies characters, and narrates actions, all untinged with personality. The first sort of narrator is extremely common in a figural narrative situation, where the personality of the reflecting character dominates the reader's impression of the narration. Covert narrators can be used in an authorial narrative situation, but even where few clues about the qualities of an external narrator exist, readers tend to fill in or assume they know features such as gender, age, and attitude. Overt narrators may or may not identify their age and gender, but they leave sufficient evidence of their existence in the text to create a sense of a distinct personality. Overt narrators can make summaries of time passing or provide bird's-eye views. They can identify characters with capsule descriptions of their traits, pasts, appearance, and what they think, as well as what they do not think or say. Overt narrators can offer commentary, including interpretation of the action, judgments about characters or events, generalizations, and even self-conscious remarks about the narration. A named narrator is by personification rendered overt.

Overt narrators are common in authorial narrative situations and automatic in first person. While few sophisticated readers would mistake a first-person narrator for the author (Molly Bloom is obviously not Joyce), overt authorial narrators (such as Trollope's narrators) are often mistaken for the author. (See the discussion above on implied and real authors for a set of

terms that helps distinguish narrator, implied author, and real writer.) Finally, the overtness or covertness of a narrator can change during the course of a narrative, as an overt narrator fades from view or a covert one suddenly demands attention. Just because covertness seems to rule the opening 50 pages of a narrative does not guarantee that it will be sustained throughout the whole narrative. Henry James objected strenuously to the chatty breaking in upon his narration that exemplifies Trollope's overt narrator. Tastes change, however, and in recent fiction breaks with the apparent norms of a narrative situation, including a sudden burst of overtness from a previously covert narrator (as in the end of Iris Murdoch's *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983)) have become more common, and not only in experimental or postmodern fiction. Noticing where and speculating why moments of overtness occur in an otherwise covert narration, or observing the retreat from overtness that can occur over the course of a novel, can provide opportunities for interpretation.

The degree of overtness of a narrator may have an impact on other aspects of narrative situation. Fully personified narrators may narrate either externally or internally. They may exist outside the story world or may coexist with the characters inside the story world. A personified, overt narrator who exists inside the story world with the characters about whom he or she narrates is perhaps the most logical bearer of the term 'limited,' since the circumstances of the narration would usually imply that such a narrator could not exercise omniscience, having good excuses for not knowing everything, or even for withholding information. However, a narrator who appears at first to be external and omniscient may be revealed at the end to be a singularly well-informed cohabitant with the characters. In *The Philosopher's Pupil*, the narrator at first appears to be covert and external (authorial), but is revealed at the end to be overt (though usually reticent) and involved in the action with the characters of the story world. Evidently, 'N' has interviewed all the participants in order to gain the copious evidence of their thoughts, feelings, and motivations that would usually be plausible only as funneled through an external authorial narrator. Murdoch's 'N' acts authorial despite existing inside the story world. As 'N' comments coyly, 'I also had the assistance of a certain lady,' presumably the author (*Philosopher's Pupil*, 558).

Narrative situation can be further complicated when more than one narrator is used. Both horizontal and vertical extensions of the narrative function can be made, and each extension should be described independently in order to accumulate an accurate description of the narrative situation and perspective. The reader asks 'Does the text use more than one

narrator?' and 'Does the narrator combine with a single reflector or with more than one reflector?' In cases with plural narrators, these tellers may exist parallel to one another (though they may not show awareness of one another's existence), or they may be presented within the story world (inside another's narration). There are two possibilities when a character narrates: the straightforward use of the first-person narrative situation, or the secondary or tertiary nested narration that occurs when a character in someone else's narration (delivered either in the first or third person) becomes a teller in his or her own right. By far the most famous example of this kind of nested narrative situation comes from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902). Properly described, Marlow is a secondary narrator inside a frame narrative that itself possesses a narrator who becomes one of the group of narratees on the ship to whom Marlow tells his tale. Nested narrations (frame tales and so forth) are treated in more detail in Chapter 8. When responding to a narrative that has more than one narrative level or more than one narrator located in a parallel level, the critic will not be wasting time by characterizing the narrative situation of each narrative level or section. As will be seen below, interpretations of the reliability of the narration often hinge on accurate descriptions of narrative situation.

