

Points of Origin: On Focalization in Narrative

Focalization, a recent critic writes, is "the most important, most penetrating, and most subtle means of manipulation" available to the narrative text, whether literary or otherwise (Bal 1985, 116). Yet both the intensive study of focalization in the narrower sense and even the expression itself are very recent arrivals on the narratological scene.¹ The term, like many others in contemporary narrative theory, was introduced into critical discourse only twenty years ago by Gérard Genette in his *Figures III* in 1972, in order, as he says himself, to dispel "a regrettable confusion" surrounding an "apparently obvious but almost universally disregarded distinction," namely that "between the question *Who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *Who is the narrator?*," or, more simply, the question *Who sees?* and the question *Who speaks?*" (1980, 186). There had, of course, been a very considerable amount of critical discussion of the effects of "narrative perspective" and "point of view" in narrative, especially in the English-speaking world, long before Genette, who duly acknowledges the major contributions of such predecessors as Percy Lubbock, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, F.K. Stanzel, and Wayne Booth. None of these earlier contributions, however, made consistent use of the crucial distinction that informs all subsequent discussion of what we can call focalization in the narrower sense, namely, once again in the words of Mieke Bal, who considerably developed Genette's original system, "the insight that the agent that sees must be given a status other than that of the agent that narrates" (1985, 101).

Focalization is a matter of mediation. As Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan puts it with exemplary brevity, "the story is presented in the text through the mediation of some 'prism,' 'perspective,' 'angle of vision,' verbalized by the

¹ It is indicative that the index of so recent and authoritative a publication as Seymour Chatman's *Story and Discourse* (1978), which sets out to provide a comprehensive approach to a general theory of narrative, contains no entry for focalization.

narrator though not necessarily his" (71), and this mediation is what Genette and his followers call focalization.² The fundamental distinction between narration and focalization emerges very clearly, to repeat an often used example, in the opening sentence of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist* (1916):

Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nice little boy named baby tuckoo.... (7)

Here the narrative voice is, as always, that of the narrator, but the perceptions conveyed are those of the very young child Stephen listening to a bedtime story. Voice and vision, in other words, quite clearly derive from separate points of origin. By contrast, the opening sentence of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848) is clearly both narrated and focalized from the same centre of consciousness, voice and vision sharing a common point of origin:

While the present century was in its teens, and on one sunshiny morning in June, there drove up to the great iron gate of Miss Pinkerton's academy for young ladies, on Chiswick Mall, a large family coach, with two fat horses in blazing harness, driven by a fat coachman in a three-cornered hat and wig, at the rate of four miles an hour. (11)

Like *Vanity Fair*, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866), to take a final example, also opens with a sentence where both narration and focalization appear at first reading to be clearly those of the narrator and the narrator alone:

Towards the end of a sultry afternoon early in July a young man came out of his little room in Stolyarny Lane and turned slowly and somewhat irresolutely in the direction of Kamenny Bridge. (1)

Only the phrase "and somewhat irresolutely" may give us some slight pause here, but that will be quite enough to introduce surprisingly radical doubts, whether acknowledged or not, into our reading of Dostoevsky's opening statement, doubts which the reader of Thackeray's opening sentence has no reason to entertain. Where is Raskolnikov's alleged irresolution being "seen" from? Is it something that is known to the narrator because the narrator, as in *Vanity Fair*, is omniscient and can thus see, godlike, into the minds of all his characters? Or is it rather that Raskolnikov's lack of resolve was in fact clearly visible *physically* to the narrator, who just happened, as a fellow character, to be standing across the street on that July afternoon watching

the young man leave his lodgings? Or is there, after all, an at least momentary divergence between the narrating voice and the perceiving eye, as in Joyce's *Portrait*, allowing us a sudden and unexpected glimpse through Raskolnikov's own eyes, if only for the duration of the three words in question? The attempt to answer such questions leads us directly to the central consideration of what focalization theory can and cannot do for us as readers of a narrative text. Before going any farther, however, let us attempt to establish some of the ground rules by which the game of focalization is played.

I. ASPECTS OF FOCALIZATION

To begin with terminology, the story is presented (transformed into the narrative text) through a double mediation, namely a "voice" that "speaks" and "eyes" that "see": the former belonging to the narrator, the latter to the *focalizer*, the perceived centre of consciousness, who may or may not, as we have seen, be identical with the narrator. It is important to understand, however, that to speak in anthropomorphic terms of a "focalizer," with "eyes," is purely a convenient metaphorical strategy. The focalizer is not a "person," not even an agent in the same way that the narrator or implied author is an agent, but rather a chosen *point*, the point from which the narrative is perceived as being presented at any given moment.³

This point of origin may be perceived as *external* or *internal* to the story presented. The focalizer of the opening sentence of *Vanity Fair*, for example, is clearly external to the events presented, while the focalizer of the opening sentence of *A Portrait of the Artist* is clearly internal, a participant in the events narrated by the narrator. We may refer to the former of these as external focalization (EF) and to the latter as internal focalization (IF). The external focalizer will, of course, usually be a narrator-focalizer (NF), while the internal focalizer will usually be a character-focalizer (CF). We need the cautious "usually" here because of the fact that *external* and *internal* are entirely relative terms, since any particular focalization, as we shall see, can (like narration) be contained or embedded within another. So, for example, the narrator-focalizer of a hypodiegetic narrative may function simultaneously as external narrator-focalizer with regard to the story he narrates, and as internal character-focalizer with regard to the story in which

3 Theorists differ interestingly in the terms they use to describe the nature of the focalizer: Genette (1972), who is primarily interested in focalization by *characters*, calls it the "focal character" (1980, 188); Rimmon-Kenan calls it a "vehicle" (74) as well as an "agent" (78); Bal (1985) describes it a "point" (104) or an "agent" (121); and Toolan usefully sees it as a "refracting lens" (71).

