A new voice in narrative

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Summary

This article is an attempt to define an area of narratological interest that has, until now, remained somewhat blurred ontologically.

Although the focus is on so-called 'unreliable' first person narration, it challenges, in essence, the concept of the implied author but, in doing so, seeks to amplify and explicate the mode of being of such a narratological concept rather than to jettison it altogether.

The postulation of indices in the text that alert the reader to the presence of an 'immanent' voice is meant to supplement the contributions made to the study of narrative by such analysts as Stanzel and Genette. What is often loosely referred to as the 'ironic mode' of the implied author can be seen with more clarity to be the mode of being of a complex activity that is grounded in an elusive, but no less tangible for all its 'absence', immanent narrative voice.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel is 'n poging om 'n narratologiese gebied te definieer waarvoor daar tot dusver geen bevredigende ontologiese definisie geformuleer is nie.

Hoewel die klem op die sogenaamde 'onbetroubare' eerstepersoonsverteller val, word die implisiete outeur as begripskategorie in twyfel getrek, maar op 'n wyse wat die bestaansmodus van hierdie narratologiese begrip wil toelig eerder as om dit te verwerp.

In aansluiting by narratologiese ondersoeke deur teoretici soos Stanzel en Genette word sekere tekstuele tekens beskryf wat die leser se aandag op die bestaan van 'n 'immanente' stem in die teks vestig. Die sg. ironiese vertelperspektief van die implisiete outeur word verhelder wanneer dit gesien word as die bestaansmodus van 'n verwikkelde aktiwiteit wat herlei kan word na 'n immanente narratiewe stem. Ten spyte van 'n oënskynlike ontwykendheid en 'afwesigheid' is hierdie stem konkreet aanwysbaar.

1

Analysts in the field of narrative since Percy Lubbock (1921) whether writing in the Anglo-American tradition or that of the continent have recognized, implicitly, the centrality of the notion of mediacy or indirectness to narrative:

> [*War and Peace*] is rendered by the story-teller, whole, as a scene directly faced by himself, instead of being reflected in the experience of the rising generation. It is true that Tolstoy's good instinct guides him ... away from the mere telling of the story on his own authority; at high moments he knows better than to tell it himself. (Lubbock, 1921:38)

Lubbock's normative criticism here aside, he implicitly recognizes what has come to be regarded as the distinguishing feature of narrative (Stanzel, 1971). It is discernible in neither the lyric nor in dramatic works where immediacy or directness of presentation are characteristic of the forms, separating them from their more recent sibling. Mediacy, thus, is my point of departure: as a

critical concept it has significations for the narratologist that will amply reward close scrutiny.

It is a truism nevertheless worth repeating that a story requires a story-teller; a presence of whatever kind that performs the function of relaying the tale to the listener. The story-teller or narrator performs a pivotal function in the sequence involving the apprehension by the receiver (or reader) of the tale: it is this 'presence' that filters the details of the narrative; whose varying and variable aspects impose complex dimensions on the nature of the relationship between the reader, the narrated events, and the author. The narrator 'mediates the potential fictional world' and it is in him that 'the reader's mental illusion finds the bridge and the road which lead into the land of fiction' (Stanzel, 1971:6). Narratologists largely agree that the reading act involves the concretization of this mediator on the part of the receiver of the tale (by exactly what process is the business of Reception Aesthetics) and thus is established the intricate matrix of relationships central to narrative: between the author of the tale, the implied author, the narrator, the fictional world projected, the implied reader and the receiver of the tale. Such complexity, because of the absence of a single variable, the narrator, is not, fundamentally, a part of the technical landscape of the lyric or of dramatic works.

My point of departure lies well within the mainstream of critical debate on narrative[1] and it is my intention here to assess critically some of the accepted precepts of narratology as it now stands and to offer a refinement of certain concepts in current usage within the discipline. With Gerard Genette (1980) I am under no illusion that my analysis of selected texts will have clarified with any finality a particular area of narrative discourse, but I hope that what I am bringing to the surface will provide an insight into an increasingly intriguing area of the mechanica of narrative. Unlike the pioneers in this field who set discourse in motion by providing sweeping typologies, I intend to maintain a relatively narrow focus on certain areas in order to illuminate more sharply features of narrative which have not, to my knowledge, been examined. In doing so I hope, like Genette, 'to have furnished the theory of literature ... with some objects of study that are no doubt minor, but a little trimmer than the traditional entities...' (1980: 264). Fundamental underpinning of my theoretical posision is provided by Roman Ingarden who, while concerned to explore the field of aesthetics and no narratologist *per se,* nevertheless has bequeathed the discipline a wealth of incisive analyses of, and philosophical insight into, the mode of being and the formal structure of works of literature (1973). His phenomenological account of the literary work of art as a stratified intentional object comprising, minimally, four inter-related 'layers' is unparalleled (Ingarden, 1973).[2] It is, perhaps, essential though that I list these strata here because they are not yet widely understood and, at a certain juncture, I find myself challenging his account of the literary work of art.