Wayne Booth's description of the *unreliable narrator* in his magisterial *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961, 1983) has proven one of the most enduring contributions to the permanent vocabulary for the discussion of narrative, but it is nonetheless frequently misunderstood. A common mistake is to describe the fallibility of a reflector character in a figural narrative situation as an 'unreliable narrator.' As I have suggested above, the reflecting character (focalizer) does not actually narrate; the character can possess an incomplete or misguided perspective, but he or she cannot narrate unreliably if he or she does not do the telling, just the perceiving. Another failure of critical tact can occur when *all* narrators become objects of suspicion, including the most neutral, covert, external narrators. To say that a narrator is unreliable is not a value judgment, and it differs radically from an accusation of lying. It suggests instead that a writer deliberately exploits readers' awareness that the version of the story retailed by the narrator should be treated with skepticism (this awareness on readers' part often grows stronger as they read more). Seymour Chatman explains Wayne Booth's idea in an admirably clear formulation: 'what makes a narrator unreliable is that his values diverge strikingly from that of the implied author's; that is, the rest of the narrative—"the norm of the work"—conflicts with the narrator's presentation, and we become suspicious of his sincerity or competence to tell the "true version"' (*Story and Discourse*, 149).

Identifying an unreliable narrator is always to some extent interpretive (for one must also establish the 'norms' associated with the implied author), but there are some handy ground rules.

First, a covert external authorial narrator is unlikely to be unreliable. As a narrator becomes more overt (see discussion above), the possibility of unreliability grows. A first-person narrator's implicit values are quite likely to diverge from those of the implied author, though certainly many first-person narrators, and especially dissonant (or retrospective) ones, strike readers as highly reliable. Who would doubt the veracity of what Jane Eyre imparts to her Reader? A third-person narrator who operates inside the story world with the characters about whom he or she narrates is usually more fully personified, and the more personified the narrator, the more opportunities for unreliability arise. Plausible reasons for a narrator's unreliability include the following: psychological states, such as grief or denial; incapacities, such as a low IQ or incomplete grasp of the language, senility, or extreme youth; simple obtuseness or limited information; dishonesty or some other kind of motivation to spin a story in a misleading way. When an unreliable narrator is at work in a story, the effect can be irritating, amusing, shocking, or provocative of sympathy for seemingly antipathetic characters. The umbrella term under which rhetoricians would place most of the consequences of unreliability is irony, and the differences between the views of the narrator and the views that readers impute to the implied author must be significant enough to generate tension. If the identification of an unreliable narrator makes no difference to the interpretation of the story (what would it mean to find Eliot's narrator in *Middlemarch* unreliable?), then the term should not be used. Finally, like other aspects of narrative situation, the narrator may progress from a condition of unreliability to something closer to reliability, as Stevens the butler does in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, or a narrator could devolve into unreliability through the onset of madness or decay of faculties.

Determining whether a narrator should be described as unreliable often comes down to questions of motivation: What effect would the author produce by rendering the narrator unreliable? What would change interpretively if the narrator were discovered to be withholding information, misrepresenting events, or slanting the story in a way to make it suspect? Would it matter what the reasons for unreliability appeared to be? Ring Lardner's masterful story 'Haircut' (1925) employs a first-person narrator, a small-town barber named Whitey, who speaks to the stranger in his chair. Whitey tells a story about the killing of a town character, Jim, who appears to the reader a monstrous fellow, not just the practical joker Whitey

describes. Furthermore, the reader comes to realize that the accidental shooting of Jim is almost certainly a murder orchestrated by the town doctor in a revenge plot. Whitey appears not to comprehend the import of the anecdotes he tells. Yet everything that the reader needs to understand the underlying story is narrated by Whitey. If Whitey is judged unreliable, he could be so due to limited mental and moral capacities—a narrator incapable of comprehending the wrongdoing he has witnessed or heard about. He could simply be a disorganized teller—Lardner, who began as a journalist, excels at capturing the voices of ordinary people, including their meaning speech. Alternatively, Whitey could be a sly and knowing narrator, conveying a sinister warning to the stranger in the barber's chair: if he knows what he is telling, is he then still unreliable? (Dorrit Cohn suggests that the term 'discordant' narrator makes a useful supplement to the terms 'reliable' and 'unreliable' for those cases where the narrator imparts information about events accurately, but displays attitudes that jar the reader and seem to clash with the views attributed to the implied author.<sup>10</sup>) That there is no way finally to decide questions about narrative reliability through formal tests is part of what makes it such a perennial discussion topic in the literature classroom. Readers are bound to disagree, and from those disagreements come the contesting interpretations so prized by teachers of literature.

