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You: A study of second-person narrative in two postmodern novels

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**YOU: A STUDY OF SECOND-PERSON NARRATIVE
IN TWO POSTMODERN NOVELS**

by

Thomas E. Breene

**Bachelor of Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
1992**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the**

**Master of Arts Degree
Department of English
College of Liberal Arts**

**Graduate College
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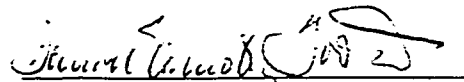
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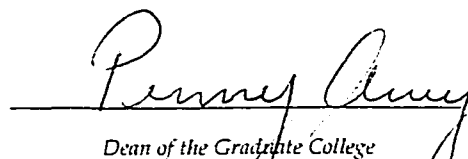
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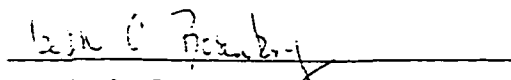
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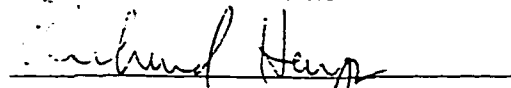
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ABSTRACT

You: A Study of Second-Person Narrative in Two Postmodern Novels

by

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This study analyzes the use of second-person narrative in postmodern fiction, both in terms of narrative mechanics and in relation to certain theories of how fiction is able to represent—and misrepresent—the empirical world. The two works examined in this study, Italo Calvino's If on a winter's night a traveler and Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow, exemplify this narrative form and, taken together, seem to exhaust its possibilities.

A primary concern of this study, therefore, is to articulate these possibilities, but not merely for the sake of creating a taxonomy. Rather, this study examines how the use of second-person narrative in the two novels both corresponds with and subverts a number of critical approaches. In the process, this study asserts that the second person, as used in postmodern fiction, participates in the larger postmodern program of destabilizing traditional ontological boundaries, especially that separating the fictive world from the real.

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CHAPTER 1

INVOCATION

The birth of narrative in Western culture begins in the second person: *Sing, Goddess, the wrath of Achilles*. The muse is invoked, her presence called for. Not merely as auditor or addressee, as is well known, but as the creative force behind the poem. The muse will sing *through* Homer, who by convention presents himself as her instrument. And in this manner narrative begins as an appeal to something at once both inside and outside the poet: as an appeal to “oneself as another,” to borrow Paul Ricoeur’s phrase.

Centuries earlier, we find a similar invocation in The Epic of Gilgamesh: “Go close to the Eanna Temple,” the poet says, “the residence of Ishtar, such as no later king or man ever equaled!”¹ Again, narrative situated in an explicit partnership. The presence of another is invoked as a precondition of the narrative act. Aware, no doubt, that the act of composing a narrative involves a mimesis of speech, the poet chooses to re-present himself as a guide, his audience as a visitor to the city of Uruk. In doing so, the poet grounds his narrative in the immediate moment of communication, the moment when speaker and addressee work together to make meaning.

This partnership, far from being a relic of antiquity, should be familiar to us in this age of reader-response theory and social constructionist models which posit all thought and writing as internalized public discourse. Ideas such as dialogism, epitomized by Bakhtin’s reluctance to claim sole authorship to his texts, have made the contemporary critical landscape a place of unavoidable collaboration. We co-construct texts as we co-construct

knowledge in general, so it seems eminently natural that the second person, in every sense of the term, would come to play an increasingly significant role in literature of our time.

When we look, however, at critical analyses of the second person in narrative, we find a variety of interpretations whose occasional disagreement seems to spring from the nature of text itself. Our encounters with the second person in written narrative, in other words, unlike our encounters with it in spoken communication, seldom fail to raise the question, "Who is speaking, and to whom?" This question, essential as it is to theories of communication, ultimately points to the problem of presence, a word poststructuralism has freighted with doubt and suspicion. Nonetheless, in this case at least, the problem does not involve a metaphysics so much as it involves the simply physical. A text sunders its participants in time and space. Speaker and addressee, sender and receiver, author and reader—all are removed from one another's physical presence. The guarantee of isotopy or at least isochrony that we take for granted in everyday speech—in meetings, arguments, small talk, phone or even Internet chat-room conversations—is missing in text. Written communication does not talk *with* us; it talks *to* or *at* us, without possibility of response, and always from a place and time we know to be different from our own.