The four strata, then, that are regarded by Ingarden as minimally requisite for a literary work of art to come into existence are:

(i) The stratum of verbal sounds and phonetic formations.

(ii) The stratum of semantic units.
(iii) The stratum of schematized aspects where states of various kinds portrayed in the work come into appearance.
(iv) The stratum of the objectivities portrayed in the intentional states of affairs projected by the sentences.

Each stratum moreover, has an aesthetic value of its own and contributes to what Ingarden calls the 'polyphonic harmony' and therefore to the aesthetic value of the entire structure. A fifth, metaphysical stratum can be discerned in great works of literature, but he rules it out for the literary work of art as being desirable, but non-essential. From the outline of this schema sketched above one is made aware of the fact that Ingarden's investigations are in the first instance broadly philosophical, operating at a macro, rather than the micro level which, of necessity (the broad demarcation of the field having been accomplished), is the domain of more recent theoreticians in the field of literary studies. Thus, while taking issue with the minutiae of his theoretical postulates as regards the literary work of art, the modern critic must accord Ingarden the respect due to a predecessor of his stature; one whose reach has proved no less than remarkable.

For Ingarden, the second stratum is central, since it requires the other three and yet determines them so that they have their ontic bases in it. He devotes a great deal of attention to the meaning units and it is at this fundamental stratum that I wish to level criticism.[3] With the introduction of sentences into the schema a number of issues are raised. They are, in the main, problems for semantics, the primary one of concern here being Strawson's distinction between asserted and non-asserted sentences which focuses upon the differences between sentences and judgements (Strawson, 1950: 320–44). Judgements we construe as asserted sentences, reference being activated by a speaker. At this juncture questions of truth or falsity come into play, as only an assertion or statement (and not a sentence) can be described as true or false.

Now, as the transition from sentences to judgements presupposes a speaker, the reader, when treating the sentences that constitute the work as judgements, has to postulate a fictive speaker (or fictive voice). For example, 'The cat is on the mat' has no existential commitment, that is no-one is committed to any particular cat or mat whereas, when someone asserts that sentence, at least he/she commits him/herself to accepting the existence of a cat and a mat to which the statement makes reference. To react, therefore, at the 'judgemental level' commits the reader to the postulation of fictional characters, and Ingarden's realm (stratum) of portrayed objectivities does not in fact accommodate the subtle logical presuppositions involved in the transition outlined above. To be called, in the first instance, into fictional being, characters who will occupy the presented (fictional) world (who form part of Ingarden's so-called portrayed objectivities) may be given as the referents of the judgements being made in the work. But this is not the only means by which they can be summoned into fictional being: in the first person narrative, whether the mediator occupies a central or peripheral position with

regard to the presented world, the first person narrator is automatically conjured into being within the presented world once the reader treats as judgements the sentences that constitute the 'presentational process' (Ruthrof, 1981: 26) in the first person narrative mode. It is, significantly, only in first person narrative situations that the mediator occupies a position within the presented world. In authorial, figural and (I shall show below) immanent narration, while a fictive speaker is necessarily posited by the reader, he occupies a separate ontological realm, rarely entering that of the presented world (except in extraordinary narrative situations as I shall subsequently demonstrate).

It could, however, be objected that in a first person narrative such as John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) or Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), the first person narrator is not postulated within the recollected presented world. But, with a minor modification, namely that the speaker must at least be temporally and spatially contiguous with that presented world (or in other words, peripheral to the world in which large political or historical figures are central) the theoretical position remains consistent. Post-modernist writers exploit the technical possibilities inherent in such situations. There are, then, two ways in which individual characters may be realized in the presented worlds of narrative fiction:

(i) when they appear as the referents of sentences which are construed as judgements.
(ii) when the very act of treating the sentences of the literary work of art as judgements (as in the first person narrative) entails a commitment by the reader to the fictive speaker (or first person narrator).

It is only in first person narration that both these means of conjuring character are operative. In other narrative situations the second mode is inoperative. Moreover, in these modes the reader's commitment to the postulation of the fictive speaker as an entailment of his treating the sentences as judgements does not conjure up the fictive speaker (narrator/mediator) within the presented world. The narrator, in these instances, stands in a relation to the presented world that is not spatially contiguous but which may possibly be temporally contiguous. For example, there is the authorial commentary of this nature prevalent in eighteenth century fiction and, more recently, in metafictional works: In *Tom Jones,* to name only one text, there are authorial comments such as: 'To say the truth, Mr Allworthy's situation had never been so bad, as the great caution of the doctor had represented' (1966: 23). Commentary of this nature causes, in Stanzel's words, 'tension to arise between the characters' own interpretations of their experiences, and the authorial narrator's comments and reflections' (1973: 49). The point, though, is the temporal contiguity of the normally discrete realms of authorial narrator and presented world.

