Narrative and Normative Pattern: On Interpreting Fiction

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Summary

Interpretive disputes about the text's implied normative framework (its aesthetics, reality-model, ideology) often involve the reliability of the fictive narrator who mediates between interpreter and author. Narrative and normative reconstruction must go together. But how to determine the relations between the text's overt (narratorial) and implicit (authorial) frameworks, considering that the one can never be taken on trust and the other can never speak except through its questionable proxy? We have here two modes of discourse, one given (in or as the fiction) and the other hypothetical (behind the fiction). As regards the *norms* of literary communication, the first mode depends for its reliability on the second; as regards the *forms* of literary communication, the second depends for its discovery on the first.

Though omnipresent, our difficulties in relating narrative to normative structure yet vary widely, and this essay considers three major variables that affect every interpretive activity: (1) the *conventionality* of the implied system of norms; (2) its degree of *explicitness*; and (3) the control of interpretive difficulties through *compensation systems*. Some texts simplify the reader's task by reducing fictional mediation to a minimum. Their norms are (a) conventional in cultural context; (b) explicitly formulated by (c) a speaker who has proved reliable. This transparent communication is favoured by didactic or strongly ideological texts. The other extreme combines divergence, implicitness and unreliability into the opaque (or ambiguous) discourse typical of modernism. The intermediate cases have at least one variable that facilitates interpretation, making up for the more problematic sides of the discourse. E.g., explicitness often compensates for deviance, where – as in "The Kreutzer Sonata" – the work advocates idiosyncratic norms.

Opsomming

Interpretatiewe geskilpunte oor die teks se geïmpliseerde normatiewe verwysingsraamwerk (sy estetisisme, werklikheidsmodel, ideologie) betrek dikwels die betroubaarheid van die fiktiewe verteller wat as 'n bemiddelaar tussen die interpreet en die outeur moet optree. Narratiewe en normatiewe rekonstruksie moet hand aan hand gaan. Maar hoe om die verhouding tussen die teks se duidelike (narratologiese) en geïmpliseerde (ouktoriële) raamwerke te bepaal, as rekening gehou moet word met die feit dat die een nooit op sigwaarde geneem kan word nie terwyl die ander weer slegs deur sy twyfelagtige gevolmagtigde kan spreek? Ons het hier twee tipes diskoers, die een gegee (in of as die fiksie) en die ander hipoteties (agter die fiksie). Sover dit die *norme* van literêre kommunikasie aangaan, is die eerste tipe vir sy betroubaarheid van die tweede afhanklik; sover dit die vorme van literêre kommunikasie betref, steun die tweede vir sy herkenbaarheid op die eerste.

Alhoewel alomteenwoordig, is daar tog groot verskille te bespeur in die probleme wat ondervind word om die narratiewe aan die normatiewe struktuur te verbind. In hierdie opstel word drie hoofveranderlikes, wat enige interpretatiewe aktiwiteit noodwendig moet beïnvloed, beskou: (1) Die *konvensionaliteit van die* geïmpliseerde normesisteem; (2) sy graad van *eksplisietheid;* en (3) die kontrole van interpretatiewe probleme deur kompenserende *sisteme.*

Sommige tekste vergemaklik die leser se taak deur fiksionele bemiddeling tot 'n minimum te beperk. Hulle norme is (a) konvensioneel binne 'n kulturele konteks; (b) eksplisiet geformuleer deur (c) 'n spreker wat as betroubaar bewys is.

Hierdie deursigtige kommunikasie word begunstig deur didaktiese of sterk ideologiese tekste. Die ander uiterste kombineer uiteenlopendheid, implisietheid en onbetroubaarheid in 'n duister (of meerduidige) diskoers wat tiperend is van modernisme. Die tussenliggende gevalle het ten minste een veranderlike wat interpretasie vergemaklik om op te maak vir die meer problematiese kante van diskoers. Byvoorbeeld, eksplisietheid kompenseer dikwels vir afwyking, waar – soos in die "Kreutzer Sonata" – die werk idiosinkratiese norme voorstaan.

1. Introductory remarks: interpretation and narration

Many disputes among interpreters can be traced back to variant readings or reconstructions of the text's implied normative framework: its aesthetics, reality-model, ideology, scale of values. No wonder, therefore, that these disputes so often involve the reliability of the speaker or narrator, whose discourse must imply the authorial norms but need not share and express them. Does Hamlet speak *for* Shakespeare, Moll Flanders for Defoe, the Duke in "My Last Duchess" for Browning, Humbert Humbert for Nabokov? Is Tolstoy's *Kreuzer Sonata* a psychological "case history" of a madman who has killed his wife and now rationalizes the murder by theorizing against sex, or is it an ideological story that reflects, though from a peculiar viewpoint, a position held in essentials by the author himself? Does Emily Brontë share the extreme "romantic" values of Catherine and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights?* Perhaps the novel presents their extremism as destructive and bound to lead to a violent end? Is Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* a portrait of the mysterious Sutpen, whose figure eludes and illuminates both the characters who observed him in life and those who attack the riddle after his death, or is the novel another self-reflexive work that centres on the problematics of creation and re-creation, reality vs. invention, life vs. art?

What all these notorious disputes have in common is the point at issue, namely, the normative system informing and organizing the text as a whole. Even when the disagreement seems to bear on something far more specific – e.g., the reading of character (Faulkner's Sutpen), the coherence of a plot-ending (Moll Flanders' happy or Catherine's and Heathcliff's unhappy fate) – the problem nevertheless goes back to a divergence in the conception of the text's ideological framework. In the last analysis, it is this framework that determines characterization, closure, and all other components. How we fashion it, therefore, affects not only our evaluation of agent and event but equally our interpretation of neutral-looking features of reality, structure, often even language. In Brontë's case or Tolstoy's, for instance, the sense made of all these textual features hinges on the basic interpretive decision whether to align or to oppose the protagonist and the author, the 'overt' and the 'implied' speaker. Equate their world views and you will get one pattern of meaning and effect; dissociate, let alone polarize them and another pattern will result, where irony, ambiguity, double voices and standards are built into the very premises.

Hence the importance of reconstructing the authorial value system and, more generally, of identifying the factors that for better or worse play a role

in the reconstruction. Moreover, since a better understanding of the textual and contextual factors involved promises to illuminate the variances among readings, and also vice versa, this issue is doubly relevant to the theory of interpretation.

2. Some factors that complicate reconstruction

A variety of factors and forces separate the reader from the implied normative structure. The distance must be bridged by way of inference in the reading, so that the act of bridging may give rise to different readings. The text's period and genre are among the most prominent of these variables. How, for instance, is one to interpret the soliloquy in Elizabethan drama? The approaches to this well-known crux[1] reveal a deeper disagreement about the models of character and reality behind the plays. The sense made of the soliloquy as such varies with the sense made of the soliloquist.

At one pole there stand extreme historicists, like E.E. Stoll in *Shakespeare Studies* (1927) and elsewhere, who take the soliloquy at face value – regardless of the speaker's personality and state of mind – by appeal to Elizabethan stage conventions, to the heritage of the medieval morality play with its crude characterization, and particularly to the contemporary conception of character. The Elizabethan view of man, they argue, does not recognize purely psychological ("pre-moral") motives and assumes a moral world picture that is shared by everyone – including the dramatic villain. In soliloquy, therefore, even the villain describes and evaluates his actions from this fixed, collectively acceptable standpoint. It does not matter how out of character his "confessions" may sound, because he then speaks not from and for his own perspective but for the overall perspective of the play; not in response to an inner pressure for self-expression but to some rhetorical pressure for generalization. The soliloquy, in short, is a piece of objective exposition assigned to the speaker for the benefit of the audience.