2 Other terms have been suggested, e.g., "orientation" (Toolan, 68), or a combination of "slant" and "filter" (Chatman 1990, 143).

he is a character.⁴ Focalization, moreover, need not be constant throughout a text: indeed, it can be variable to any degree. Rimmon-Kenan thus makes a threefold distinction between *fixed* focalization, where the same focalizer is maintained throughout a narrative; *variable* focalization, employing, say, two different character-focalizers; and *multiple* focalization, employing several different types of focalization, internal or external or both (76-77).

Rimmon-Kenan makes the further valuable point that while focalization is always a matter of "seeing," the vision involved is by no means limited to physical vision, but can also include psychological and/or ideological components (77-82). The question "Who sees?" should therefore be understood as potentially meaning "Who perceives, conceives, assumes, understands, desires, remembers, dreams?" and so on. Each of these visions will have its separate implications for the kind of focalizer employed and for the kind of reading we feel appropriate. We are unsurprised when an external narrator-focalizer is assigned a bird's-eye view in terms of space and a panchronic view of both past and future in terms of time, while we expect a character-focalizer to be "naturally" confined to both a limited spatial perspective and a purely retrospective temporal vision. We readily accept that an external focalizer should lay claim to unrestricted knowledge, but assume that a character-focalizer's knowledge will be "naturally" restricted, like our own. We tend to treat a character-focalizer's perspective cautiously as being subjective, but quite happily accept an external focalizer's vision as entirely objective. In a word, we tend to read the norms of internal focalization as questionable, those of external focalization as authoritative. Since externality and internality are interchangeable, however, the textual potential for manipulation of the reader here is abundantly evident.

Focalization, however, involves not only a subject of focalization, or focalizer; it also crucially involves an object of focalization, the *focalized*. In a sentence like "John watched the train arriving," the character-focalizer is "John," and "the train" is the focalized, the object of John's attention. In the case of a novel like *Vanity Fair*, indeed, with its external narrator-focalizer who focalizes the entire narration, it is evident that *everything* in that narrative is focalized, whether or not there is *also* a character-focalizer

involved at any given point. External narrators, however, it is crucial to remember, are *always* present, whether explicitly or implicitly (O'Neill, 89-90). It follows that in *every* narrative *everything* is *primarily* focalized by this world-creating narrative agent, including all subsequent focalizations within that narrative world.

"Everything" includes both events and what Chatman calls "existents," namely, characters and setting (1978, 26). Characters as objects of focalization (CO) are particularly interesting in that they can be focalized "from without" or "from within," to employ Rimmon-Kenan's terms (75): that is to say, "seen" by the focalizer "from without" as impenetrable, non-transparent, opaque objects to be seen from the outside only, like any other object; or, alternatively, "seen" by the focalizer "from within," as if the focalizer could read their mind, could see "through" them as transparent rather than opaque objects. In the former case, the focalizer's vision simply registers the focalized with whatever degree of objectivity or subjectivity; in the latter case, however, the focalizer's vision can be (though it *need* not be) transmuted to a greater or lesser extent into the vision of the focalized, which consequently, and correspondingly, becomes a focalizer in its turn; a transformation, incidentally, which has remained largely undiscussed among narrative theorists.

Combined with the fact that focalization can be either internal or external, this potential transformation of focalized and focalizer provides a whole series of new perspectives. Thus, in a sentence like "John watched Mary," for example, "Mary" is a non-transparent character-focalized. In a sentence like "John watched Mary, who wished he would stop," "Mary" is still a non-transparent focalized as far as the internal focalization by "John" is concerned, but in terms of focalization by the external *narrator* of the sentence as a whole, "Mary" is a transparent focalized, since the narrator, unlike John, can see "through" her and her own focalization of the situation as an independent character-focalizer. In a sentence like "John could still see himself as a schoolboy, wishing the summer would never end," the older "John" is a character-focalizer, while the younger, remembered self is both a transparent character-focalized, and, with his wish that summer would never end, also a secondary character-focalizer (CF2) *within* the primary character-focalization (CF1) of his remembering, or fantasizing, or self-deluding older self. That older self, in turn, is a projection of the *narrator* of the sentence as global external focalizer (EF). The implications of this multiple embeddedness of different focalizations have not yet been adequately theorized and will consequently be our central focus here.

As a final aspect of focalization that needs to be borne in mind before proceeding any further, however, we may, as Mieke Bal observes (1985, 109), mention the *perceptibility* or otherwise both of the focalizer and of the

4 Genette's conception of internal and external focalization (1980, 189), followed by Prince (31-33), differs from that of both Bal and Rimmon-Kenan: his "internal" focalization is roughly the same as theirs; but his "external" focalization actually refers less to the focalizer than to what I will be calling a non-transparent focalized (Bal 1977, 28-29; qtd. Rimmon-Kenan, 139n6). What I call external focalization, meanwhile (following Bal and Rimmon-Kenan), Genette prefers to call "non-" or "zero-focalized." This, however, is quite unsatisfactory for the same reason as was Chatman's later decision to refer to "non-narrated" narrative (1978, 166) — namely that *all* narrative is always both narrated *and* focalized.