### Perspective

Thus far my discussion of narrative situation has de-emphasized the role of characters in favor of narrators (characters receive full treatment in Chapter 4). To review, narrative situation encompasses narrative levels, the narrator, and the relationship of the narrator to the characters. When a character self-narrates, then character and narrator overlap, though a gap between the experiencing self and narrating self may be emphasized (see consonance and dissonance, above). Any character within a story may also be used as a secondary narrator for an embedded narration (see Chapter 8). The most central function of a character in narrative situations, however, lies in a character's role as a 'reflector' (Genette's 'focalizer,' Chatman's 'filter').<sup>11</sup> This terminology has been mentioned earlier as it pertains to authorial and figural narrators. Discussion of a narrative fiction's perspective adds the dimension of character-centered perception that is implied by the popular term 'point of view.' In addition to the colloquial slippage between 'point of view' and 'opinion,' the term has other limitations. At least metaphorically, it

makes a priority of the character's eyes and gaze that may not adequately capture the matrix of thoughts, sensations, memories, preoccupations, and interests that comprise a 'reflecting' character's 'perspective,' though perspective (and focalization) both also suggest lines of sight.<sup>12</sup> I like 'reflector' because it conveys both a visual direction and a cognitive component. Thus it works for external narration, featuring the slant of a character or the internal report of a character's interior: both can fit one phrase of the metaphor of reflection. Reflector can also be smoothly integrated into description of narrative situations employing fixed, multiple, or variable perspectives, and it can work in combination with a narrator's externalized reports of objects, actions, and persons which the reader is also expected to visualize. Fixed perspective sticks with a set reflector (usually a single figure, though sometimes a fused unit such as a husband and wife). Multiple perspectives can be employed either in formal alternation (with different sections employing different centers of consciousness) or within the same scene, when more than one character's reflections on the action are offered. The former strategy is more consistent with figural narrative situation, and the latter more common in authorial narration, where the external perspective of the narrator makes the presentation of multiple characters' thoughts more plausible. Variable perspectives can be especially interesting, as when Doris Lessing almost imperceptibly withdraws the male perspective from what begins as a plural reflector, 'David and Harriet,' in her novella *The Fifth Child* (1988). This manipulation of narrative situation enhances the effect of David's alienation and Harriet's isolation, even before Ben, their fifth child, enters the tale. The modes of representation of fictional consciousness that contribute so significantly to a reflecting character's function are treated in detail in Chapter 4.

### Second-person narration

It would be easy to dismiss second-person narration as rarely used, gimmicky, or even just irritating. (Certainly most creative writers' how-to guides advise against using it.)<sup>13</sup> That would be to ignore two phenomena: a marked increase in the use of second-person narration in recent fiction, and a flurry of theoretical articles grappling with the challenge second-person narration poses to the traditional formal analysis of narrative situation in fiction. Narrative theory has a weakness for atypical narrative strategies and borderline cases, and it can emphasize the unusual at the expense of accuracy about the ordinary. I proceed, therefore, with the



caution that second-person narrative fiction is uncommon, and that a critical consensus has not yet emerged on how to describe it, or rather, how to delimit it so as to distinguish it from other narrative situations that include the second person, such as the 'you' addressee of epistolary fiction, remarks addressed to a narratee, or extended apostrophes.

Second-person narration refers to a protagonist as 'you.' This conflates the protagonist called 'you' with the narratee, or even with the real reader, though the more specific information about the thoughts, actions, and speech of the protagonist accumulates, the less likely these features are to be confused with the reader's. Most commentators on second-person narration emphasize the blurring of boundaries between protagonist and reader invited by the use of 'you.' I doubt that real readers are ever confused, though they may be entertained or enjoined to sympathize, by the technique. Readers of fiction tend to understand that they are not the characters in the narratives they read; if their reading is aggressively characterized by the text, they still possess the power to dissent or to cease reading. As both James Phelan and Robyn Warhol observe, the more fully characterized a narratee becomes in a fiction, the greater the sense of dissonance felt by the reader (whereas the less fleshed-out the narratee, the more willingly a reader may comply with the imputed identification). The 'you' narration tends in the direction of this narratee-related dissonance, unless the reader simply converts the 'you' mentally into the third person 'he' or 'she', as can be done nearly automatically when reading an extended 'you' narration.