The opposed approach goes back to the rise of Romanticism towards the end of the 18th century, and it reads the soliloquist as a psychological being, a character in the fullest sense. Critics of this persuasion, from Coleridge to A.C. Bradley, find the Elizabethan villain's behaviour throughout the plot to be inconsistent with his candid confession of his nature and designs within the soliloquy. Briefly, this approach holds that all soliloquists unconsciously reveal their distinctive personality and viewpoint, which they would otherwise conceal. Thus the soliloquizing villain does not voice the collective moral judgment on his actions but exposes his own peculiar, distorted (if not self-deceiving) vision of his environment and his own motives. In the process, he lays bare the hidden, attractive (because experiential) facet of his character. All this renders him far more complex and interesting than the flat villain presented or recreated by the historicists.

So, one might ask, does the soliloquy express a cultural (i.e. authorized and authorial) or an individual perspective? Does it form a rhetorical or a revelatory device? Stage convention and reliable discourse or inside view and subjectivity? The conflict between these two models of interpretation illus-

trates in historical terms the problematics of the underlying normative system and its reconstruction.

As with historical so with purely generic context. Recall the misunderstanding (or rather the mistaken identification) of the genre as well as the ideology governing Defoe's political essay "The Shortest Way with the Dissenters". The majority of Defoe's contemporaries took the attack on dissenters at face value rather than as a satire *by* a dissenter, thereby missing the irony behind the speaker's mask. Defoe paid the price of their reversal of his intention and was pilloried. If we know better, this is not because we are necessarily better readers of Defoe's words, but because we read them in the light of the genre that coordinates their values and poetics. Again, disorder in communication and disharmony in interpretation lead back to the system underlying the discourse.

3. The communicative and existential barriers in fiction

No matter what text the reader encounters, literary or otherwise, such variables always (mis)direct his reconstruction of the appropriate (moral, aesthetic, communicative) norms. In the literary text, however, these variables are complicated even further by a distinctive factor, namely, *fictionality*. By this I mean, first, the fictionality of the act of communication, which opens what I call a "mediation-gap" between author and reader; and secondly, the fictionality of the world rendered through that act of communication, which erects an "existential barrier" between the represented "reality" and the reader.[2]

The interpretive difficulties that originate from the mediation-gap may be described from two complementary angles. On the one hand, the fictive speaker always stands in the way as a mediator of quasi-autonomous status, with his own features, circumstances, attitudes, goals, expressive and rhetorical techniques, and often his own addressee as well. The very presence of a mediator, and one independent within the fiction and unaware of his role at that, prevents all direct communication between the two genuine participants: the author and the reader. Further, the ever-possible variation in the mediator's competence – in his reliability, above all – complicates even the indirect communication between author and reader. Accordingly, this constant factor and its assorted variables present a distinctive obstacle, or challenge, to interpretation. For the reader of fiction to bridge the gap, so as to get and keep in touch with his true partner, he must identify and evaluate the official speaker interposed to perform the mediation in ignorance of his role.

But even this is only one side of the matter, an oversimplification in fact. The reader's interpretive activity does not (and cannot) really move straight from an assessment of the mediator, reliability included, to direct communication with his maker and master. For one thing, this movement is hardly linear or unidirectional. In literature, the speaker's reliability is by nature measured in terms of the author's position. How else is one to view and place the creature if not in relation to the creator? Hence, as with the business of interpreting in general, the reader's evaluation of the mediator does not

simply lead to the author but itself requires an authorial point of reference *and* departure. It is a two-way process, in short. For another thing, the reader never achieves direct contact with the author. Unlike the speaker, the author has no formal discourse of his own: he "speaks" only through intermediaries, whose authority is in principle doubtful and unstable.

So, if one face of the problem is the manifestness or tangibility of the fictional communication, with the official speaker-mediator at its centre, then the other face is the implicitness of the rhetorical communication frame centred round the author who secretly manipulates the speaker for his purposes. These two faces are separable only in theory, if at all, rather than in the actual reading process. For the reliability-judgments performed by the reader are nothing but a hypothesis about the *relations* between the text's explicit and implicit (mediating and mediated) communication. Granting reliability to the mediator means neutralizing the gap and postulating relations of harmony and congruence between the two levels of communication; while denying reliability to the mediator means realizing the gap and postulating relations of disharmony and incongruence between the two.

Due to the implicitness of the communication with the author, the reader can never determine these relations by simply confronting version with version, one image of reality with an alternative image, one given discourse with another that serves as its measure. Rather, we can judge the reliability of a literary speaker's discourse only by appeal to the author's system of norms as built into, and reconstructed from, that very discourse in its various (historical, generic, structural) contexts. To make things even more problematic, this system shows a variability that has no equivalent outside fiction. Unlike the binding force of truth-value in other kinds of communication, historical or scientific, the norms which are supposed to guide the reader of fiction are neither limited and determinate nor given in advance as part of the rules of the game. They certainly owe no allegiance to the truth value of the representation. And this leads us from the fictionality of the communicative act to that of the represented world itself: from the channel to the object of narration.

In communicative terms, when a represented object bears on "real life", all the components of discourse (the object, the representation, the judging of its truthfulness or reliability, the speaker as representer and the addressee as judge) belong to the same level or framework of reality. This is why truth value always applies here as a criterion, though its application may still cause difficulties. A historical or legal text, for instance, describes past events, past relative to the description, all the more so to its judgment. At the time when the representation needs to be compared with the represented object (the image with the original), the event is no longer there. In the absence of direct or full access to the object itself, the reporter and his addressee face an identical problem. Both may gather and combine whatever facts or traces have been left, examine witnesses, etc., and thus recreate the event. However, as conflicting versions offered by historians or lawyers show only too well, such reconstruction is hardly a substitute for the real thing. It appeals to evidence liable to imprecision, incompleteness, subjectivity or downright bias, and at least partly results from gap-filling by way of conjecture.

Even so, such obstacles do not equal – in nature, seriousness, permanence – the difficulty peculiar to the literary text: the fictionality of the object. However grave, the problems of reconstructing the real are yet essentially technical, depending on the availability and the quality of witnesses, documents, aids to discovery and verification. By contrast, the fictional event is not amenable, in principle, to reconstruction in any such independent, parallel or progressive manner. In the fictional text, instead, the various components are distributed among different frameworks of reality and separated by what I called an *existential barrier.*

This barrier creates two problems that throw into doubt even the possibility of *in*direct reliability-judgments (the kind always applicable to historical narrative and report). First, the reader always finds himself in an inferior position vis-à-vis every speaker or subject within the fictional world. This holds true not only in face of omniscient or authoritative reporters (e.g., the sleuth in the detective story) but of problematic and dubious sources of information as well (the suspect in the detective story). After all, the reporter ("mediator") confronts the object directly or at least exists within the same world. His is, therefore, an eyewitness (or at least inside) account, and the reader depends on it for information – sometimes, as in a "first person" novel like *Moby Dick* or *Doctor Faustus,* exclusively so. Not only does the reader lack access to the object; he cannot count on an *alternative* representation either. In these circumstances, then, even if the reader has his doubts about the veracity or validity of the given fictional report, how can he set up his own judgment in opposition to the reporter's first-hand vision and version?