focalized. An external narrator-focalizer, for example, may just be a narrating voice that gives us an apparently entirely objective account of the events narrated but provides no information as to the personal identity of its owner, who thus, as focalizer, is non-perceptible; a narrator who gives his name and the circumstances surrounding his narration, on the other hand, is perceptible. It will be clear that such perceptibility or otherwise can involve increased or decreased authority for the narrator-focalizer: the more perceptible the focalizer becomes, and thus the more easily graspable as a character, the more the reader will in turn feel authorized to question the focalizer's vision. Bal points likewise to the perceptibility or non-perceptibility of the focalized object as being of importance especially as to the extent to which it can provide an insight into the power-structure between focalizers (1985, 109). We are hardly surprised at all as readers when an external focalizer can focalize such non-perceptible objects as a character's thoughts or the contents of his dreams. We should no doubt be disturbed, on the other hand, if a character-focalizer focalized anything other than perceptible objects. In this respect too, the potential for textual manipulation of the reader through focalization will be evident.

II. LEVELS OF FOCALIZATION

We may theoretically and provisionally (or *sous rature*, to use a fashionable Derrideanism) distinguish three possible levels of focalization (simple, compound, and complex), each of which may be seen as applying globally (that is, to whole texts) or regionally (to parts of texts). We can thus appropriately speak of *simple* focalization when there is only a single focalizer involved; we can speak of *compound* focalization when there is more than one focalizer involved, as when a character-focalizer's vision is embedded in an external focalizer's enveloping perspective; and we can speak of *complex* focalization in cases where the focalization is essentially ambiguous or indeterminate. It should be said at once, however, that the theory in this area, which is of considerable interest, is frequently a great deal clearer than the narrative practice, which very often is consequently even more interesting. Both the "simple" and the "compound," in fact, as we shall see, demonstrate a pronounced tendency to slide systemically and irresistibly towards the complex.

Simple focalization, involving a single focalizer, can be said (provisionally) to occur when, for example, a single narrator also functions as focalizer for the entire duration of the text under consideration. In practice, however, this is rarely encountered in texts of more than a few sentences in length. One could also speak of simple focalization even in the case of multiple narrators, as long as each individual narrator functioned as sole focalizer for the duration of the text under consideration. It should, however, be noted

that simple focalization is, in principle, limited to narrator-focalizers (and that, as we shall eventually see, also only provisionally) while character-focalization is always compound.

Compound focalization always involves, whether explicitly or implicitly, some form of embedded focalization, where one focalization is contained within another. We especially need to remember that *the narrator is always a focalizer*, having no choice *whether* to focalize or not (just as he has no choice whether to verbalize or not), only *how* to do so. The narrator, in other words, necessarily has a particular "vision" of the narrative world he projects.⁵ As we have seen, the narrator may focalize objects directly, or he may focalize them indirectly through one or more interposed character-focalizers. Focalization by a character is therefore always, of necessity, contained within an enveloping narrator-focalization and is consequently, in principle, always compound rather than simple. In practice, one could, for convenience' sake, regard texts where a single character-focalization both remained constant and did not at any point yield the foreground to an external narrator-focalization, as being *de facto* simple focalization. In theory, however, *de jure*, all character-focalization is compound — and it is thus, strictly speaking, always more appropriate to speak of focalization *through* a character rather than *by* a character.

This relationship can be formulated, since the use of schematic formulations may be helpful from this point on, as

$$F = (EF1 (CF2)),$$

where F stands for the focalization under analysis, while EF1 indicates the primary and CF2 the secondary or embedded focalization.⁶ There are many different forms of compound focalization. Objects can be focalized identically by (through) multiple characters simultaneously, for example, as when Robyn Penrose and Bob Busby "turn to face Philip Swallow, who has evidently just arrived, since he is wearing his rather grubby anorak and carrying a battered briefcase" in David Lodge's *Nice Work* (61). Since the overall context provides no clue as to individual focalization here (even though Robyn Penrose is one of the two major focalizers in the text), the implication is that what is "evidently" the case here is evident to any

5 Here I must disagree with Chatman, who, though he actually proposes the term *slant* to describe precisely this vision, argues that narrators and characters should properly not be regarded as focalizers in the same sense (1990, 145).

6 I owe the concept of primary and secondary focalization to Mieke Bal (1985, 112), whose usage also suggested the notational convention employed here.

reasonable observer, in this case both of them at once. This could be formulated as

$$F = (EF1 (CF2_{Robyn} + CF2_{Bob} - CO_{Philip})),$$

where the focalizer and character-focalized (CO) are specified in subscript and the arrow indicates the action of focalization. Likewise, objects can be focalized simultaneously but differently by multiple characters, as when, in Beckett's *Watt* (1953), we catch our first glimpse of Watt through the combined eyes of three evening strollers: "Tetty was not sure whether it was a man or a woman. Mr Hackett was not sure that it was not a parcel.... Goff rose, without a word, and rapidly crossed the street" (16-17).

Frequently, of course, the subject of focalization can switch abruptly from a character to a narrator, as it does in the example just cited from *Watt*, where Tetty and Mr. Hackett function as embedded secondary focalizers, but Goff is presented as a direct object of the narrator's primary focalization. Such alternation between character-focalization and narrator-focalization, indeed, is entirely common, especially in narratives with a so-called omniscient narrator, as in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847):

"I shall not be at peace," moaned Catherine [EF], recalled to a sense of physical weakness by the violent, unequal throbbing of her heart [(EF (CF_{Catherine}))], which beat visibly and audibly under this excess of agitation [EF]. (142)⁷

Likewise, to take a very much older example, in the Bible: Jesus "entered into an house [EF], and would have no man know it [(EF (CF_{Jesus}))]; but he could not be hid [EF]" (Mark 7.24).