And yet, in spite of this difference, this threat of alienation from the moment of speech evoked by a text, our experience with everyday conversation undeniably conditions our reading, as it conditions the basic nature of narrative itself. We speak of an author's "voice," and some of us even insist on imagining that a narrator such as Jane Eyre is addressing us and only us when she writes, "Reader, I married him."² Others of us spend significant time and energy hunting for biographical clues in text, all to reconstruct the missing author whose words remain captured there, as if they were the residue of person or consciousness we must settle for in his or her absence. Words, then, are not as easily dissociable from person as some might think, even if the question is one of truth versus habit. However much we deny in theory the power of language to re-present things or persons; however much we expose the bankruptcy of the grapheme or the linguistic signifier in general, we find that habit will

out. Readers will continue to imagine the presence of the missing speaker, and nowhere is this more evident than in second-person narrative, whose mention of the *you* so strongly invites us to conjure a complementary *I* in our imaginations.

Keeping in mind, then, both our habits as conditioned by everyday speech and the nature of written representation, we can perhaps chart a middle course between an analysis of second-person narrative that insists overmuch on the pull of the standard communicative circuit (i.e., one that too quickly attributes the *I* to an empirical author and the *you* to the empirical reader) and one that isolates narrative from its obvious commerce in the real world (i.e., one that fails to consider the author's or reader's role in constructing an identity out of the second person in text). The result, though verging at times on either extreme, will hopefully encourage a plurality of readings, or at the very least demonstrate the extent to which the second person is a mediator between two worlds—text's and ours.

Some Linguistic Considerations

Many critics have emphasized the potential ambiguity or “placelessness” of the second person pronoun, often using Jakobson's notion of the linguistic “shifter,” but fewer have addressed the ground state which makes this ambiguity possible in the first place. The distinction, ultimately, is one between presence and absence—or, to borrow Gérard Genette's formula, between absence, which is absolute, and presence, which has degrees.³ But for now we might simply suggest that the second-person pronoun has spatial and temporal implications worth examining.

When we speak of the second-person pronoun as it functions in a text, we are speaking, obviously, of a different set of circumstances than we would find in conventional models of the communicative circuit, models in which speaker and addressee are assumed to be simultaneously present. This simultaneity, as suggested above, does not exist *per se* in written communication. Unlike a face-to-face discussion or a phone conversation, the creation and consumption of a text sunders the two halves of the basic communicative circuit

both spatially and temporally. When we read, we experience not the speech act itself, but rather a transcription of this act whose completion necessarily excludes us as simultaneous participants. Likewise, when we write, our voice is sundered from its object, the reader, and must address this object in our absence.

This is not to suggest that writers and readers cannot constitute one another from a text. They can and do, which is part of what makes reading and writing both engaging and enjoyable. Nor, on the other hand, is this to make a hidden return to the Saussurean notion that the phonic substance, because it exists at one less remove from thought than writing, is somehow better equipped to convey meaning than the grapheme, and therefore meaning is more “present” in speech. This notion, which seeks to establish the immediacy of speech over writing in terms resembling the Platonic progression from thought to representation, has been adequately problematized by Derrida and needs no rehearsal here. Nevertheless, there is a certain asymmetry and asynchrony to written communication that excludes it from other avenues of expression, such as those examined by speech-act theorists. A text, for example, cannot make use of the gestural aspect of communication. Nor can it convey inflections as reliably or directly as the human voice.