Like other narrative situations, second-person narrative can be external or internal, authorial or figural. It can range from extended interior monologue of a first-person character addressing himself or herself as 'you,' as in the second-person passages of Carlos Fuentes' *The Death of Artemio Cruz* (1962, trans. 1964), to an authorial narrator's telling of a story, where the degree of omniscience apparently extends to include the reader's mind, as well. Second-person narration can function as a device inviting identification with a main character labeled and addressed as 'you,' as in Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984): 'Already you feel a sense of nostalgia as you walk down the narrow halls past all the closed doors. You remember how you felt when you passed this way for your first interview, how the bland seediness of the hallway only increased your apprehension of grandeur' (34). In that case the second-person narration persists through the whole novel. It can also be used intermittently, in combination with other narrative situations, in either the first or third person, as a way of marking a particular character as especially different. For instance, in Stella Gibbons's *Cold Comfort Farm* (1932), the domineering grandmother Aunt Ada Doom recalls:

When you were very small—so small that the lightest puff of breeze blew your little crinoline shift over your head—you had seen something nasty in the woodshed.

You'd never forgotten it.

...

That was why you stayed in this room. You had been here for twenty years, ever since Judith had married and her husband had come to live at the farm. (113)

This early extract remind us that second-person narration, though uncommon, is not simply the product of postmodern experimentation.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, it suggests that second person can be used with past tense narration, though it is certainly the case that it is often combined with present tense in imitation of what is sometimes called 'guidebook imperative': 'Put on some jazz. Take off your clothes. Carefully. It is a craft' (Lorrie Moore, 'How,' 56). You narration can also verge into a projected future or subjunctive narration,<sup>15</sup> as in the same story by Lorrie Moore: 'You will fantasize about a funeral. At that you could cry. It would be a study in post-romantic excess, something vaguely Wagnerian. You would be comforted by his lugubrious sisters and his dental hygienist mom' (61). In some uses of the imperative second person, as in Lorrie Moore's 'The Kid's Guide to Divorce,' the impression of an implicit first-person narrator speaking to herself becomes so strong that questions of the (self)-narrator's reliability arise. As David Herman points out, the location of the addressee can be horizontal, within the fictional world, or it can reach beyond the story worlds toward the reader.<sup>16</sup> Some readers find second-person narration annoying, but that may not be the desired effect. The novelist Helen Dunmore told me that she chose to use second-person narration in her book *With Your Crooked Heart* (1999) to enhance the intimacy of the reading experience. That novel is in fact a multi-personed narrative, with sections in first, third, and second person alternating somewhat erratically throughout the novel.

Acknowledging the many multi-personed narrative fictions makes a good place for this chapter to come to an end of its descriptive task. As soon as students of narrative form become comfortable in recognizing the different kinds of narrative situation, they will realize that many novels and stories combine narrative situations in patterns, in deliberate illogic, or in ambiguous ways. Indeed, the many-voiced quality of novelistic discourse, containing as it does the contesting voices, styles, speech, and thoughts of a variety of characters

from different social realms, has sometimes been considered a defining feature of the novel. For Mikhail Bakhtin 'polyphony' emphasizes the variety of different positions available for the author within a text; the analysis of polyphonic effects can be accomplished handily with the vocabulary for narrative situation introduced in this chapter, especially if the critic grants multiple perspectives validity and resists the urge to ascribe an overarching point of view to 'the author.' The author's voice, according to Bakhtin, is mediated by the multiple alternative voices of characters within the text. These voices are themselves positioned in dialogic relation to one another, with a resultant emphasis on process, diversity of voices, and social types implied by these voices (*heteroglossia*). The description of the novel as a dialogic form means not only that narrative fiction embeds dialogues among characters, but also that it is constituted out of diverse voices, languages, and social speech types. For Bakhtin, the representation of interaction among voices and the personalities or social beings implied by them is a core feature of novelistic discourse, though he traces its prehistory in earlier, non-novelistic genres. Bakhtin especially admires Dostoevsky's achievements in this form of the novel, but other critics following Bakhtin have observed polyphony or dialogic form at work in modernist fiction, in the mainstream realist tradition, in Victorian multi-plot novels, and in postmodernist and feminist texts.