Whether speakers are realized in the fictional worlds of prose narrative by means of either (i) or (ii) above, the important consideration for this theoretical position is that it is only with the recognition of an implicit speaker that, in

our cognition of the literary work of art, we are able to move from the semantic level (Ingarden's second stratum) to that of the portrayed objectivities (Ingarden's fourth stratum). What emerges from the above is what may be called the notion of ontic ascent, comprising a series of conditioned levels which, when clearly perceived by the critic, precludes the blurring of boundaries on his/her part. This conditioned relationship, as I see it, provides the theoretical bonding for Ingarden's four discrete layers and it is these theoretically bonded, impacting levels that constitute, then, the literary work of art.

2

A pertinent (and largely over-looked) question that must be addressed to the literary work of art is: how can it cope with its threatening solipsism? That is, how, as readers, do we introduce a principle that will allow us to draw a distinction between 'way of seeing' and 'thing seen'. The solipsism threatens because the presented world of a novel stands in no spatial relationship to our world. Thus, we cannot, on the basis of an independent evaluation of the facts of the presented world, correct the narrator's account of those facts (as we could correct another person's distortions or misinterpretations of events in our world). This is so because we have no access to the facts of the presented world of a novel other than through a mediator's ostensibly incorrigible rendition. To gloss over what occurs as 'inference' which appears to be what Ruthrof is doing when he states that 'The reader must assess the narrator's mental shortcomings and shift the misinterpreted world so that it coincides with what he infers to be the implied authorial stance' (1981: 131) seems to be to ignore an intriguing aspect of the presentational process in narrative. Clearly, narrative allows for this distinction between the presented world as it appears to the narrator, and the presented world as it is, to be drawn. The example I have selected for my purpose is Muriel Spark's *You Should Have Seen the Mess*. The problem as I see it is to explain the mechanics of an achievement which allows the reader (where there is no apparent mediatory presence other than that of a limited or 'unreliable' narrator) to correct distortions and to arrive at what 'he infers to be the implied authorial stance'. I intend to offer a brief typology of what I term 'translational indices' with regard to the above short story. It is their presence in the text which alerts the reader to the possible existence of an 'immanent' voice from which is inferred the existence of the immanent narrative situation.

In Spark's short story, the implied reader moves rapidly to a vantage point which encompasses and exposes the naivety (or limitations) of the first person central narrator. The grounds for this perspective, whereby the conventional epistemic relationship of inferiority (the reader) to superiority (the narrator) is inverted, inhere in what is essentially (but loosely) defined as the ironic mode, a device which allows the registering of distance between the view of the reader and that of the narrator. A number of internal clues would reveal the irony: in Spark's short story the discrepancy between the narrator's values, for example, and those of the implied author and the reader creates ironic tension. But pointers may be less subtle with, perhaps, authorial

interjection redirecting or shaping the reader's responses to the thoughts and utterances of the narrator. The controlling ironic mode creates a dioramic perspective for the implied reader. As will be shown, the world presented by the limited first person narrator (in *You Should Have Seen the Mess)* is juxtaposed to a distinctive narrative voice not to be confused with that of the author (for there are problems, ontologically if such confusion enters at this juncture) which I term the 'immanent narrative voice'; a voice which guides the implied reader to a perspective upon the presented world which is distinct from that of the first person narrator. Hence, it can be seen that first person fictional prose narrative avoids solipsistic status on those occasions when the dual perspective on the presented world is made possible by the presence in the text of the voice of an immanent narrator. Solipsism must inevitably result, therefore, if such a narrator does not emerge as a presence in the narrative.

It appears that despite the subtlety of their theoretical positions critics like Stanzel and Booth and, more recently, Genette, Ruthrof and Rimmon-Kenan, have not perceived the existence of such a narrator (or narrative situation) and, in referring to what has become known in accepted terminology as the omniscient authorial narrator, have failed to realise an important distinction as I see it between the so-called omniscient narrator and what I have termed an 'immanent' narrator.[4] This is a distinction which my theoretical postulate of translation indices will allow me to draw. A further important consequence of this postulate is that it allows me, contra Ingarden, to relocate, radically, the logical space of the presented world allowing the implied reader a richer perspective on, dioramic vision of, the presented world. Ingarden, together with other critics in this field is, in fact, compelled, logically to accept only that world which is projected by the first person narrator. Obviously such a position is untenable and I suggest that the postulation of an immanent narrative situation resolves a felt dilemma.