More important to our discussion here, however, is the insistence, promoted by John Searle and others, that elements of speech be studied within the entire context of language use, a process which would ideally involve an analysis of the interplay between written and oral communication.⁴ As it applies to the second-person pronoun in narrative, this principle of interplay allows us to remove the *you* from textual confinement and explore ways in which the conventions of oral communication influence our reading and writing. For example, when we look at the second-person pronoun strictly as a phenomenon of language, we find that its spatial implications are rooted in the basic physical configuration of the communicative circuit, and this probably influences how we react to second-person address in text. Linguist Joseph Greenberg notes that the tripartite pronoun paradigms common to many languages are distributed along the path of communication in distinctly spatial terms,

with the second person usually occupying the medial position.⁵ In his *Ars Grammatica*, for example, Dionysius Thrax of first-century-B.C. Alexandria describes the typical pronomial paradigm in the following manner: “the persons (*prósopa* ‘faces, persons’) are three, the first being the source of the utterance, the second the one to whom the utterance is addressed, and the third whom (or what) the utterance is about.”⁶

“Faces” and “persons”: the pronoun arises in response to the physicality of communication, which requires a speaker and an addressee or object. Arabic grammars offer an even more explicitly spatial paradigm: the three pronomial positions translate as “the speaker,” “the addressee,” and “the absent one.”⁷ This latter term, the equivalent of our third-person pronoun, illustrates the degree to which pronomial paradigms are arranged in space or with respect to the path of communication. “The absent one” is the person not directly involved in the communicative circuit. *He* is not spoken to, but spoken of; whether physically present or absent, *he* is treated as a discursive “outsider” until he constitutes himself as a subject by speaking, or is constituted by direct address. This may have something to do with the absence of neuter third-person singular pronouns in languages such as French, where *il* can function both as *he* and *it*, each denied communicative subjectivity by virtue of its indirect role in the circuit of speech. In fact, one might speculate over whether gender division of the third person singular pronoun is a later development than its objectified relation to speaker and addressee along the path of communication.

That aside, we can perhaps further locate the typical pronomial paradigm in space and time by analyzing the source of the utterance, the speaker. From the oldest models of communication to the present, this speaker has been located in the *I* or ego.⁸ It is generally accepted that the *I* serves as the “primary reference point” around which the communicative circuit is formed, which in turn explains the “overtly spatial metaphor” embedded in the other two pronomial positions.⁹ If we look, for example, at the translingual phenomenon of person-deixis, we find that it originates in what most linguists and philosophers consider the “egocentricity” of speech. Jakobsonian shifters, or what the philosopher Bertrand Russell

described as “egocentric particulars,”¹⁰ usually function in relation to the source of an utterance: words like *here*, *there*, *now*, *you*, *he*, *she*, *yesterday* and *today* all derive their specificity relative to the speaker.

Likewise, demonstratives such as *this* and *that* operate in relation to the spatial arrangement of speaker, addressee and object. Most languages place these demonstratives either within the immediate sphere of communication, locating speaker and addressee in the realm of *this* and the third person in the realm of *that*, or within the immediate sphere of the ego, locating the second and third persons in the realm of *that*. Interestingly, in either case there is often an archaic third-person demonstrative, such as the English *yon*, which conveys a further remove from the immediate communicative circuit and applies both to persons and things, as with the French *il*. Or, as in modern Japanese, the three degrees may be preserved: *kono* (this), *sono* (that) and *ano* (that yonder), all of which parallel the deictics *koko* (here), *soko* (there) and *a-soko* (there yonder), the latter being a second-person deictic with an additional distance marker to convey absence from the communicative circuit, the typical condition of the third person.¹¹