No matter how firmly creative writing handbooks enjoin aspiring writers to stick to the contract they establish with their readers, and avoid shifts in narrative situation, in published writing, narrative situation is as often as not manipulated and altered during the course of the story's unfolding. As Brian Richardson remarks, 'contemporary fiction is replete with a polyphony of competing narrative voices; even where the narrator's speaking situation seems fixed, the proliferation of alternative voices threatens to destabilize that situation.'<sup>17</sup> These circumstances make the description of narrative in its component parts all the more rewarding, for when changes in technique can be detected and identified, then rich interpretations can be generated.

### Analytical techniques

If the habitual use of early twentieth-century formalism is to demonstrate how particular literary works are unified, narratology, by way of contrast, aims to identify and name the components of narrative, suggest grammars of narrative function, or explain the nature of narrativity in narrative texts taken as a group (see Chapter 1 for a fuller account). Only a minority of advanced students will wish to pursue the calling of post-classical narratology. For the many more who would like to employ the analysis of narrative

situation in their interpretations of narrative fiction, following a simple set of precepts may lead the way to the integration of narrative form and the thematic, contextual, or theoretically driven insights of compatible approaches, such as gender studies, cultural studies, or post-colonial theory and criticism.

The precepts are as follows:

- Establish and name the techniques employed (ask 'Who's who and what's its function?').
- Ask 'Why?' or 'To what end?' of each narrative situation.
- Discover any marked changes in technique within the text.
- Ask 'Why?' or 'To what end?' of each change in narrative situation.

Among the many different elements of narrative situation discussed in the preceding pages, several have proven of perennial interest to literary critics. Many contemporary narratives combine sections with contrasting narrative situations, as in Ali Smith's *Hotel World*, where the sections employ different persons and tenses. Counterfactual questions can be particularly useful: Ask, 'What difference would it make if the text were consistent with the technique of its first section?' Ask, 'Does the change from one set of norms to a different one undermine or support prior understandings of the text?'

When texts employing figural narrative shift the reflecting function from one character to another, or when authorial texts provide information about the minds of one set of characters while systematically excluding others, these choices and any alterations to the apparent norms of narrative situation can be interpreted by the student alert to formal cues.

Many first-person narrators and some overt narrators in third-person narration provoke discussion of reliability. (This should be strictly distinguished from the potentially partial views and opinions of the reflector in a third-person figural narrative.) If a narrator seems to be unreliable, and a gap between the values of the implied author and the narrator emerges, not only the evidence of reliability but also the ostensible underlying causes or motives can be interpreted. Differentiating discordance in values or perspectives from out-and-out unreliability in narrating what happens in a text can also be a useful exercise. Sensitivity to the historical context of the work's first appearance (perhaps the text was published in a time when very different ideas or feelings prevailed) and attention to the motives that attend our own reading can lend nuance to discussions of narrative reliability. Care should be taken not

to overuse imputations of unreliability. No one wants to return to the days when any view clashing with the reader's own values could be explained away as 'irony' on the part of the author.

Though reader response criticism and reception theory are now over three decades old, lots of fruitful work remains to be done with narrators, narratees, implied readers, and real readers. In addition to the research that could be conducted into the reactions and behavior of real readers, implied readers can be characterized and historicized. Feminism and gender studies approaches to narrative can be usefully combined with an interest in implied and real readers, narrators, narratees, and narrative situation generally. Examining actual readers' assumptions about the gendering of narrators or implied readers or narratees can produce fresh interpretations, and opens the way for the richer reading of texts such as Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* (1992) which features a conspicuously ungendered narrator. Attention to implied readers also opens up rewarding avenues for the discussion of narratives in its various genres.