I wish, now, to refine somewhat the metaphor of dioramic vision which I have put forward. I have presented, briefly, a situation (with regard to the Spark short story) where the implied reader moves to a vantage point which allows for the correction on his part of subjective descriptions or accounts of events by the first person narrator. Translational indices in the text, provided by the author in the creative act, permit, indeed coerce the reader towards, a corrected reading of the limited narrator's commentary. Initially, this could lead to some ontological confusion and it, therefore, requires, clarification. The authorial realm is necessarily distinct from that of the mediator in fictional prose narrative (even when the narrative exhibits the presence of an authorial mediator as in the authorial narrative situation) and the author, Muriel Spark in the above instance, can by no stretch of the imagination inhabit the realm of her narrator: it is logically impossible for her to do so. Even were she to adopt the guise of an authorial narrator no transition from one realm to another occurs – they remain ontologically discrete with Muriel Spark inhabiting the one domain and an authorial narrator another. In bringing into being the presented world of this short story, Spark has selected a first person narrator. Now, while the narrative details that comprise the

presented world remain constant, subtle shifting of the focus is gradually discerned to be occurring so that emergent features are perceived by the reader as being inconsistent with the perceptions of the first person narrator. In this instance the reader is being drawn toward an overview by the careful, systematic guidance of a second, discernible mediatory voice; and it is this 'voice' which I have designated 'immanent'.

Ruthrof's neat distinction between, on the one hand, the *presentational process* and, on the other, the presented world (1981: 22) seems to me a useful one in clarifying the ontological separation of author, narrator(s) and presented world. Narration aligns itself with the presentational process and is, thus, ontologically separate from the realm of the projected world of the narrative. There are, however, precedents for a fusion or overlapping of normally disparate realms in narrative, some of which I suggest below:

(i) Autobiography provides, superficially, one of the more intriguing mergers of author and presented world. But the questions may be eliminated as they are raised for such a narrative as *Down Second Avenue* (Mphahlele, 1959) functions less as fiction than as a quasi-factual record of real events. Ontological consistency is retained by an apparently autobiographical work such as *David Copperfield* where the first person narrator is a fictive persona and no matter how similar (and biographically verifiable) his experiences, he can never be confounded with Dickens himself. Thus the realm of author and that of narrator remain separate.

(ii) The merging of presentational process and presented world occurs, perhaps, most tangibly in ostensibly authorial narratives such as *Tom Jones* (Fielding) or *Don Quixote* (Cervantes). Here there often occurs that temporal (if not spatial) contiguity which permits of authorial commentary of the kind remarked upon earlier. In fact, as Stanzel points out, the deliberate merging of these two realms is a large part of Fielding's virtuosity as an author:

> ... The picaresque adventures of Tom Jones ... could not conceivably have captured the interest of adult readers for two centuries if these readers were not concerned with the high intellectual play of the narrator in his attempt to make the rather coarse experiences of Tom Jones literarily presentable ... In *Tom Jones* one can observe that the narrator in such a novel does not make merely autobiographical remarks about an otherwise simple story, but rather he arouses the reader's interest above all in the narrator as the one who evaluates, senses, visualizes. He symbolizes the epistemological view held since Kant that we do not apprehend the world as it is in itself, but as it has passed through the medium of an observing mind. (1973:50)

What Stanzel isolates here is one of the primary advantages of the authorial narrative situation, one which seems to gainsay any normative critique that rejects such a narrative situation because of its simplicity or lack of sophistication. At its best, authorial narration, with its possibilities for the subtle interlocking of realms in the fictional work, can be extraordinarily evocative.

(iii) Overlapping of presentational process and presented world occurs most explicitly when the first person narrative situation is the mediatory mode of a fictional work's presentation. Given the pressure on the novel (during the last century particularly) of verisimilitude – the profound and lasting influence of 'realism' – it became necessary in first person narrative that the mediator must, to some extent at least, have participated in the narrated events. Problems of consistency arise even in a work such as *Moby Dick* when, with the changing emphasis of his vast landscape, Melville allows Ishmael, his initially central narrator, to occupy a more and more peripheral role, so that, when Ahab's consciousness is being explored (in what has become an omniscient–authorial manner), the splendour of the narrative must quell any niggling doubts as to Melville's technical control. Ideally, we demand that the first person narrator must, minimally, have had some means of gaining access to the mind of a character whose thoughts he is mediating. In *Wuthering Heights,* Emily Brontë is compelled by canons of consistency to resort to the rather clumsy technical device of the letter from the Grange in order to overcome a first person narrator's limitations where spatial and temporal discontinuity might call in question the validity of an account. When, however, the narrator of a first person novel is manifestly central to events being recounted, fusion of the two realms occurs (presentational process merges with the presented world). In other words the experiencing self is indistinguishable from the narrating self (as in, amongst many other examples, *David Copperfield*).