So far we have been operating as if tacitly assuming that internal and external focalization were always clearly distinguishable, as if character-focalizers and narrator-focalizers could always and unproblematically be told apart. Such is by no means the case, however. Focalization need not be clearly identifiable and frequently is not, and such cases, as Rimmon-Kenan rightly observes, are almost always the most interesting ones (84). We shall refer to this kind of focalization as *complex* (as opposed to compound), in the sense that it provides us simultaneously with too much and too little information to make a definite decision as to the location of the focalizer.

7 The complexity of the focalization in this example is increased by the fact that the narrator-focalizer, Nelly Dean, is herself a hypodiegetic narrator in the first-person narration of Mr. Lockwood.

To this extent, complex focalization is essentially characterized by indeterminacy.

One writer whose narratives gain much of their pervasively enigmatic character from a sustained and masterly use of indeterminate focalization is Franz Kafka. The opening sentence of *The Trial* (1925), for example, initially reads as if it were an uncomplicated narrator-focalization: "Someone must have traduced Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning" (1). Indeed, there is no technical reason why this should *not* be regarded as narrator-focalization pure and simple. "Someone *must have traduced*" could simply be an assumption made by a character-narrator realistically aware of his incomplete control of all the facts, as could the further statement that Joseph K. was arrested "without having done anything wrong." As sentence follows sentence, however, the cumulative effect is to cause the reader to wonder if even the opening sentence should not retrospectively be read as character-focalization (by K.) after all:

His landlady's cook, who always brought him his breakfast at eight o'clock [EF? CF?], failed to appear on this occasion [more likely EF?]. That had never happened before [more likely CF?]. K. waited for a little while longer [EF?], watching from his pillow [more likely CF?] the old lady opposite, who seemed [CF] to be peering at him with a curiosity unusual even for her [CF], but then, feeling [CF] both put out and hungry, he rang the bell [EF]. (1)⁸

Even though the reader's initial assumption of narrator-focalization may be unsettled by this sequence, however, he still is not at any stage provided with *unambiguous* evidence that his first reading was either right or wrong. The entire novel is characterized by this indeterminacy of focalization—as indeed are almost all of Kafka's other narratives.

It would be over-hasty to assume that such determined indeterminacy can be characterized as merely a product of the epistemological obsessions of high modernism, however, and as such constituting a relatively limited phenomenon. We find the following passage in Balzac's *Père Goriot* (1834), for example, which certainly contains its share of indeterminacy as far as focalization is concerned:

He [Vautrin] knew, or had guessed, the secrets of everyone in the place [EF? CF_{Vautrin}?]; his own thoughts and activities no one could fathom [EF? CF?]..... He

8 "Die Köchin der Frau Grubach, seiner Zimmervermieterin, die ihm jeden Tag gegen acht Uhr früh das Frühstück brachte, kam diesmal nicht. Das war noch niemals geschehen. K. wartete noch ein Weilchen, sah von seinem Kopfkissen aus die alte Frau, die ihm gegenüber wohnte und die ihn mit einer an ihr ganz ungewöhnlichen Neugierde beobachtete, dann aber, gleichzeitig befremdet und hungrig, läutete er" (7).

evidently bore some deep-rooted grudge against the social order [Evident to whom? the narrator, suddenly no longer omniscient? some other character?]; and somewhere in his life there was a carefully shrouded mystery [EF? CF_{not-V_{auclim}}?]. (20)⁹

As for the other boarders of the Maison Vauquer, "they all knew they were powerless to help one another" (20), which again can be read either as a narrator-focalization (EF - CO, the latter multiple and transparent) or a simultaneous embedded focalization by (or through) multiple focalizers.

Some readers might be rather more surprised to find indeterminate focalization even in the Bible. The object of biblical translation is certainly to convey the unadulterated meaning of the original text, seen traditionally as the very word of God himself, as completely accurately as possible. Yet, to take just one example, no less an authority than the Authorized Version changes the focalization of the last sentence of Mark 6.48's original Greek quite radically, arguably producing a superior literary text in the process, but only at the semantic cost of allowing new and extra readings not catered for in the original text. The passage in question is a particularly interesting example, in that it reports one of the miracles performed by Jesus and displays an intriguing complexity of focalization in doing so:

And he saw them toiling in rowing [CF_{Jesus}!]; for the wind was contrary unto them [EF?]; and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them [EF? CF_{disciples}?], walking upon the sea [EF? CF_{disciples}?], and would have passed by them [EF? CF_{disciples}? CF_{Jesus}?]. (Mark 6.48)

The more ambiguous the focalization, of course, the more scope there is for interpretation. It is therefore especially interesting to observe what different Bible translations have made of the most complexly focalized phrase here, where Jesus "would have passed by" the disciples in the boat. The original Greek is "kai êthelen parelthein autous"; the standard Latin translation has "et volebat praeterire eos"; the Revised Standard Version has "He meant to pass by them"; and a recent translation by E.V. Rieu has "with the intention of passing them" (16), all of which can be read either as externally focalized by an omniscient narrator or with Jesus as an embedded character-focalizer. The New International Version, however, has "He was about to pass them by," which also allows either of these possibilities, but also, and more emphatically, the possibility of the watching disciples as a multiple character-focalizer. The Authorized Version, as we have seen, with its "and would have

passed by them" goes furthest in allowing all three interpretations without emphasizing any of the three, which could certainly be read as a rather striking indeterminacy concerning a crucial event in the tradition and dogma of the Christian church.