This links up with another disctinctive feature of the same barrier, namely, fiction's freedom of invention. In practice, no doubt, this licence to fictionalize is often restricted within the limits of truth telling – from realism to the real – drawn by the work's culture, genre, convention. But even such limits vary with time, place and tradition, to the point of disappearance; in principle they need not apply at all and may be crossed at will, so as to leave invention unconstrained. The reader of history, for instance, inhabits a world similar in *kind* at least to that evoked by the historian: both worlds have some common denominator, however minimal, such as "the laws of nature." An historical narrative that violates these laws automatically becomes suspect. Even though the addressee has no access to the object itself, still, in this context, the entrance of the "unnatural" into the report about the object counts as a ground against the reporter's reliability. If the event is impossible, we say, the historian must be unreliable.

The reader of literature, on the other hand, cannot judge a reporter's reliability by any such basic reality-model common to both. After all, literary reality is not necessarily bound even to the laws of nature most familiar from everyday life: it may be fantastic, oriented to generic logic, multiple or inconsistent in its workings, etc. Nor is this fictional reality – and, indirectly, the fictional reflector's authority – subject to any of the familiar literary models. These may lose their normative force or even come under attack from new fiction in the name of realism, as happened repeatedly in the history of the novel. The laws as well as the details of fictional reality can therefore be

reconstructed (if at all) only after the fact – during that very reading process which is supposed to determine the reliability of the mediator. In the absence of any firm reference-point, the two would seem to become interdependent reading-constructs: the image of the world depends for its force or acceptability on the reflector, just as the reflector's authority depends on the imaging of the world. Doesn't this seal, and trap us within, a vicious circle of interpretation?

Indeed it does, but only if we persist, as so many do even nowadays, in imposing on fiction the logic of historical narrative. Actually, once fiction is in principle delivered from the criterion and constraints of truth value, the question of reliability assumes a new meaning: the centre of gravity shifts from the representation of reality per se to the functions and effects of representation.

This shift from a documentary to a communicative approach has two related consequences for fiction and its reading. The first is the switch from an external orientation (focused on the relations between the represented and the real world) to an internal orientation (focused on the relations between the represented world and the various norms, goals and pressures that underlie its representation within the work as a whole). In short, the emphasis now falls on the part-whole relations established in the text as a functional structure – a pattern that suits its means, including the shape of reality, to certain ends in view.

The second consequence is the rise in the status of the author, as the fiction-maker and pattern-maker implicitly responsible for this whole. As such, he becomes reliable by definition within his own framework and a measure of the reliability of his creatures. Given the implicitness of the authorial figure, to be sure, the measure itself calls for reconstruction and may therefore assume variant shapes among readers; but no matter how different its reconstructions, they all exempt fiction in principle from history's reference to an external world. In other words, the question of reliability no longer depends on the correspondence (congruence, identity) between an extratextual, pre-existing reality and its textual representation. Instead, it comes to depend on the correspondence between the attitudes and goals of the hidden master of communication and those held by the speakers-mediators inset within his communication. Accord marks them as reliable – at least as far as it goes – discord as unreliable. This includes accord or discord about the reality evoked and the point of its evocation; but it may equally concern matters of art, style, design or whatever. To give only one example of multifold discord: "first-person" narrators typically expose themselves to irony because their view of their world as real and of their narrative as history or (auto)biography is incongruous with the fictional premises of the discourse.

Reliability thus emerges as a privilege given or denied in the light of some norm that we attribute to the author of fiction and apply to the mediator. Evaluating the perspective of fictional speakers by this contextual measure, therefore, involves the conception of (un)reliability as a perspectival hypothesis formed by the reader. More precisely, the hypothesis of a fictional

reporter's unreliability is a mechanism for reconciling textual incongruities by appeal to a deliberate tension between the viewpoint of this informant (a character, narrator, dialogist, monologist) and that of the implied author who created him for his own purposes.[3]

4. Normative variables in fictional discourse

This shift in orientation from one constant or dominant norm of reliability (such as truth value in those types of discourse governed by it) to a variable hierarchy of contextual norms does not exactly make the reader's life easy. On the contrary, far from being uniform and postulated in advance, the specific normative hierarchy of a literary text is unpredictable and possibly unconventional. Further, it can even be argued that the contextual norms of fiction (as a criterion implicit in the text) are no more available to the addressee than the reported object itself. Or in my earlier formulation, at no stage of the reading process does the reader achieve direct access to the author, who has no formal discourse of his own. Not only are the author's norms diverse, flexible, and variable from period to period, from genre to genre, even from text to text; nor is it only that these norms lie hidden within the discourse of another subject or communicator, so that they are never directly attainable and never available for direct confrontation with the official discourse. In addition to all this, there appears the complication that the value system by which (and by which only) we are supposed to evaluate the reliability of the speaker(s) is implicit in the discourse of the very speaker(s) to be evaluated.

Therefore the difficulties that the reader of fiction encounters in relating narrative to normative structure are omnipresent. But they still widely vary – in degree, form, role, interaction – and this paper considers three major factors that come into play in every interpretive activity. The first is the *conventionality* of the implied, authorial structure of norms; the second, the degree of normative *explicitness;* the third, the presence or absence of a *system of compensation* that simplifies one normative aspect in order to make up for difficulties along another dimension.

4.1 Conventionality of the implied, authorial structure of norms

(1) Regarding the *conventionality* of the authorial reference-point, the variations fall under a fairly simple rule: the more binding or generally accepted the implied (social or aesthetic) norms within their culture, the easier their reconstruction, even when they are left not only unstated but hidden behind a distorting narrative. A clear case in point is the inhuman light in which Ring Lardner's story "Haircut"[4] presents acts of cruelty committed in the guise of practical joking. In the cultural, historical and generic context of Lardner's writing, the norm that generates this negative judgment is highly probable and expected; so much so that, though the barber who narrates the story views the persecution as a great joke and admires the persecutor, he cannot lead us astray. The reader dismisses the explicit evaluation in favour of the

familiar "truth" behind it, and draws the obvious conclusion about the reliability of the obtuse barber, as well as about the character of his hero.

Nevertheless, the identification of the relevant normative framework does not by itself solve all our interpretive problems, not even that concerning the relations between author and speaker, mediated and mediating viewpoint. However transparent the distorted norms, we still need to determine the reliability of the mediating teller by establishing the cause of distortion. Given a discourse showing incongruities with the implied norms, do we integrate it by constructing a narrator who betrays himself (Lardner's barber) or one who knowingly assumes an incongruous mask or voice (as so often in Fielding's commentary)?

Even in "Haircut" the barber's divergence from humanity is so extreme, and its implications for him so grave, that the reader cannot help wondering whether he is serious. Precisely considering the generality and the force of the social norms in question, can it be that he does not share them? In this instance, the answer remains affirmative. We cannot save the narrator from the consequences of his own narrative – unreliability and all – because characterization, style and worldview consistently indicate that he in fact means every word. To put it differently, the hypothesis that the barber plays an ironic game throughout is less integrative and hence less likely than the alternative of his unpalatable sincerity.