If, then, the normally distinct boundaries between apparently discrete realms may, in narrative prose, become blurred or indeterminate at times as indicated above, it seems possible to assume at least the possibility of contiguity between first person (limited) narration and an 'authorial' type presence such as the immanent voice. Precedents abound in literature. What might, perhaps, be argued is that, where the immanent voice is to be heard, the presentational process has assumed a degree of complexity and sophistication (technically-speaking) of an order not unlike that which is possible in commentary made by the authorial narrator in a novel like *Tom Jones.* But narrative criticism does not concern me here: it is on the technique itself, at the moment, and not on the dividends it might pay for a metaphysical fifth stratum, that I concentrate, although I am certain that such an analysis would, in other circumstances, prove profitable to the business of criticism generally.

Contiguity of normally discrete ontological realms, then, is certainly a possibility, given literary precedent, but, if I am to proceed fruitfully with a discussion of the contiguity of immanent narration and first person narration in particular works of literature, I believe it is necessary to set forth some of the gradations within the first person narrative situation which critics have already established and which currently form part of our critical vocabulary.[5]

Very broadly, then, these are:

(i) *A first person peripheral narrator* whose vantage point is from the fringes

of the presented world with, very often, only second-hand experience of the narrated events. The implied reader is made aware of his peripheral status by the deployment in the text of signifiers such as 'I assume' or 'I imagine' which serve to indicate that the narrator's relationship to the narrated events is a tenuous one. (Mr Lockwood in *Wuthering Heights* exemplifies this peripheral stance of the first person narrator.)

(ii) *A first person central narrator* whose vantage point is patently from the centre of the narrated events; that is, he narrates, as David Copperfield does, from the centre of the presented world (or well within it). In this instance he is the 'experiencing self' through whose consciousness the implied reader receives the mediated events of the narrator.[6]

(iii) A further possible subdivision first articulated by Booth is that of the above first person narrators into reliable or unreliable narrators. There are special consequences (as Ruthrof, 1981: 130, shows) for the implied reader when the conventional relationship of superiority and reliability with regard to the emergent presented world is *undermined,* and the narrator is revealed as having an unreliable, naive or limited consciousness. The implied reader, normally 'victim' of the presentational process assumes a new position of authority able to challenge and re-assess the narrative material being filtered through the mediator. In order for this perspective to be achieved and for the inversion of a conventional role (on the implied reader's part) to occur, not one but two narrative situations must be present as part of the presentational process: the one, a (limited) first person narrative situation; the other, an authorial narrative situation whereby the authorial narrator patently addresses the reader, warning him of the unreliability of the first person narrator.

Revelation with regard to a first person narrator's unreliability may also occur in another, less tangible way, when the implied reader is made aware of textual signals (translational indices) which point to the presence in the narrative of the immanent voice. It is, essentially, a revelatory voice which 'shows' rather than tells. Its technical virtuosity lies in that it permits of a simultaneity in the narrative situations rather than a consecutive progression of a (first-person) narrative and (authorial) commentary kind. By virtue, then, of the peculiarly dioramic vision which such a presentational process entails, the reader is made to confront not one narrative situation, but two: whose superimposition allows for the dramatic revelation of the first person narrator's psychic structure. So, the presentational process outlined above comprises two separate narrative voices, but permits the reader the simultaneous apprehension of, on the one hand, details presented ('told') by the first person narrator and, at a more sophisticated meta-level, on the other hand, the apprehension of details rendered ('shown') by the immanent narrator. As I have indicated, and to corroborate the 'telling'/'showing' distinction which I see as operating when this narrative situation applies, when the immanent narrator's presence comes into focus, it is without any conscious activity of 'telling' on its part (the *modus operandi* of an authorial narrator) and it bears a marked resemblance to the authorial narrator's activity in that

the activity of telling lies submerged, is implicit, in the act of revelation. I call it immanent because of its omni-present qualities: it is pervasive and covert; and it must be a narrative voice in that only a narrative voice can mediate between the presented world and the implied reader, leading him often with great subtlety into the land of fiction.

The distinction between the function performed by a limited first person narrator (or, as the case may be, an authorial narrator) and an immanent narrator can, of course, be traced to E.M. Forster's differentiation between 'telling' and 'showing' (1927). In his adaptation of the concept for his purposes in his recently translated book, Stanzel refers to 'reflector-characters' and 'teller-characters'. A teller-character is the speaker of the narrative words while a reflector-character is the 'knower' of the narrative (1984). But, confining this distinction as Stanzel does to concretizable characters within either the presentational process or the presented world seems to me to preclude his ever undertaking a fundamental investigation of narrative possibility; that is, the discovery of the means by which the implied reader is made to call in question the credibility of the first person narrator when there is, *apparently,* no mediator in either domain which is responsible for his adjustment of the perspective to encompass and surpass that of the first person narrator. In other words, Stanzel's concretized 'person' does not allow for the accommodation by the reader of such dioramic vision and his theoretical account must, inevitably, suffer accordingly.