The point here is not which of the translations is more accurate or more faithful to the original, but rather what reading each permits purely in terms of focalization. Certain lexical items, of course, have a built-in ambiguity. The effect of this on focalization in translation can be very significant. The biblical Greek *prospoiomai*, for example, "to act as if, to give the impression that" implicitly contains the possibility of a dual character-focalization: by both the character who gives the particular impression and the character who receives it. Thus Luke 24.28, "kai autos *prospoiêsato* porroûteron poreusthai," is translated in the Latin as "et ipse *se finxit* longius ire," and by E.V. Rieu as "Jesus gave them to understand that he was going on," where both translators opt for Jesus as character-focalizer. The Revised Standard Version, however, prefers "He appeared to be going further," where the focalization is unambiguously by the disciples rather than by Jesus. Both the Authorized Version ("and he made as though he would have gone further") and the New International Version ("Jesus acted as if he were going further"), like the Greek, allow both Jesus and the disciples as possible character-focalizers and thus permit an interpretive ambiguity not allowed by any of the other versions. Finally, of course, since all character-focalization is embedded, each of these versions also allows the alternative possibility of an external narrator-focalizer.

III. FOCALIZATION AND THE IMPLIED AUTHOR

Focalization is very evidently a phenomenon of discourse rather than story. But should it be located more specifically on the level of *text* or on that of *narration*? To some extent we can actually have our cake and eat it too in situating focalization on either level, depending on our purpose. For the obvious answer, in terms of the axiom that "text is to narration as *how* is to *who*" (O'Neill, 87), would seem to be that we will locate focalization on the level of the narrative text if we see the primary question concerning it as being one of *how* focalization operates. If we see the primary question as being one of *who* (which is to say, which narrative agent) is ultimately responsible for the most authoritative level of focalization, then we will want to locate it on the level of narration. This, however, means situating the ultimate locus of focalization on the level of the *implied author* rather than the narrator, who is seen by most narrative theorists as the primary, which is to say, the most authoritative focalizer.

Most narratologists, indeed, have completely ignored the implied author in the discussion of focalization. In spite of such theorists as Bal and

9 "Il savait ou devinait les affaires de ceux qui l'entouraient, tandis que nul ne pouvait pénétrer ni ses pensées ni ses occupations.... Souvent une boutade ... devait faire supposer qu'il gardait rancune à l'état social, et qu'il y avait au fond de sa vie un mystère soigneusement enfoui" (38).

Rimmon-Kenan, however, who situate focalization on the level of text (the product of narration), there are evidently very strong reasons for seeing it rather as being more importantly a part of the *process* of narration itself.¹⁰ Focalization, indeed, can be read as logically prior to the *act* of narration: Before the narrative voice speaks, it is *positioned* (by the implied author) in time and space, a decision is made as to where (and when) the (implied) *reader* will position the point of origin of both the narrative voice and the primary focalization. To this extent focalization provides a bridge to the consideration of an area considered by "classical" narratology to be beyond the boundaries of its proper concern, namely "extratextual" textuality, a bridge that will become quite apparent in the discussion of the role of contextual restraints in identifying focalization.

Insofar as it can have a very major impact on the way the reader perceives the narrative world presented, focalization is clearly a powerfully manipulative textual device. A focalizer-character has a special claim not only on the reader's attention but also on his sympathy, for, as Bal observes, in such a case "the reader watches with the character's eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character" (1985, 104). Likewise, when the focalization is external, the reader tends to accept it as being a purely "objective" vision of the narrative world presented, in that it is *not* presented from the viewpoint of any one of the characters.

That assumed objectivity, however, is fundamentally questionable. Character-focalization, it was argued above, is in principle unreliable because it is always an embedded and therefore always an "invented" focalization. To what extent, however, is an external narrator-focalizer ever entirely reliable either? If character-focalizers can always be presented in lights that suit the narrative agenda of their narrator, is the same not always in principle equally true of the narrator, however apparently objective, insofar as the narrator can be seen as merely the verbalizing aspect of the implied author? An unreliable narrator, as Chatman observes (1978, 149), is evaluated as such by comparison with the implied author, who is the only unquestionable authority in the text that constitutes him. Likewise, a text may well have several external narrators, but by definition each text can have only a single implied author. It must in principle follow that all narrators are therefore *at least potentially* not only unreliable narrators but also unreliable focalizers. *Everything* is therefore ultimately (or rather, *primarily*) focalized by the implied author, through the interposed lens of the narrator, and possibly also through the further lens of one or more characters. The reader, for his

part, is always fully aware only of the most *recent* focalization and is consequently almost entirely unaware throughout of the most important focalizer, the implied author, except, for example, in titles, chapter headings, and like paratextual information. Such information can, of course, be of central importance to our reading of the narrative. The fact that a novel is called *David Copperfield*, *Madame Bovary*, or *Anna Karenina* constitutes a crucial if minimal opening statement of the implied authorial focalization.¹¹

We may detect further faint evidence of implied authorial focalization in a case such as the following, where the character-focalizer's perceptions and the narrator's voice seem to be not quite in harmony. In David Lodge's *Small World* (1984), Cheryl Summerbee, a British Airways check-in clerk with a talent for matchmaking, considers and decides where would be the best location for seating a particularly likable passenger: "About a quarter of an hour ago she had dealt with an extremely elegant Italian lady professor, of about the right age (younger, but not too young) and who spoke very good English, apart from a little trouble with her aspirates" (116). Up until the very last word here the focalization, though clearly compound, is tilted so that we are much more aware of the character Cheryl than we are of the faceless narrator; since Cheryl is fairly unlikely to know what an "aspirate" is, however, while the scholarly narrator certainly does, the use of that term effectively introduces an unexpected element of irony into the situation, as the external focalization gains the upper hand after all, revealing the compound focalization as, at least potentially, *dissonant* as opposed to *consonant*. Admittedly, it might well be objected that it would be less unnecessarily complicated to regard this simply as an example of irony on the part of the *narrator*, with no need to drag the implied author into it. Let us consider a further example before deciding.