While these examples of deixis illustrate a certain flexibility with respect to the perceived location of the second and third persons, in all cases the first person is defined as the primary reference point. In Dravidian, for example, two forms of the verb *to give* are defined in relation to the ego, one meaning “to give to the first and second person,” the other meaning “to give to the third person”; conversely, in Nile Nubian, the verb *dene* means “to give to the first person,” while the verb *tire* means “to give to the second or third person.”¹² In both cases, the first person functions as the primary point of reference and dictates whether or not the second person will be included in the immediate sphere of ego-deixis, but in both cases also the third person is excluded from this sphere. As Greenberg reminds us, there are no instances in any language where the first and third person occupy the same deictic sphere; moreover, the second person always occupies a medial position between the two.¹³

Thus, the *you* is never quite fully here or there, just as it is potentially subjective or objective in grammar, which may have something to do with its ambiguity in narrative. On the one hand, if we set aside for the moment the idea of dialogue with oneself, the *you* is not within the ego, though it can be nearly contiguous with it, joined by the act of speech. On the other, it is never so distant from the path of communication as to be outside the vocal reach of the ego, such as with the third person pronoun (by design or necessity). Even in special cases such as the apostrophe, from which the apostrophized is absent by convention, the act of direct address signals an attempt to re-present the addressee in imagination, along with the immediacy of face-to-face communication. Or, as seems to be the case with Keats and his Grecian urn, direct address personifies or “gives face” (*prósopa*) to non-persons, to the faceless. Keats’ urn can be spoken to (instead of about), and indeed speaks itself, through a mimesis of oral communication. If the second-person pronoun did not possess this power to personify, to convey the material presence of the addressee even in the “face” of physical absence, or to construct person from non-person (which is another way of saying absence of person), then the apostrophe would be indistinguishable from speech *about* the third person, who in terms of the communicative circuit is “the absent one.”

We might tentatively say, then, that the second-person pronoun approximates the speaker, and vice-versa, in a way the third-person pronoun cannot. If the widely accepted model of communication is to be believed, the *you* always implies the *I*.¹⁴ And yet, the same might be said of the third person, even in so-called “objectivist” fiction cast in this mode, because all narratives are ultimately in the first person, implying as they do an appeal from a sender to a receiver.¹⁵ What finally distinguishes *I-You* and *I-He* as dyads, then, is the simultaneity of presence conveyed by the first and second persons, as opposed to the absence (absolute) of the third person from the communicative circuit. When the *I* speaks to or of the *you*, even if describing events in the past, the empirical tense is always present. The second person, in other words, cannot exist outside the moment of speech. Even when spatially sundered from the speaker, such as in the apostrophe, the addressee occupies (or is

imaginatively made to occupy) the same temporality, simply by virtue of its implied intimacy with the *I*.

Thus, when we encounter the second-person pronoun in text, we are forced to reconcile certain cognitive expectations drawn from the experience of oral communication with the asymmetry and asynchrony of written communication. The phenomenon of person-deixis as experienced in direct speech influences both our reading and writing of second-person narrative, and this has implications beyond the question of whether or not a given reader identifies with the *you* as one might identify with “Reader, I married him.” As we shall later see, even in those cases in which the *you* is aligned with a particularized character in the story, the second-person pronoun can influence the perceived temporality and even spatiality of the narrator. But for now we might simply say that the *you* is not inherently ambiguous. It is simply a marker of presence problematized by the nature of text, which dislocates the parties in a communicative circuit and forces us to insert ourselves into the immediacy of a conversation which exists in the past—to identify, in other words, with a time and space out of alignment with our own.

Some Narratological Considerations

The study of narrative representation, as is only natural, involves at its origins the basic properties of speech. Plato, for example, in Book III of The Republic, makes the distinction between “diegesis” and “mimesis,” the two modes of discourse fundamental to narrative.¹⁶ The former is defined as the narrator’s own voice, while the latter is defined as the voice of a character. Thus, for Plato, drama was a purely mimetic form: the characters spoke for themselves, without authorial mediation. Epic, on the other hand, was considered by Plato a mixed form, alternating between authorial diegesis and the quoted speech of the characters.