3

The selection of Muriel Spark's short story, 'You Should Have Seen the Mess' (1972), was occasioned not by any sense of its aesthetic worth but rather by its seeming to provide pre-eminently an example of the immanent narrative situation. In addition, it is by no means familiar to critics in this field and as there are, therefore, no presuppositions to eliminate, it provides the narratologist with a wholly unchartered domain through which she/he can move unhampered by earlier topographical pointers.

Spark's narrator in this short story is Lorna Merrifield. She is the 'experiencing self' whose perceptions take the implied reader into the fictional world. The ostensible narrative situation, thus, is first person central:

> I am now more than glad that I did not pass into the grammar school five years ago, although it was a disappointment at the time. (p. 301)

In these opening lines Spark establishes Lorna Merrifield's distinctive voice and we are given some indication that this narrator will evolve towards a stance somewhat remote from that of quasi detached objectivity which, conventionally, governs the relationship of narrator to related events.[7] An early warning signal is provided by her idiosyncratic use of the adverbial phrase, 'More than glad' which, coupled with her unvaried use of simple sentence structures, and the repetition of whole linguistic units with very little

by way of embellishment, indicates that her perceptions are bound to be, at best, subjective and, in general, severely limited. In short, her powers of description are markedly curtailed by linguistic inadequacies which provide ironic tension when observed against her own comment that she 'was always good at English, but not so good at the other subjects' (p. 301).

In addition to these linguistically based character signals Spark further delineates her narrator, stylistically, by means of what, in section I, I referred to as a 'prephonetic' (Ingarden, 1973: 23) pointer, that is, the double exclamation mark. The emphatic nature, then, of the exclamation '... but not so good at the other subjects!!', allows the reader an insight into the narrator's psyche which simultaneously encompasses Lorna Merrifield and reveals a state of mind which is not readily determinable given, merely, her highly subjective (personalized) account. She does not *state* that she is embarrassed by her inability to 'pass into the grammar school' (in fact, given in the text is her diametrically opposed view: 'I am now more than glad that I did not...') but the reader's conventional relationship of inferiority to the unfolding of events by the mediator has been inverted by the conclusion of the opening paragraph, so that from a position of superiority with regard to the narrated events, he/she is able to infer that Lorna Merrifield, unconsciously, is, say, mortified by the failure, her veneer of gratitude being merely a defensive rationalization. In short, the presented world, filtered through the consciousness of the highly subjective mediator, is not to be trusted: the implied reader's perspective, enhanced by its having a dioramic quality, coerces her/him towards a three-dimensional, corrected, vision of the whole. What, though, is the nature of the technique which Spark has employed in order to achieve this dioramic view for the implied reader? It is a method involving what I term translational indices or signals in the text which point to the fallibility of what the mediator conveys to the implied reader. A very important gain which this technique allows an author is the subtle revelation of character: the emergent indices permitting the author to 'show' rather than 'tell' as she develops her narrator's personality.

In arriving at a decision about Lorna Merrifield's limitations, the reader has been confronted by a number of such indices. As outlined above they are, firstly, the initial manifestation of her distinctive narrative voice, emerging in the presentational process via such textual signals as the double exclamation mark, her repetitive and unvaried use of simple sentence structures, her idiosyncratic use of adverbial phrases ('far from', 'more than') and a characteristic prissiness made manifest in her use of evasive formulations (such as 'facilities' for lavatory; or 'he did not attempt to go to the full extent' for example).

The deployment in the narrative of these signals sharpens our focus (at the micro level) upon the emerging mediatory character of Lorna Merrifield. The result is that at a macro-level, we reach conclusions about this narrator which derive directly from this translational process. For example, the reader concludes that the narration is highly subjective and unreliable and that this unreliability stems from her superficial, materialistic focus on external data and impressions. In the following excerpt,

> I am glad that I went to the secondary modern school, because it was only constructed the year before. Therefore it was much more hygienic than the grammar school. The secondary modern was light and airy ... the grammar school ... you should have seen the mess! (p. 301)

a subtle ironic counterpoint to the narrator's perceptions is provided by the implied reader's value stance where secondary modern and grammar schools are concerned. For the narrative to have any ironic point, the implied reader must find himself aligned with grammar school education and not with secondary modern schooling within the framework of this short story. Any other orientation by the implied reader would entail a non-apprehension of the translational indices and a unidimensional perspective on the presented world. The reader would not, in short, be alerted to the presence in the narrative of the immanent narrator.