### Keywords

*Author: author-function, death of the author, authority.* Narrative theory distinguishes the real author from an implied author, but this isn't the end of the possibilities. Wayne Booth's second edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* contains an afterword in which he develops with considerable nuance not just two but five potential meanings of the word 'author' with each type's qualities and functions, as well as consequences for the reader (428–31). Discussing authors, implied or real, can suggest an uncritical acceptance of intentions and meaning. Structuralist and some post-structuralist criticism emphasizes or even rejects the perspective of the author in favor of the text, textual relations, and what Julia Kristeva named intertextuality. According to these theoretical perspectives, the author should serve as neither a source nor a measure of a text's meaning. Authority can appear tyrannical at worst, limiting at best. If words have unstable meanings and texts are best understood as parts of larger intertextual networks, avoidance of authors and authority can help a reader subversively resist the imposition of constraining meanings and final answers. The central assumptions in cultural studies about the author derive from these ideas, as elaborated by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, among others. (Barthes's career

encompassed structuralist and post-structuralist phases, and while Foucault is usually read as a post-structuralist thinker today, his early work was influenced by structuralism. From that early phase comes his work on the author-function. Two key texts for the questioning of authors and authority are Foucault's essay 'What is an Author?' and Barthes's essay 'The Death of the Author'.<sup>18</sup>)

In narrative theory, authority usually designates the degree of knowledge or the extent of the powers of a narrator in an authorial narrative situation. While feminist criticism has often pointed out the ways in which authority is constituted in sanctioned rhetorical arrangements that support the dominant patriarchal social order, it has also shown how authority and author-functions can be appropriated to empower women or other marginalized groups.

*Discourse.* Two influential post-structuralist uses of the term 'discourse,' by Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Foucault, differ significantly from its sense in narrative theory, where it means the words of the narrative as they actually appear rather than the content of the story. Paul A. Bové points out in his essay for Lentricchia and McLaughlin's *Critical Terms for Literary Study* that the New Critics used 'discourse' to mark generic differences and to establish a hierarchy in uses of language, with 'poetic discourse' elevated over the 'discourse of the novel,'<sup>19</sup> but few confusions are likely to arise from this quarter.

The use to which the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin puts 'discourse' (a translation of the Russian word *slovo*) links words, speech, and the way that languages as social or generic indicators interact in the novel. For Bakhtin, novelistic discourse refers to a diverse system of languages that 'mutually and ideologically interanimate each other' ('Prehistory,' 47). Both the medium and object of representation, 'double-voiced' novelistic discourse includes indirect discourse, in the sense that narrative theorists name it. Bakhtin's use of discourse is more inclusive than the indirectly represented thoughts and speech of characters, however, emphasizing as it does the dialogue amongst competing languages, including literary language and extra-literary languages, that he places so centrally in his account of the novel.<sup>20</sup>

Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) recasts discourse to mean the bodies of statements, not only collections of text, that comprise the disciplines (such as medicine, political economy, heredity). Foucault recommends both a critical approach to discourses, emphasizing their validating functions, ordering

principles, and exclusionary practices, and a genealogical approach, examining and affirming the power of discourses to constitute domains of objects. In both cases the emphasis is on the political function of language; the analysis of discourse aims, in the words of Bové, 'to describe the surface linkages' among 'power, knowledge, institutions, intellectuals, the control of populations, and the modern state as these intersect in the functions of systems of thought' ('Discourse,' 54–5). Using the word 'discourse' in the Foucaultian sense implies (to some degree) the writer's assent to a number of other post-structuralist skeptical doxa concerning human identity, subjectivity, sexuality, truth, authority, origins, history, and causation.

For full discussions of discourse in the narrative theoretical sense, refer to Chapters 7 and 8.

*Voice.* Gérard Genette's influential use of the term 'voice' to designate the combination of effects that contribute to narrative situation can be the source of confusion to other literary critics, poets, theorists of the romantic lyric, and feminist and multicultural critics, for whom 'voice' is a contested term. The idea that the voice of a text or an author might authentically represent experience receives full elaboration in the works of Romantic poets and in many contemporary writers, especially poets, who strive to 'find their voices' in confident expression and effective performance. However, both structuralist and post-structuralist critiques of authority insist that language cannot neutrally express anything; instead language constitutes the subject. Bakhtin's multiple competing discourses (as in polyphony or heteroglossia) are sometimes translated as the different 'voices' of a narrative text, in the sense that voice embodies ideologies and expresses responses to particular historical conditions. Many feminist and multicultural critics place a priority on recovering and hearing the voices of those who may have been silenced or ignored in the past. Another kind of feminist reading emphasizes hearing the double-voiced qualities of narration that simultaneously tells and implies different messages to different narratees (see Lanser, 'Toward a Feminist Narratology'). The advanced student of narrative form may want to avoid association with any of these positions when describing a narrative text's participants and the relations among them. The simplest way would be to employ the terms 'narrative situation,' adding if necessary a parenthetical reference to 'what Genette calls "voice".'