In other cases, however, the apparent normative deviation reads not as the object of irony but as an ironic stance adopted by the speaker himself, who proves reliable after all. His reference to the divergent value system, even his explicit defense or recommendation of it, is only a pretense: an ironic mask rhetorically camouflaging and promoting valid views that the speaker has in common with the author and the reader. Sometimes, the expected agreement between author and addressee concerning such "natural" or "basic" attitudes is precisely what enables the author to create and exploit the repulsive, shocking pretense of the unreliable mediator.[5]

Such is, for instance, the communication structure that gradually emerges in "Draft of a Reparations Agreement" by the modernist Hebrew poet Dan Pagis:

> All right, all right, you gentlemen who yell bloody murder as always,
> You troublesome miracle-workers,
> Silence!
> Everything will be returned to its place,
> Paragraph after paragraph.
> The scream back into the throat.
> The gold teeth to the jaw.
> The fear.
> The smoke to the tin chimneys and further and inside
> Back to the hollow of bones,
> And already you will be covered with skin and sinews and you will live,
> You will still be living,
> Sitting in the living room, reading the evening paper.
> Here you are! All in time.

As to the yellow star: it will at once tear away
From the chest
And emigrate
To heaven.[6]

The poem clearly bears on the acceptability of the financial "reparations" offered by postwar Germany to the victims of Nazi atrocities, an issue that was hotly debated at the time and raises an eternal question. But where does the poem stand, and where its speaker? At first it appears that the speaker, a lawyer or official who represents the would-be makers of reparation, genuinely believes that what has been done can be undone. The "gentlemen who yell bloody murder as always" may calm down: "Everything will be returned to its place." Thus loaded, the opening invites the hypothesis that the poem unfavourably opposes the speaker's to the author's and reader's viewpoint, explicit to implicit communication. The former preaches (and in a tone that sets one's teeth on edge) what the latter must reject, namely, the preposterous notion of repairing, even "returning" bloodshed and agony. As we go on reading, however, this initial hypothesis that the speaker is the object of irony progressively loses its hold. If in Lardner's "Haircut" our first impression ("the speaker is stupid and cruel") gains more and more support from the sequel, its counterpart in "Draft" weakens with each new line we encounter, until it no longer makes sense.

This is mainly because whoever persists in attributing to the speaker the *ethical* view expressed in his "draft" will also have to saddle him with an absurd *world*view. These two systems of norms are here indivisible. If he literally means what he says, he must believe that time is reversible and action cancellable. He then sees nothing impossible about returning "the scream back into the throat. / The gold teeth to the jaw. / . . . The smoke to the tin chimneys and further and inside / Back to the hollow of bones." The holocaust of European Jewry will be erased from history and the victims will resume their tranquil prewar lives, "sitting in the living-room, reading the evening paper". The cumulative effect of the details of the resurrection pushes the grotesque to an extreme. And when it emerges at last that the addressees blamed for yelling murder and promised full, idyllic reparation are the millions of the dead themselves – "*you* will be covered with skin" etc. – the reading of the speaker as an unreliable official ("paragraph after paragraph") simply collapses. Basic ethical values can still be disputed, but not the basic laws of existence. Given the world as we know it and as the discourse appeals to it, a speaker who seriously adheres to such a scenario must be a lunatic.

On the other hand, the alternative reading of the same speaker as a reliable ironist yields a much more probable picture of him, his text, and their relationship. If he is only pretending, then he offers the draft in order to expose, all the more effectively, the unacceptability of any reparations agreement. Under this ironic guise, moreover, he reaps rhetorical gains over and above the *reductio ad absurdum* itself. For instance, the itemizing called for by the draft enables him to mention with appropriate restraint a whole series

of unmentionables, from the extraction of teeth through the crematoria to the yellow star, which do not lend themselves to straight artistic expression. Likewise, the items also make up a summary in reverse of the story of the Holocaust, tracing it from the end to the beginning in a way that sharpens the sense of irreparable loss. So this harmonious combination of three systems of norms (reality-model, ideology, and poetics) identifies the speaker with the author, as one of the most troublesome yellers of bloody murder.

The two examples, "Haircut" and "Draft," thus illustrate two patterns of communication or reading, with significant points of similarity and dissimilarity. The dissimilarity lies, above all, in the organization of the perspectival structure. In a structure of the "Haircut" type, author and reader oppose the divergent stand of an unreliable narrator from their own conventional position in the frame. Whereas in a structure of the "Draft" type, the official speaker joins forces with the implicit participants, and their unity isolates the unreasonable position on the surface as the target of attack from both communication acts. The ironic mediator as well as the author and interpreter reject the explicit view – e.g. the idea of a reparations agreement – and the dissonant elements in the text are taken to betray the unreliability of anyone who can seriously hold such a view.

Of the two modes of reconstruction, the second is no doubt the more complex, because for us to establish the mediator's reliability here, we must shift his discourse out of its literal meaning. Still, the price of ironic complication is relatively low, considering the gains in coherence and the cost of the alternative, nonironic reading. It is sufficient to think of the three normative systems or perspectives that jointly regulate the "Draft" poem and to glance at the consequences of dissociating them from one another or from the speaker. In context, it would be possible to assume that the speaker is not guided by the same rhetorical and aesthetic norms (e.g., a partiality for restraint or the grotesque) as his author. It would be much more difficult to assume, certainly by the end of the Draft, that he is not guided by the same ethical norms. It would be absurd (i.e., not productive, too expensive in terms of coherence) to assume that he is not guided by the same existential norms, concerning time or resurrection for instance.

But the two examples also show a point of similarity in that their *implicit* message is relatively easy to decode, and for much the same reason. In either case, the normative (social, existential, poetic) groundwork is firm or transparent enough to prevent disagreement between author and reader about the attitudes to be taken or condemned. The only question bears on where the official speaker stands: in opposition to or in coalition with those between whom he mediates. With everything else settled, then, we still have to distinguish between reliable (intended and ironic) and unreliable (unwitting and ironized) distortion of the implied value system. And this distinction is not always so easy to apply in practice as in the extreme examples just given; if it were, we would be spared many quarrels about irony. So even the most conventional norms may leave ambiguities in the structure of narration and point of view.

Interpretive difficulties (and hence also disputes) multiply when the under-

lying framework is itself unconventional or deviant, that is, inconsistent with morality, common sense, human nature, or at least what is normally taken as such in context. As in both earlier types of structure, this again involves a normative disharmony between convention and deviation. But there the clash is supposed to be resolved in favour of the conventional reading or perspective, here against it.

This explains the rise in the possibilities of faulty communication between author and reader, due to anything from ideological differences to interpretive misunderstandings. I do not only or primarily mean that certain readers refuse to entertain any view of life or art that goes counter to whatever conventional value-system they regard as "the truth". Their adherence to orthodoxy is such that they do not deviate from or suspend belief in it even when confronted by fiction. This is a relatively simple case – one of more sociological and psychological than of poetic interest – because such readers will not, and perhaps cannot, become the implied reader of the work.[8] The point is that even much less inflexible or conformist readers, both able and willing in principle to assume the part of the implied reader, may find such a work troublesome – not because they entrench themselves in their own positions, but because they are reluctant to ascribe to the author divergent positions. (All the more so in fiction, where one can always shift the burden and the stigma from creator to creatures.) If, all other things being equal, the reader always inclines to the most probable hypothesis in terms of his culture, then an hypothesis concerning the author's normative divergence simply is (or appears) less probable. And this consideration, just as it duly governs the reconstruction of "conventional" discourse, may unduly influence the reading process and reliability-judgment in "revolutionary" texts. Small wonder that their authors often resort to countermeasures for the sake of intelligibility and persuasion.