Lorna Merrifield's gimlet-eyed focus upon walls, floors and window-sills is, at its best, a metaphoric revelation of her superficiality. At its worst, technically speaking, it is a somewhat heavy-handed ramming home of a point creditably (and humorously) established if the reader adapts him/herself to the framework projected by the text and within which the hypostatized receiver is located. In repetitions such as 'He was a good-looking boy, I will say that ... To look at he was quite clean in appearance!' one senses, though, an intrusion of values which undermine, even obscure, the more subtle balance created between the first person central and the immanent narrator.[8] The reader, moreover, discovers that the narrator's limitations of consciousness extend to her perceptions of other, related, spheres but that they all have their source in the central characteristic – that of superficiality – which Spark is at pains to establish. For example, once the Darbys have befriended her, she reveals her lower middle-class values in her shocked response to their chaotic household:

> I had to wait in their living room and you should have seen the state it was in! There were broken toys on the carpet, and the ashtrays were full up. (p. 303)

However the implied reader might respond in reality to untidiness, grubbiness or injunctions to 'Shot your gob, you little bastard!' or not to 'pee over the cabbages ... [but] on the lawn (p. 302), there is little doubt at this juncture in the narrative that the Darbys are meant to receive a positive evaluation, Lorna's credentials having been subtly eroded. Neat juxtapositioning of narrative details such as 'She was very nice to me' (p. 303) followed by a remarkably unsympathetic description of the Darbys' home and environment point us away from Lorna Merrifield as a reliable centre of orientation and towards the Darbys with their cluttered, untidy, but apparently unrestrained life-style. Lorna's values, in themselves by no means unworthy but, as she reveals them, hopelessly limiting and limited, are further elaborated upon in the incident with old Mrs Darby. Her revulsion at Mrs Darby's being housed in such a 'tumble down cottage' serves a two-fold function:

(i) it reveals Lorna's genuine sympathy for and sense of responsibility towards other people;
(ii) but it is overlaid by the limitations set on her by her class-affiliations. What she sees as a place unfit for human habitation is, in fact, a fourteenth-century cottage which she compares unfavourably with the Council house she and her Mum and Dad occupy.

Thus, the hypostatized reader is required to re-interpret Lorna Merrifield's commentary here and subsequently, when she describes her hopeless relationship with Willy Morley, in order to arrive at an accurate reading of the presented world; a reading manifestly at variance with that which would be encountered solely through the first person narrator's perspective. To make sense of this corrective element in the presentational process, and to maintain ontological consistency, it becomes necessary to postulate a contiguous narrative situation operating in conjunction with that of the first person but which is responsible for relaying to the implied reader the presented world as it is, and not as Lorna Merrifield perceives it. It is by being alerted to such an occurrence in the presentational process that one will arrive at an accurate description of the technique employed by authors in narratives of this nature.

The immanent voice, then, (or, to maintain Stanzel's terminology, narrative situation) is responsible for the reader's perception of the presented world in its entirety. It cannot be countered that this is a matter merely of authorial manipulation, as this would be to commit the inadmissible error of blurring ontologies: the realm of the author is logically separate from that of the narrator or mediator. Spark, in order to achieve certain narrative goals has employed, simultaneously, not one but two narrative situations so that the implied reader can arrive at a reading of the text that encompasses that of the ostensible first-person narrator. The presence of this voice is ascertained by means of translational indices which allow the reader to correct the given details, accommodating in the process the astigmatic perspective of the first person narrator, so that the true reading is obtained. These indices may be of many kinds, it seems, ranging from the micro- to the macro-level in textual analysis and involving the minutiae of punctuation at one level; and, at their most subtle, calling upon the reader to respond to a complex interweaving of values and mores which coerce a re-reading of what is tangibly 'there' in the narrative. Two translational indices which I have omitted to point to above but which it seems to me are central to this narrative's success or failure derive from comedy.[9] Such comic conventions as repetition – of phrases, whole sentences, even situations – with its cumulative and rather predictable effects, and, in this short story, alienation, are effectively deployed. Spark manipulates conventional alienation in a most interesting manner so that a peculiar reversal occurs in the final paragraph of the story, drawing the reader inexorably away from his/her recently established centre of orientation with the immanent narrator towards Lorna Merrifield. This allows Spark to achieve a poignancy in the mood of the short story for which the reader has been largely unprepared but which derives precisely from a recognition of the effectiveness of the alienation: a distance which has been created by the

gradual erosion of sympathy for the superficial first-person narrator by means of translational indices but which closes as we are given a brief glimpse of Lorna Merrifield's unhappiness. Against the apparent resolve of the last lines of the narrative:

> I agree to equality, but as to me marrying Willy, as I said to Mavis, when I recall his place, and the good carpet gone greasy, not to mention the paint oozing out of the tubes, I think it would break my heart to sink so low. (p. 307)

is set the almost parenthetic 'I was upset as usual' which hints at levels of experience that Lorna's account has not, until then, permitted the reader to deem possible. The strength of the short story lies in the effect this conclusion has, on the, by this point in the narrative, alienated reader, and its roots lie in the co-existence of the two narrative situations. Two sets of perceptions, then, can be seen to light the presented world of this narrative: those of Lorna Merrifield, the first person narrator, and those of the immanent narrator. It is the presence of the latter which determines *how* we read Lorna's decision not to marry Willy Morley. By her own lights her resolution is a positive one ('It would break my heart to sink so low') but for the immanent narrator, it is a negative decision. Willy Morley's potential has never been fully appreciated by Lorna who, despite the hint we are given of the struggle underlying her decision about the future, allows her first thoughts about him, 'He was young, dark, with a dark shirt so you couldn't see right away if he was clean' (pp. 305–306) to remain her last.