### Further reading

- Bakhtin, Mikhail, 'Discourse in the Novel,' *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (University of Texas Press, 1981), 259–422. See this essay for dialogic form and heteroglossia.
- *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (University of Minnesota Press, 1984). See this book for polyphony and dialogism.
- Benjamin, Walter, 'The Storyteller,' in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (1955, trans. 1968), ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Schocken Books, 1969), 83–109.
- Booth, Wayne C., *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 1983). See Booth for discussions of implied author and reliable/unreliable narrators.
- Chatman, Seymour, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Cornell University Press, 1978). A comprehensive and readable handbook on narrative theory. Caution: many theorists find Chatman's idea of a 'nonnarrated' prose narrative unconvincing, and prefer the alternative he proffers, of 'minimally narrated' texts.
- Cohn, Dorrit, 'Discordant Narration,' *Style* 34:2 (2000), 307–16.
- 'The Encirclement of Narrative: On Franz Stanzel's *Theorie des Erzählens*,' *Poetics Today* 2:2 (1981), 157–82.
- *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton University Press, 1978). On consonance and dissonance in first-person narration, see especially 145–72.
- Genette, Gérard, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cornell University Press, 1980), 212–62. Genette's chapter on 'Voice' is the classic nomenclological treatment of narrative situation. Genette makes the case that his precise terminology of extra- or intra-, heterodiegetic or homodiegetic narration should replace the looser terms 'first' and 'third person.' He views all narration as at least potentially in first person, since any narrator could refer to himself or herself as 'I,' though many do not.
- Herman, David, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (University of Nebraska Press, 2002). An exemplary reconsideration of central precepts of narrative theory in light of cognitive science.
- Lanser, Wolfgang, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).
- *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).
- Lanser, Susan Snaider, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton University Press, 1981). Lanser argues that in addition to authorial and 'personal' narration, a 'communal' narrative situation representing collective voices should be recognized. Her treatment of the philosophy of point of view is also very useful.
- 'Toward a Feminist Narratology' (1986), in Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (ed.), *Feminisms*, rev. ed. (Rutgers University Press, 1997), 674–93. Here Lanser demonstrates the need for a comprehensive theory of voice, including tone and rhetorical contexts as determinants of meaning.
- Prince, Gerald, 'Introduction to the Study of the Narratee,' in Jane Tompkins (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 7–25.

Rabinowitz, Peter J., *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation* (Cornell University Press, 1987). Rabinowitz's work advances a nuanced view of the different kinds of narrative audiences, beyond the implied reader of Booth and Chatman.

Stanzel, F. K., *A Theory of Narrative* (1979), trans. Charlotte Goedsche (Cambridge University Press, 1984). My source for authorial and figural narrative situation.

Tompkins, Jane, *Reader-Response Criticism* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980). A now classic collection of essays.

## 4 People on Paper: Character, Characterization, and Represented Minds

'What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?' asked Henry James in his 1884 essay 'The Art of Fiction.' More than a century later, we can still ask the same questions when we begin thinking about the nature of fictional character in narratives. Separating plot from the characters who experience events, cause them through their actions, meditate on them, or react in one way or another, wrenches apart the two elements of fictional narrative that are most securely bound to one another. How indeed can we think about characters without discussing their actions? (We can't!) How can we judge a set of actions in a plot without referring to the agents we come to know through those actions? (We shouldn't!) This discussion thus begins with an acknowledgement that it artificially separates characters from the plot that couldn't function without them. The benefit of temporarily isolating characters from their story-matrix lies in the observations that can be made about how writers build out of descriptive, illustrative, and demonstrative passages their invitations to imagine the people who populate story worlds.

Some narratives emphasize character and some emphasize plot. No narrative can do without either element, though writers and critics have disagreed over which element should be given the higher priority. Furthermore, character and plot resemble one another functionally in that the reader's knowledge of both shifts and changes during the reading experience. During a first reading, details of both plot and characters are received through the narration; these details can provoke the questions that drive the desire to continue reading. After a first reading of a narrative has been completed, a reader can then reflect critically on the 'full story'