Tolstoy's "The Kreutzer Sonata" illustrates the dangers and difficulties of perspectival reading in the face of an unpopular ideology. Confronted with a murderer who would have humanity put an end to sexual relations, we find it tempting to grasp the proposer and his proposal as objects of authorial irony. And yet the implicit normative context gives them the stamp of reliability. Indeed, to promote understanding and, if possible, assent, Tolstoy has to manipulate our response to the deviant scheme of values through a complex rhetorical strategy.

Briefly, the author distributes and combines throughout a variety of persuasive devices, from the most explicit to the most implicit, extra- and intratextual. The impact of the epigraph quoting Jesus in dispraise of marriage thus joins forces with statements to the same effect made by Tolstoy himself in his Afterword. This makes a powerful combination. Extremes in terms of placement along the sequence, the "beginning" and "end" are also extreme in prominence, in straightforwardness, in authority derived from extrafictional prestige. In between, the mockery and defeat inflicted in the first episode on characters set up as ideological antagonists discredit the opposition at the earliest stage. But the most subtle device of persuasion lies in the tale-within-a-tale structure, whereby the primary teller within the fiction turns listener as

the hero, Pozdnishev, takes the floor to unfold his outrageous-sounding ideology. In this role, the primary teller becomes the reader's surrogate, giving voice to our own reservations and objections. So the gradual but marked change for the better in his attitude to the protagonist's revolutionary ideas, if it does not prove contagious, at least dissuades the reader from automatically rejecting the novelty. And in encouraging ideological response and revaluation, this change undermines the alternative, psychological reading of the tale as a case history. The network of strategies outlined here thus reflects an awareness on the part of the author of the extent to which the doctrine preached goes against human nature as well as public opinion. But the harmony between the overt and the hidden persuader in "The Kreutzer Sonata", between the fictional and the authorial perspective, suffices to indicate that, in essence, the incongruous speaker is, after all, a spokesman.

In still another type of narrative, however, such perspectival harmony gives place to disharmony between the two communicators, because the unorthodox doctrine implicit in the discourse is mediated by a speaker who holds or even champions orthodox views. So the perspective that the reader is supposed to reject in the fiction may well be the one closest to his own in real life.

This structure of communication accordingly presents special difficulties. On the one hand, it contrasts with the "Haircut" type in the appeal and salience of the unreliable position on the surface. In neither instance is the speaker reliable, because he fails to see eye to eye with the author, so little so that his value system may figure as a kind of ideological "negative." But in the case exemplified by Lardner's tale, the speaker openly represents the deviant position – which is salient and implausible at once – so that the reader can easily identify behind his back the implicit yet conventional truth; or in other words, easily translate or invert the mediator's dissonant "negative" into his creator's reliable "positive". Where the speaker represents the cultural norm, however, his unreliable viewpoint gains in plausibility and decreases in salience vis-à-vis the author's reliable but deviant position. The barrier of fictive mediation that the reader must overcome proportionally thickens.

On the other hand, this communication pattern also differs from that illustrated by Tolstoy's "Sonata". In both the author's own perspective is deviant, but this time the offical speaker's perspective runs counter to the author's. Therefore, not only do the rhetorics wielded by the two pull different ways, instead of reinforcing each other, but the speaker's (autonomous-looking) rhetoric even has a certain advantage, thanks to the "natural" or naturalized values for which it speaks.

Such a perspectival organization appears, for example, in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. The two main narrators here, Lockwood and (above all) Nelly Dean, are sane, orthodox, practical; and they see, speak, and judge as well as behave accordingly. But this "normal" position finds a "romantic" opposition in characters who manifest extreme feelings, rebel against the code of society, and will defy death itself for the sake of an intensive and individual life. So which of the two conflicting value systems enjoys the support of the implicit author?

Most readers and critics nowadays will agree that the conformist worldview

governing the fictive discourse is exposed as untrustworthy by reference to Brontë's romantic ideals. As John Mathison (1956: 106) puts it, "when the reader refuses to accept [Nelly Dean's] view of things, which he continually does and must do, he is forced to feel the inadequacy of the normal, healthy, hearty, good-natured person's understanding of life and human nature". Only, such an ideological choice is not easy to infer – or to accept – across the mediation-gap created by a narrative that abounds in both overt statements and practical proofs in favour of balance, self-control, normality. And if it is not easy even in today's "open" culture, where individuality counts with many as a positive value, how much less so in the age of Victoria. No wonder the novel (1847) met a hostile response from contemporaries. Nor is it surprising that the few more sympathetic readers include a reviewer who reconstructed from the "sombre, rude, brutal" story a storyteller with unexceptionable views and even didactic intentions:

> "Such brutes we shall all be, or the most of us, were our lives as insubordinate to law; were our affections and sympathies as little cultivated. And herein lies the moral of the book, though most people will fail to draw the moral for very irritation at it."[9]

The "moral", on this reading, lies close to Nelly Dean's conventional perspective. In line with Victorian norms, the unhappy end of the "romantic" heroes is taken as a call for subordinating the emotional, chaotic, anti-social elements in human nature.

Nor are the interpretive pressures revealed here at work peculiar to this Victorian reviewer or his age. Where the implicit norms are or look deviant and the fallible but official mediator opposes them – with all the resources provided by his "autonomous" rhetoric – even more flexible and sophisticated readers may get into trouble, if only in the form of complex or compromise solutions. In regard to *Wuthering Heights* itself, Mark Schorer (1949) thus argues that the deviant worldview is, happily, no more than an unrealized intention. In the finished novel, the ideological victory – to judge from the tragic end of the two rebels, as opposed to the success of the conformists, and from the hints given by the language, particularly the figurative clusters – goes to Nelly Dean:

> Emily Brontë begins by wishing to instruct her narrator, the dandy, Lockwood, in the nature of a grand passion ... Her rhetoric altered the form of her intention. *It is her education: it shapes her insight.*

Schorer in effect starts where Mathison concluded: Emily Brontë meant to establish a novel ideology behind the back of a conventional, hence ironized narrator. To his mind, however, this idea then reversed itself in the process of writing – though it left traces, especially in the first part – so that what the novel actually vindicates is the overt position which it set out to attack. To the extent that the narrative contains elements inconsistent with this position, therefore, their significance is not perspectival (as clues to the self-betrayal of the narrator) but genetic (as the remains of the writer's original plan).

The two readings of the novel thus clash in the message inferred, in the relations and hierarchy established among the viewpoints on the world, in the play of positive and negative judgment, including irony, and in the place and resolution given to discordant elements. In terms of either reading, that is, the alternative figures as a misreading, a breakdown in communication. But for the purpose of analyzing the problematics of communication between implied author and reader, there is no need to decide between these hypotheses. On the contrary, the fact that the incompatible hypotheses draw their arguments from the same mediating report serves my point. For it effectively illustrates the reader's dilemmas and choices vis-à-vis a fiction that constructs – reliably or unreliably, that is the problem – an unconventional value system.

4.2 Degree of normative explicitness

(2) The second variable determining the reader's ability to reconstruct the normative groundwork is the degree of its *explicitness* in the discourse. Even where the norms are conventional, the more explicit their presentation the easier and safer it is to decipher them. And vice versa: the more implicit the normative system, the less straightforward and certain is the reading of the authorial perspective, especially where the norms are problematic.