Ben Watterson's widely read syndicated comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes* derives its comic effects very largely from a highly sophisticated use of focalization. The small boy Calvin's constant companion in triumph and adversity is Hobbes the tiger, who is at once the bane of Calvin's life, continually pouncing on him to devastating effect from one ambush or another, and his best friend and fellow participant in a series of escapades. Every frame of the cartoon where Calvin and Hobbes are alone together portrays Hobbes as a real tiger, and, depending on whether Calvin sees Hobbes as friend or foe, the subject of focalization is either Calvin-as-best-friend or Calvin-as-terrified-victim. In frames where anyone else is present, however, Hobbes is invariably portrayed as a stuffed toy. The subject point of focalization, that is to say, changes from the character Calvin to any

10 Rimmon-Kenan, like Bal, treats focalization as an element of text, but notes that there are also reasons for treating it rather as an element of narration (85).

11 Here I must disagree with Genette, who attributes such paratextual information to the narrator rather than the implied author (1988, 68n).

character other than Calvin. In addition, we frequently encounter focalization that is overtly compound rather than ostensibly simple, for Hobbes often reacts to Calvin's madcap schemes and stratagems with a distinctly adult sense of irony, attributable neither to a small boy nor to a tiger (whether real or stuffed) and consequently inviting the reader to read it as a character-focalization, via Hobbes, overtly embedded in an external narrator-focalization, or

$$F = (EF (CF_{Hobbes} \rightarrow CO_{Calvin})).$$

There is a clearly a further level of focalization at play in *Calvin and Hobbes*, however, for finally there is the crucial point (so obvious as to be almost entirely invisible) that the whole thing is a comic strip, where the nature of the reality presented is quite different from that of the world the reader lives in: all of the characters are drawn precisely as *cartoon* characters, so Calvin, for example, will have three fingers on each hand in one frame, four in the next, his eyes literally come out on stalks when he is surprised, visible stars appear when he falls on his head, and so on through the usual gamut of graphic devices characteristic of comic strips. In other words, everything in this represented world is very overtly *as if*, and *all* the forms of focalization mentioned so far are in consequence further embedded, but *covertly* rather than overtly, in a global external focalization that takes precedence over all others.

This last type of focalization, however, is clearly not limited to *Calvin and Hobbes*, since the same argument could evidently be made for any comic strip. Indeed the further argument can clearly be made that the overtly non-realist presentation of a narrative world typical of comic strips is different only in degree rather than in kind from *any* narrative presentation, however ostensibly realist that presentation may be. Comic strip presentation is only one particular form of narrative discourse, and there can be no narrative without discourse. This, in turn, evidently implies that a *covert global external focalization* as suggested here is characteristic not just of cartoons but of *all* narrative texts. Clearly, we need a way of distinguishing this form of *covert* external focalization typical of *all* narratives from the *overt* external focalization we encounter in *some* narratives. The most economical (as well as the most aesthetically pleasing) way to achieve this end is to regard the former as focalized by the implied author rather than by the narrator. What we have been calling external focalization (EF) so far, in other words, emerges as being itself already a compound focalization, where the explicit perspective of an external narrator (ENF) is embedded in the implicit perspective of the implied author (IAF). Calvin is thus the object of

focalization in a situation that can be formulated more accurately and more completely as

$$F = (IAF1 (ENF2 (CF3_{Hobbes} \rightarrow CO_{Calvin}))).$$

It will be evident from all of this that ultimately all focalization tends towards the complex and indeterminate. The concept of "simple" focalization, it emerges, is nothing more than a convenient (if useful) oversimplification: we were obliged first to disqualify character-focalization as simple; now it is evident that narrator-focalization cannot be simple either, since it too is embedded; and even the ultimate focalization, that of the implied author, can finally be expressed only through the voice of the narrator, and likewise becomes questionable in the process. All focalization, it emerges, is always compound, but because of the multiple layers of overlapping and intersecting visions involved, *compound* must always, as far as the reader is concerned, be just another word for *complex*.

Meanwhile, what of the reader? If there is an implied authorial focalization, to what extent must there also be an implied *readerly* focalization? We can profitably turn at this point to a concluding consideration of the role of the reader, both implied and real, as an "agent" of focalization in the very practical sense that the reader, after all, finally has to *decide* which of these multiple complications need to be seen as more important and which can afford to be discounted or even disregarded, at least provisionally.

IV. FOCALIZATION AND CONTEXTUALITY

If complex or indeterminate focalization, far from being an exotic or unique occurrence, is in principle the *only* kind of focalization we encounter as readers, then the narrative terrain is, in principle, *always* strewn with potential unadvertised detours and misleading signposts. Many of the most effective tricks of focalization employed by the text in throwing the reader at least momentarily off balance are often surprisingly inconspicuous. Simple pronouns, for example, can have a disproportionately significant effect on our perception of focalization. Take a passage like the following:

Now he was in the midst of the sheep, they made a circle round him, their eyes converged on him. Perhaps he was the butcher come to make his choice.