The presence in a narrative of the immanent voice is one of the components of the ironic mode, and its isolation for criticism constitutes an important addition to the analysis of the mode. I stress this to avoid what would be a confounding identification of the ironic mode with the immanent voice. This voice, in itself, is not ironic but its presence and the contrasting world that it reveals, provides the tension that constitutes the ironic mode. Further, in order to anticipate such criticism, I can vindicate the description of the phenomenon as a narrative situation because it meets what are the requirements for it to be a narrative voice, namely, that it mediate between the reader and the presented world and that the reader arrives at his/her grasp of the presented world as a consequence of a presentational process which has, as its source, this phenomenon. This, then, should circumvent any inclination to identify the voice in question with any loosely conceived ironic mode.

To conclude let me add that while Muriel Spark's ostensible subject, deriving from the first person narrative situation, might be conceived of as an exploration of the experiences of Lorna Merrifield, the deployment of an immanent narrator allows her to reveal her narrator's inner landscape so that the reader has the advantage of a superior centre of orientation which would not be immediately accessible to the unsophisticated reader and without which reception of the short story would be severely circumscribed.

Notes

1. See for example Stanzel (1971, 1981) whose terminology and typology provide the framework within which the argument of this article is to be located, Booth (1961), Scholes and Kellogg (1966), Cohn (1978), Iser (1978), Genette (1980), Prince (1982), Ruthrof (1981) and Rimmon-Kenan (1983).
2. Although H.G. Ruthrof extends and expands his model. (See, particularly, Ch. 4 pp. 65 ff.)
3. It is, perhaps, worth mentioning here that there are possibilities for an author inherent in the phonetic stratum which are 'set into a function' (Ingarden, 1973: 65) when the implied reader apprehends the determinate word sounds. There exists, moreover, the possibility of a pre-phonetic stratum so that a poet such as George Herbert in 'Easter Wings' or 'The Alter' may arrange the physical lines of print in such a way as to coerce the perceiver to gestalt an image that has semantic value but which is not, in any acceptable sense, phonetically based. Normally, however, the phonetic stratum is registered only fleetingly and the reader transcends this level almost as it is admitted to consciousness, arriving instantly at the level of word and sentence meanings in the literary work. If, as Ingarden says, the semantic level can be defined as 'everything bound to a word sound which, in conjunction with the sound forms a work' (1973: 63), then it appears that his schema does not accommodate the semantic contribution made typographically by the creative manipulation of the 'prephonetic' stratum – the visual dimension of a literary work. It is undoubtedly a 'stratum' that must be given consideration in any inclusive account of the mode of being of a literary work of art.
4. In her assessment of his most recent work *Theorie des Erzählens* (1981), Dorrit Cohn has vindicated Stanzel's theoretical investigations after the less than enthusiastic reception of his *Narrative Situations in the Novel* (1971). My terminology throughout this article is drawn from Stanzel's rather than from Genette's whose analytic specificity has an attraction somewhat different from Stanzel's more 'synthetic' (Cohn, 1981: 159) approach, the latter's being more suited to my requirements in this article.
5. See Bertil Romberg's exhaustive account of this type of narrative (1962). He does not, however, isolate the immanent voice.
6. I think it pertinent to return at this juncture – briefly – to Stanzel's remark about the significance for fiction of Kant's epistemological view with regard to the apprehension of the presented world by the receiver (1971: 22) The context in which the comment was made was a chapter on the authorial narrative situation, but first person narrative also permits the aesthetic deployment of such a mediator (that is, a highly 'conscious' narrator, such as Zeitblom in Thomas Mann's *Dr Faustus*) who provides a remarkably sensitive perspective.
7. This is not to deny that first person narrators very often reveal idiosyncratic quirks and character traits. These I regard as affecting the narrative more or less effectively when measured against the 'norm' of conventional (apparently detached) objectivity. (*David Copperfield* would be an instance of such objectivity.)
8. It should be noted that in discussion with colleagues there was a profound sense amongst some of the story's distatefulness given a knowledge of Muriel Spark's other writings. The humour of the piece is then read as unpleasantly satirical in nature. However, despite momentary 'lapses' in narrative consistency (if they can be called such) I think one could argue for a position, on the part of the author, far removed from patronage and more closely aligned with emphathy for the narrator. These are finer points of analysis and do not concern me directly here.

9. It is perhaps this comic undertow that causes an adverse reaction in some readers. The implied reader then finds the humour mocking and patronizing rather than functionally revelatory.

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