This issue lies at the heart of the controversy between the Jamesian theory of narrative and the reaction voiced by Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) and later in *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1974). The approaches differ both in the evaluation and in the description of rhetorical stances or techniques. On the one hand, the Jamesian school extols the absence of overt commentary in the modern novel, and correspondingly denounces the verbosity or simply the overexplicitness of narrators in the old novel, particularly the Victorians in their favourite role of commentators, philosophers, social reformers. (Ford Madox Ford (1967: 10), for instance, goes so far as to draw a quasi-generic line between the garrulous "nuvle" and the artistic "novel".) Taking the opposite view, Booth demonstrates the rhetorical gains of commentary in the classical novel at its best, and attacks the lack of normative guidance in the modern novel, resulting in an open or ambiguous text and the reader's confusion. On the other hand, the Jamesian tradition tends to oversimplify matters by opposing the presence to the absence of commentary, while Booth (1961) makes a refined distinction between overt and dramatized rhetoric.

Descriptively, at least, the latter approach is more rewarding for our purposes. Let me therefore mark three points (or narrative possibilities) along the continuum under discussion and organize the argument around them. At one pole, there appear explicit pronouncements on the evaluative (ideological, aesthetic) norms regulating the work, or in short, on its "thesis," as in *Tom Jones* and *War and Peace*. What is made explicit in summary form at some juncture or junctures agrees with, and if necessary serves as a key to, what the work as a whole implies. Such elucidating commentary indicates that smooth communication with the reader ranks high on the author's scale of priorities. It also indicates the reliability of the narrator as a mouthpiece for

the text's view of art and world. This is the case with most of the narrators in the novel of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century – Fielding, Austen, Dickens, Balzac, Tolstoy – rich in generalization, thematic address, evaluative portraiture, and the like. Their commentary not only neutralizes the mediation-gap or at least its ideological aspect (which explains the tendency to refer to such speakers as "the author"). It also simplifies the work's establishment and the reader's reconstruction of the normative groundwork, so much so that James and his followers dismiss the entire procedure as inartistic.

At the intermediate point, we have explicit references to the main issue or centre of evaluative interest (the "theme"), leaving the thesis itself implicit.[10] Everyone agrees, for example, that the Houyhnhnms are indeed as central to *Gulliver's Travels*, and the fallibility of human insight as central to *The Good Soldier*, as the respective narrators maintain; the disputes rather concern the question whether Gulliver's admiration for the rational horses voices Swift's and whether Dowell's despair reflects Ford's. Even with the theme formulated in the commentary, what still remains is the task of working out the thesis – to scale the thematic elements, organize them into a world picture, relate them to a poetic system – and accordingly to determine the speaker's reliability. Given the focus of interest, in short, the reader must himself supply and evaluate the perspectives on it.

Finally, as often in modernism, we have the opposite pole of complete silence, with no relevant commentary whatever, not even regarding the theme or normative crux. Such failure on the part of the mediating speaker to generalize about the author's concerns may have different reasons. In the Jamesian tradition of narrative, the reason is aesthetic: commentary is seen here as a mark, indeed a vice, of inartistic narration, and art lies in the challenge that its avoidance presents to author and reader alike. But the motivation may also be mimetic. For example: given a monologist unaware of any audience, as in the stream of consciousness novel, it makes sense that he will not bother to generalize his problems and attitudes, certainly not beyond his own immediate needs. Similarly with a speaker who does address an audience but has no gift for abstraction or who wishes to create an impression of objectivity, as if he were a mere recorder of events. In each case, the absence of commentary means that the fictional mediator does not overtly lay himself open to reliability-judgments, and the process of reconstruction accordingly operates under constraints of extreme obliquity. We have to infer from the speaker's discourse not only the authorial value system and its implications for the speaker but the very thematic center or heading – what the whole thing is really about.

Along the "explicit-implicit" axis, then, these three basic possibilities mark an ascending order of difficulty in communication and interpretation. Yet, again, it would be hasty to conclude that difficulty (and the mediation-gap in particular) automatically decreases or increases in line with explicitness. Beyond the mere presence or absence of narrative exegesis, some further variables and combinations should be taken into account. The most fundamental of these derive from the fact that there is no automatic correlation

between the explicitness and the reliability of the commentator or the commentary itself. Thus, just as a reliable mediator may (and, in modernism, often will) keep silent, so may we encounter

(a) *unreliable commentary*, explicit but in context discordant and discrediting. With Lardner's barber, clearly, the admiring remarks about the practical joker not only go with but betray or even widen the mediation gap. Less obvious is

(b) *commentary mediated by way of reversal.* Explicitness need not involve a reliable explicator, but nor does his unreliability prevent his voicing appropriate attitudes, if only to negate them. An unreliable speaker may quote or otherwise present a contextually-valid outlook far from his own, thus explicitly rejecting what the author and the reader implicitly endorse. Take the end (paragraph 29) of Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal." The speaker having detailed his cannibalistic proposal – to save Ireland's economy by exporting baby-meat for the delectation of her neighbours – he lists a number of alternative solutions and dismisses them as impractical. But these are doubtless the very solutions that Swift himself advocates. As Booth puts (1974: 116) it:

> If we ignore the first clause, "Therefore, let no man talk to me of other expedients," all that follows in the paragraph is absolute Swift, without a touch of irony. (It is of course "ironic" that the direct program seems hopeless to the speaker, but once we are wrenched on the proper platform, we do no ironic reconstructions throughout this passage.)

Here, as in *Tom Jones,* the author's attitude is overtly transmitted, but through a different pattern of mediation. Fielding's narrator shares and preaches the doctrines of his creator, while the Modest Proposer expresses the contextually valid proposals only to reject them out of hand. It is the reader who is supposed to transform the negated ("reversed") proposals into the author's positive message and recommendations. One should note, finally, that this holds true no matter whether we read his negation (indeed like his entire Proposal) as straightforward and mad or as itself ironic and all too realistic in view of the hopelessness of the Irish problem. Each reading yields a different speaker, of course, with a structure of mediacy and communication to match. But the fact that these polar readings amount to the same thing, as regards the need to invert the ambiguous negative on the surface into the authorial positive, serves to underline the dynamic relations between commentary and reliability.

Nor does commentary always lend itself to "yes or no" or even "yes and no" judgments, because it may elude all direct ideological evaluation. Such is the case with a device that I would name

(c) *the exegetical deflection.* Here the incongruity arises more from the speaker's misfocusing than from any direct misjudgment on his part: the issue most central or relevant to the authorial frame is passed over in silence throughout the mediator's discourse, while side-issues receive liberal commentary. Take the section of *The Moonstone* that Wilkie Collins delegates to

Miss Cluck: she sermonizes all the time, but rarely to the point – Collins's point, that is, and ours. She shows a genius for irrelevance, to grotesque effect. No matter how loaded and weighty the topic, therefore, its developments by the mediator does not necessarily provide the reader with a normative key or clue, let alone a straight one. It may fulfil altogether different purposes, from psychological exposure to comic relief.