There is no particular problem in describing the focalization here: the focalizer in the first sentence is either the narrator (EF) or the embedded character-focalizer "he"; the second ("Perhaps he was the butcher ...")

involves an embedded focalization whose object is "he," either a somewhat unlikely

$$F = (EF (CF_{\text{sheep}} \rightarrow CO_{\text{he}}))$$

or, more likely, the doubly embedded

$$F = (EF (CF1_{\text{he}} (CF2_{\text{sheep}} \rightarrow CO_{\text{he}}))))$$

In Beckett's *Molloy* (1951), however, the passage actually occurs with first-person rather than third-person pronouns:

Now I was in the midst of the sheep, they made a circle round me, their eyes converged on me. Perhaps I was the butcher come to make his choice. (159)

The basic focalization is unchanged, with the substitution of "I" for "he," including in the second sentence, where "I" rather than "he" is now the object of focalization. The powerful sense of dislocation engendered by having "I" function as the object rather than the immediate subject of focalization in a first-person (or homodiegetic) narration, however, demonstrates the surprising effectiveness of what in itself is a relatively simple stylistic device.

Clearly, however, in spite of such allegedly pervasive indeterminacy, we do not in practice usually allow ourselves as readers to be entirely becalmed by proliferating visions of interpretive entropy. But how do we actually go about establishing the most appropriate focalization, since, as practical readers rather than focalization theorists, that is exactly what we have to do? In practical terms, the answer is clear and comfortingly pragmatic: we will choose whichever particular reading seems most warranted by our overall reading of the situation as a whole, by our perception, that is to say, of the overall *context* involved. That perceived context, in turn, will be established by our notions of overall interpretive *relevance*.

A contextually unacceptable character-focalization will thus, for instance, usually be read as *implying* a different focalization, namely one that is more acceptable in terms of the reader's perception and expectations of the overall narrative and interpretive context. An interesting example of this can be found in Elizabeth George's detective novel *A Great Deliverance* (1988), where the child Bridie is feeding her pet duck as she talks to Inspector Thomas Lynley:

She hopped off the steps and filled a shallow pan with water. "Here, Dougal," she called. The duck ignored her. *There was a chance the food might be taken away if he*

did not eat it all as fast as he could. Dougal was a duck who never took chances. Water could wait. Bridie rejoined Lynley. Companionably, they watched as the duck gorged himself. (183; emphasis added)

Here the character-focalization in the italicized sentences, though ostensibly that of Dougal the duck, is hardly likely to be attributable primarily to the consciousness of a barnyard fowl, since this particular narrative world is predicated on realist assumptions rather than the assumptions of, say, a child's story like Beatrix Potter's *Tale of Jemima Puddleduck*, where such reflective cerebration on the part of a duck would be entirely acceptable. Since Dougal as focalizer,

$$F = (EF (CF_{\text{Dougal}})),$$

would therefore attribute a whimsicality to the narrator that is otherwise nowhere in evidence (and would consequently be entirely pointless in the context of this narrative world), we are led — as in the case of Molloy's sheep — to assume a further embedding, namely

$$F = (EF (CF1 (CF2_{\text{Dougal}}))))$$

Since CF1 could be either Lynley or Bridie or even both simultaneously, how do we then go about the next step of deciding whether the focalization is indeterminate or localizable? It is clear that the decision will again rest on the narrative context, and essentially that means on grounds of perceived narrative relevance. Thus, to begin with, our generic expectations remind us that a localizable rather than an indeterminate focalization is far more *likely* in what up to this point has been a work of detective fiction in the classic tradition. Likewise, our expectations of realist fiction remind us that the focalization is fairly unlikely to be a product of Bridie's uncomplicated eight-year-old consciousness. More important, the episode would again lack a narrative point even if the focalization *were* attributable to Bridie. It is, however, entirely consonant with what we know of the thought processes of the aristocratic and intellectual Inspector Lynley, an engaging blend of Adam Dalgliesh and Lord Peter Wimsey, so the most likely (which means, the most globally persuasive) reading in this particular narrative context is clearly a doubled embedded character-focalization, namely

$$F = (EF (CF1_{\text{Lynley}} (CF2_{\text{Dougal}}))))$$

The reader, in other words, processes the information as one more factor in the continuing characterization of Lynley, which is a central point of this particular narrative and therefore has a very high narrative relevance. The

fact that "EF" is "really" "(LAF (ENF))," on the other hand, has no relevance whatsoever to the reader's immediate interpretive problem here, and can consequently be completely ignored, as it certainly would *not*, however, in the case of a contextually appropriate reading of an overtly self-interrogative, self-parodic detective fiction like Robbe-Grillet's *Voyeur* (1955), where the narrative point is less the presentation of believable characters than the presentation of narrative presentation itself.

Contextual relevance is also the yardstick we routinely employ as readers in deciding to what degree we should ignore the fundamental (if to date largely disregarded) axiom that all character-focalization is already embedded. The reason why we should be interested in doing this in the first place, we recall, is that character-focalization is in principle *always unreliable*, since it is made available to the reader only through the mediation of a prior focalization, namely that of the external narrator, the only textual level to which we have unmediated access. One can therefore, in principle, never say with certainty that any example of focalization is a character-focalization, but only that it is *presented* as such by a narrator who in turn may or may not be reliable. Should we ignore this, however, in practice if not in theory? Especially when watching, say, a theatre performance, where the theoretically present narrator is minimally in evidence?