But nor does relevance ensure reliability, due to the frequent combination (d) *'right focus, wrong attitude'*. Here, no matter how reliable the speaker's centering of the problem (or "theme"), his solution (or "thesis") yet turns out to be unsatisfactory or unacceptable in authorial context. Among many other naive observers, Huck Finn instinctively puts his finger on the right questions but arrives at the wrong, often socially conditioned answers. In this, Huck as a mediator both reflects and obscures or distorts his author's perspective, so that he both helps and hinders the reader. On the one hand, his vacillation between handing over and assisting the runaway slave directs us to the heart of the thematic conflict, and accordingly invests him with authority. On the other hand, his self-condemnation by reference to a value system that regards the handing over as a moral duty and the assistance as a crime may infect the reader with doubt, but not for long. This judgment indeed follows from a view of property rights encoded in the narrator's own society; yet the humane-liberal norms carry such weight within the novel's ideology and rhetoric that the negative attitude, supported by Huck himself in all innocence, is firmly rejected by the author.

To return to my starting point. Like most of the other patterns of communication I have outlined, Huck's case also suggests why, as the speaker's explicitness increases, the reader's normative uncertainty proportionately tends to decrease, and vice versa. This is not because or insofar as overt guidance equals reliable guidance, but despite the possible or manifest unreliability of the guidance offered. To be sure, it is one thing for the reader to go along with the general statements made by the discourse and quite another to assume an attitude in opposition to them: to deny rather than accept the authority of the speaker, often our only informant, to distinguish rather than identify perspectives, to complicate the structure of transmission by actualizing the mediation-gap vis-à-vis the author, and all by appeal to norms that remain implicit in the text as well as multiple and flexible in cultural context. And yet, once such opposition has suggested or imposed itself, it is much easier to reconstruct its detail and force where the speaker expresses the author's viewpoint, no matter how dismissively, than where he ignores it, wittingly or unwittingly, in favour of his own. Likewise, it often proves easier to recover the implicit norms from their "negation" by a suspect or unreliable mediator (Lardner's barber, Swift's Proposer, Twain's Huck) than from their dramatization within an authoritative but reticent discourse of the kind favoured by modernists.

4.3 Control of interpretive difficulties through a compensation system

(3) The various narrative and communicative patterns traced in the two above

sections are not merely specific rhetorical devices open to fiction. They also reveal something far more general about the structuring of norms, that is, about the three axes of discourse with which we are concerned: conventionality, explicitness and reliability. I refer especially to the play of flexibility and regularity in combinations.

Consider what I called the exegetical deflection. As a pattern that disharmoniously brings together the narrator's explicit commentary with his creator's implicit commentary within the same piece of text, it shows that there are no simple 'either/or' divisions on any of the axes. It is not only that the degree of explicitness spreads all the way between the poles of thesis-formulating statement and no comment, but that even the extremes may tensely coexist as two opposed normative perspectives on the same discourse. On another axis, likewise, reliability not only extends from perfect accord between speaker and author *(Tom Jones)* to total discord ("Haircut") but also assumes complex intermediate forms, such as tension in regard to the center of interest *(The Moonstone)*. And needless to say, the axis of conventionality vs. deviance is equally flexible since it depends on codes that are essentially protean and subject to change and on the *ad hoc* premises of the specific text.

At the same time, the exegetical deflection also illustrates the complexity of relations *among* the three axes in all that regards the structuring of communication. The tense coexistence within it of two orders of guidance, explicit (but irrelevant) and implicit (but duly focused), is possible only because the narrator's commentary does not bind his creator to anything. True, the more explicit the formulation of theme or ideology the easier for the reader to place both the speech and the speaker within the text's value system. Yet, again, the reason for this is not at all that commentary signifies or guarantees reliability, but rather that commentary exposes the fictional commentator to reliability-*judgments*, both positive and negative. His ideological generalizations may be authoritative, but they may equally turn out contradictory to or "deflected" from the implicit world-picture. There is no automatic correlation of any kind among the three axes.

The same conclusion arises from other strategies discussed above. We have seen, for instance, that the mediator may be reliable or unreliable, regardless of whether his norms are conventional or deviant, stated or suggested. Similarly, authoritative comments may rise to the surface, if only by way of quotation and "reversal", from the mouth of an *un*authoritative commentator. And the circumstance that a fictional mediator's exegesis fails to reflect his creator's perspective in one area (e.g., ideological stand) does not yet entail a mediation-gap in other areas as well (e.g., in thematic focus).

However separable in theory, the three axes are never separate in the practice of writing and interpretation. On the contrary, they remarkably intersect and interact. The combinatory possibilities are numerous, each with its own effect on our reconstruction of the implied norms from the official discourse. Yet they also show significant regularity, due to the relative probability of the combinations among axes and, above all, to the author's desire to control interpretive difficulties by lowering or raising the demands made on the reader.

From this viewpoint, literary discourse falls into three types. Some texts or modes of narration simplify the reader's task all along the line by reducing fictional mediation to a minimum; others complicate all the relevant factors to the highest degree. In between these extremes we find texts that balance or regulate communicative obstacles on one axis through simplifying operations on another.

The shortest way to reconstruction is offered by an author or text that simplifies all the factors of normative organization. The norms are then (1) culturally conventional, hence acceptable and well-known to the implied audience; (2) explicitly formulated in the discourse by (3) a speaker who has already demonstrated and established his reliability. This combination is typical of didactic or strongly ideological works, e.g., the social commentary in Dickens's *Bleak House,* which accords with the novel's "real life" as well as its poetic context. In generalizing from the plot itself, this commentary gives expressive voice to a call for reform that enlightened public-opinion of the time was sure to embrace and had indeed anticipated.[11] Transparent communication cannot go any further, at least not in fiction with its mediator interposed between author and reader, encoder and decoder.

The other extreme marks the strategies devised by authors who have no such regard for the transparency (or the very transmission) of an ideological message. Here divergence, implicitness and unreliability combine into the opaque (if not irresolvably ambiguous) discourse typical of modernism, for instance. Even moderate combinations of these factors do not make for a smooth reading. Under the conditions of divergence and implicitness "alone", the reader may still appeal to the axis of reliability: if up to the problematic stage the narrator has been consistently reliable or unreliable, then in all probability he will continue to be so. However, things can get even worse owing to what looks like sudden changes in the mediator's reliability. Thus, the terrible Heathcliff appears to speak for Emily Brontë in expressing the "romantic" worldview at some points in *Wuthering Heights*. But does he really? It is certain that his authority does not compare with that of Dickens's privileged and consistent spokesman in *Bleak House.* Nor does his ideological extremism, going against the "rationalism" of Victorian (as well as of his fictional) society, enjoy the rhetorical benefits of Dickens's, which likewise borders at times on linguistic violence but finds an echo in public opinion. Accordingly, if the dark and anti-social figure does largely express Brontë's position, after all, this emerges not from the passages of overt commentary in themselves but from our continuous reconstruction of the novel's worldview, its entire structure of values and voices. To decide whether such changes in perspective as Heathcliff's are real or apparent, that is, the interpreter must turn from the local to a larger context (the whole work, the author's works, the convention that may have been observed or defied, etc.) Nor does this resource always resolve matters. Often, we must simply suspend judgment, for the time being if not for good, about the ends and the channel of communication: about normative and narrative pattern.

The variety of intermediate cases do not fall neatly between these two poles of transparent and opaque discourse, because the mere enumeration of

difficulties confronting the reader may turn out to be misleading in regard to their actual effect on the establishment of norms and reliability. As a matter of fact, such arithmetical shortcuts fail even along a single axis, because every factor is itself a complex of assorted subfactors. Reliability, for instance, is determined by various criteria – social, moral, aesthetic, etc. – which do not entail one another. At most, tendencies of linkage or interrelatedness among them, as distinct from package deals, may be observed in specific traditions and models of narrative.

Moreover, sometimes a combination of two complicating factors – for example, the implicitness of the normative system *plus* contextually unreliable commentary – proves easier to overcome than one factor alone. For a complicating factor like unreliable commentary may at the same time serve as a simplifying or compensating force: the mediator's commentary "negatively" implies its authorial opposite, as the barber's applause in "Haircut" does Lardner's disgust. Plain reticence on the part of a reliable speaker, though exhibiting only one obstacle, is often much more perplexing, since it offers us no overt clue whatever to the thesis or even the theme. What attitudes towards life and art lie, for instance, beneath the "objective" surface of a narrative like Hemingway's?

Falling between minimum and maximum complexity, the intermediate cases do not lend themselves to gradation along any formal scale. Rather, what matters is that they show such flexibility and that they nevertheless have one thing in common: a *compensation system*. They all contain at least one variable that facilitates interpretation and makes up for the more problematic sides of the discourse. For example, explicitness often compensates for deviance where – as in "The Kreutzer Sonata" – the work advocates idiosyncratic norms. Or, as in "Haircut," the conventionality of the underlying norms compensates for the need to reconstruct them by inverting the official statements. Since these statements are incompatible with basic human values, the reader moves with relative ease from the narrator's dissonant explication to the author's familiar implication, distinguishing the two in the process along the axis of reliability as well.

Our reading often grows more complicated and hesitant when difficulties arise not (or not only) on one of the axes but owing to some combination of factors. Thus, when a hitherto unreliable speaker suddenly articulates the work's central theses, how are we to reconcile this exception with his habitual deviance and unreliability? The rise to the surface of the authorial viewpoint that has so far remained hidden (or even mediated by way of reversal) doubtless helps, but does not this compensation for the narrative method undermine the narrative logic? Not necessarily, as suggested by Swift's "A Modest Proposal". Here, the Proposer's abrupt shift from cannibalism to a series of reasonable reforms exemplifies at least three forms of motivation. One is to make sense of the perspectival incongruity by abandoning the very hypothesis that the speaker is unreliable, in favour of a different and harmonious structure of communication: the mediator has so far been pretending madness, we say, with the author's blessing and in the interests of shock tactics. Reliable throughout, that is, he simply shifts from ironic to plainer

discourse, with a view to intelligibility. An alternative resource is to preserve the mediation-gap between speaker and author by attributing the speaker's new (rather than his old) position to a voice other than his own. He outlines the contextually reliable proposals, we now say, not in discontinuous addition to his own but as a dismissive, indeed negative ("let no man talk") quotation from others. A third way out lies in assimilating the incongruity to generic rule or latitude, e.g. to the fractures in point of view (as well as in the coherence of plot or character) that genres like satire permit themselves. No matter how jarring, then, the introduction of the compensating measure may be variously resolved. But whatever the resolution here, perspectival or other, it is never simple and often less than stable.

Finally, the regulation of reading through a compensation system also raises the problem of "adequate guidance". To realize its purpose as an act of communication, the text must provide means (indicators, conventions, directives) that will enable the reader to reconstruct the implied system of values and place the various attitudes and speakers in relation to it. In this sense, the intelligibility of the normative system is a necessary condition for communication in general and the control of reliability in particular.

But it is precisely here that the question of degree arises. What counts, from the reader's viewpoint, as adequate guidance? Is there a necessary quantity or quality of directive signals? At what point would they be considered excessive, and at what point would their scarcity lead to misunderstandings and wild hypotheses? It is useless to give an answer outside a generic or historical context. For the complex of signals responsible for successful communication with the reader changes in nature and pattern whenever we move to a new writer, a new genre or a new period.

Furthermore, the history of narrative and its reading richly manifests the two possible disturbances of the ideal balance. One is excessive guidance that is rejected by the audience – or the critics – as being overconventional or insulting; the other is inadequate or overoriginal guidance, which results in loss of control and interpretive darkness. An example of the latter problem would be the indicators and the compensation system devised in Henry James's *Daisy Miller* (1878) in order to lead the implied reader to the underlying norms and the desired reliability-judgments. Unfortunately, the provision made for the implied reader did not have the intended effect on readers at the time.[12] For James's contemporary readers missed the new signals planted in the text, and instead "found" the familiar pattern typical of the old novel. Accordingly, the contextually unreliable characters and informants within the fiction were judged to be reliable, while the author himself was accused of distorting (i.e. being unreliable about) the facts of American life. James actually developed both a new thematic synthesis (a balance instead of a one-sided view of American vs. European culture) and a new compositional strategy (internalizing the conflict into the mind of an observer, Frederick Winterbourne, so that Daisy's sensational story transforms into his "discovery plot," his ordeal of reliability). But this double novelty, in both cultural and poetic model, rendered James's compensation-system insufficient, indeed invisible, for his generation. Only seventy years later, in the second half of the

twentieth century – when both the implied norms and the presentational techniques of "objective" narrative had established themselves in modern literature – did critics begin to perceive the tale's real focus of interest. Hence the shift of interest from Daisy, who is at the center of the sensational or external plot, to Winterbourne, the "center of consciousness" who follows her adventure and tries to understand what happens and why.

The degree of difficulty encountered in reconstructing the normative context may thus vary not only from genre to genre, from period to period and from text to text, but also along the reading history of the same text. And this in turn underlines a more general implication of my argument. Communication has a diachronic as well as a synchronic aspect: apart from marking a set of basic differences among poetic or interpretive models, the variations I have traced affect and reflect some lines in the development of literary history.

Notes

1. See the discussion in Robert Langbaum (1963), 160ff., and further references there.
2. For further theoretical discussion of fictionality and some related effects on reading see Meir Sternberg (1983), esp. 172ff., and my "Narrative Structure and Fictional Mediation," *Poetics Today* (forthcoming).
3. For a fuller presentation of this approach to reliability see Tamar Yacobi (1981).
4. Ring Lardner, "Haircut," in *The Best Short Stories of Ring Lardner* (New York: Scribner, 1957).
5. Cf. the comment made by M. Perry and M. Sternberg (1970: 625-626) on the ironic technique in the David and Bath-Sheba story (II Samuel 11): "The very absence of [explicit] evaluation, which results here from the narrative technique, is often the means to alert the reader to the ethical aspect. But this presupposes the story's normative lucidity. Only because the ethical status of David's crimes is so obvious can the narrator afford to devise that ironic tension between the nature of the deeds and the manner of their transmission".
6. Dan Pagis, *Points of Departure*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (Philadelphia Jewish Publication Society, 1981), p. 27. For a close reading of the poem in another context see Tamar Yacobi (1976).
7. "Private" in the terminology of Wayne C. Booth (1961:320).
8. Thus Susan Suleiman (1976) refuses to become the implied reader of a "fascist" novel, and to her the author of such a novel is himself unreliable. See also the final section below for the responses of contemporary readers to *Daisy Miller*.
9. *The Leader*, December 28, 1850; quoted in Sale (1963: 284).
10. On the theme-thesis distinction see Monroe C. Beardsley (1958: 403-419).
11. For documentation see John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson (1968: 182-187).
12. I have gone into the question in Yacobi (1985).

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