Again, it is the context of how we think we are *supposed* to behave as readers that ultimately decides for us. As spectators of a theatre performance, our natural tendency is certainly to identify with the characters we see living out their lives before us, strangely unaware of our presence. Even the most hardened movie-goer or reader of romantic fiction will occasionally wipe away a stealthy tear or have his heart skip a reluctant beat over the lot of a vividly experienced character. Within this psychological context the reader/viewer is certainly *experiencing* an entirely unmediated character focalization, to the degree that he has been drawn into the narrative inhabited by the character. In a theoretical context, however, it is clear that the distinction between dramatic or filmic narrative and literary narrative in the narrower sense is entirely a matter of degree rather than kind. However unnoticed the external focalization embedding the character-focalization may be, in other words, its existence is no less true, but only in theory. In practice, as readers, we very happily (and properly) ignore it.

Different kinds of writing, in fact, have quite different general "requirements" of both authors and readers, as to the kinds of focalization deemed appropriate. Non-fictional narrative, not surprisingly, tends to favour the most authoritative focalization, namely external. More interestingly, even though character-focalization is quite possible in perfectly professional historical narratives, we will *read* it quite differently than we would if we knew we were reading a work of fiction instead. Thus in E.J. Passant's *Short*

History of Germany, the scholarly narrator informs us at one point that the Kaiser's "determination to build a great navy involved the alienation of Great Britain, yet he had no real desire to fight this — or indeed any other — country" (122). The degree to which the context of reading determines the perceived focalization now becomes very apparent. For if this were a fictional text, we would most likely simply accept this as an embedded character-focalization reflecting the conventional ability of a traditional omniscient narrator to read his characters' thoughts and intentions, and we would read the primary relevance of the device as being the development of the fictional character. Since such a reading would clearly be inappropriate to a modern work of historical scholarship, however, we regard the equally embedded character-focalization here as meaning something like "Having soberly reviewed all the evidence available to me, I must conclude as narrator that the Kaiser had no real desire to fight," where the emphasis shifts to the reliability of the *account*, to the discourse, in fact, rather than the characters presented in the story told. In the same work there is a reference to a discussion between Hindenburg and his adviser Papen as to how best Hitler might be kept under control in early 1933: "Papen had an alternative plan. Hitler was now in a more humble mood. Had not the time come to make him Chancellor, but a Chancellor in chains?" (183). Again the (context-determined) implication is that the *narrator* proposes a particular motive for Hindenburg's later decision to offer Hitler the chancellorship of the Weimar Republic. In the quite different context of a work of fiction, we would read exactly the same focalization as once again being primarily relevant to the characterization of Papen.

The essential issue that focalization theory attempts to address, as Michael Toolan writes, is certainly that of *attribution* (75), of situating most appropriately the point of origin of the narrative vision presented. It will be evident, however, that in order to make that attribution in the most comprehensive terms, the reader needs to expand Genette's original heuristic "Who sees?" (1980: 186) to the more broadly focused question "Who, in what context, is presented as seeing?" It will also be abundantly evident that focalization is by no means just one more handy item in the narrator's bag of technical tricks, a rhetorical rabbit on the level of, say, analepsis or prolepsis, to be pulled out of the discursive hat only on special occasions when some particularly striking effect is needed. On the contrary, not only is focalization, implicitly or explicitly, *always* present in narrative, whether fictional or non-fictional, literary or non-literary; it is moreover an absolutely crucial, entirely unavoidable, and fundamentally characteristic component of narrative as a discursive system.

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Rhétorique et politique: de l'ordre des mots au mécénat d'entreprise

Le recours au langage, à l'écrit comme moyen d'échange et de communication, mais aussi à la parole comme témoignage paradoxal d'un refus et d'un silence dans le désert des hommes font de toute oeuvre littéraire une oeuvre politique. (Brunel 14)

L'étude du discours en tant que *pratique signifiante*, c'est-à-dire différenciée de l'*expérience signifiante*, est une notion avancée par Julia Kristeva dans *La Révolution du langage poétique*. À travers ce terme, l'auteur montre en quoi "le moment de la pratique met le sujet en relation avec, donc en négation, des objets et autres sujets du milieu social, avec lesquels il entre en contradiction, antagoniste ou non" (179). Pour Kristeva, l'expérience signifiante est une pratique "où la contradiction hétérogène maintenue, recherchée et mise en discours, forme l'économie essentielle du texte, mais s'investit lors de sa phase théorique [c'est-à-dire celle où est posée de façon explicite et réfléchie l'existence de l'objet], dans une représentation strictement individuelle, naturaliste ou ésotérique, en ramenant le rejet à la présence du moi..." La notion de pratique, par ailleurs, explique-t-elle, s'applique à des textes "où, la contradiction hétérogène étant maintenue comme *condition indispensable à la dimension pratique à travers une formation signifiante*, le système de représentation qui la lie est pris aussi à la pratique sociale..." (173-74). Sans entrer dans les détails de la formulation de Kristeva, on se souviendra qu'elle propose en somme la notion hégélienne¹ du "mouvement dialectique" et on retiendra que dans la pratique "le surgissement de l'objet vrai ... est donc à distinguer de sa *connaissance*

1 Ce concept est présenté uniquement parce qu'à travers la formulation de Hegel on retrouve une "parenté" avec le fonctionnement de la rhétorique humaniste. Il est clair, d'autre part, que cette parenté ne peut indiquer un même fonctionnement puisque chez Hegel le lien entre théorie et praxis est perçu d'une toute autre façon (voir Habermas).