Again, the fundamental issue here is “who is speaking?” Representation in narrative is made comprehensible, and analyzable, by first attributing it to person, which perhaps points to an essential anxiety in Western thought. Because representation exists apart from the real

world, while at the same time purporting to recreate it, it must ground itself in the realia of everyday life, which includes the basic fact that speech requires a speaker.

Millennia later, we find a similar concern underlying the study of narrative. Most narratological paradigms are reducible in one way or another to this concern; that is, they are based in assumptions about the empirical world, about things—*realis*, *res*—situated in space and time. Opposed to this world is the fictive world which narratology studies, and much of its critical armature depends on the relationship between the two. Hence the concept of the “heterocosm,” a term we will refer to throughout this study. In its simplest definition, the heterocosm is the world of fiction, as opposed to our world of reality. As Brian McHale has noted, this opposition of ontologies, fictional and real, has been around for a long time indeed. Sir Philip Sidney, for example, in his famous apologia for poetry, defends his art in distinctly heterocosmic terms: the poet ideally creates “another nature,” often a prodigal nature with “heroes, demi-gods, cyclops, chimeras, furies”; but at the same time, the poet “goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit.”¹⁷ In other words, the poet is free to create a world, but he or she is to some extent also bound by empirical plausibility or at least consistency: as Thomas Pavel puts it, “Fictional constructions, once granted willing suspension of disbelief, generally propose unitary models.”¹⁸ Even the most fabulous of fictions usually exhibit an internal consistency much like that we find in the empirical realm.

It is not surprising, then, that narratology should develop in concert with this mirrored consistency, especially to the extent that all fictional representation invokes it in one way or another, whether by rigorously conforming to it, as in realism, or by openly defying it (and thus implying it), as in many works of postmodern fiction. We see this resort to empirical consistency in contemporary narratological paradigms such as Genette’s, the terms and concepts of which, because they are exemplary of the field, this study will borrow from heavily. As with Plato, for Genette the heterocosm is fundamentally stratified in relation to speech. The two basic ontological levels in narrative are distinguished first by their

proximity to the “narrating instance”¹⁹—that is, the moment of speaking, the time *at which* a story is told. In contrast, there are the events of the story itself, the *about which* that ostensibly exists independently of its recounting. Respectively, Genette calls these two levels “extradiegetic” (outside the story) and “intradiegetic” (inside the story).²⁰ These terms can describe spatial differences, but mostly they involve the temporal aspect of narrative. Here again, we encounter the linguistic phenomenon of deixis as discussed in the previous section, this time in the form of temporal markers. As Genette says:

By a dissymmetry whose underlying reasons escape us but which is inscribed in the very structures of language . . . I can very well tell a story without specifying the place where it happens, and whether this place is more or less distant from the place where I am telling it; nevertheless, it is almost impossible for me not to locate the story in time with respect to my narrating act, since I must necessarily tell the story in a present, past, or future tense.²¹

Hence the need for a concept of level in analyzing narrative. By definition, a story will always precede the events it describes, occur simultaneously with them, or, as is most often the case, succeed them. Simply to say, “I went,” is to generate a dual temporality: the time of the utterance and the time of the event or action. The same would apply to “I will go” (the third option, simultaneous narrating, poses special problems, which we will examine in the process of the following chapter). For Genette, this dual temporality dividing the heterocosm into extradiegetic and intradiegetic implies a hierarchy of narrative level whose boundaries can be reduced to the basic distinction between speech and the spoken: “*any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed.*”²² To take *The Odyssey* as an example, the poet produces a narrative about Odysseus and therefore is situated on the extradiegetic level, outside the story. Odysseus himself, the hero of this story, is intradiegetic, inside the story, and therefore exists “at a diegetic level immediately higher” than Homer. When Odysseus in turn takes over the narration and tells his tale to the Phaiakian court in Books IX-XII, he

becomes an extradiegetic narrator in diegesis and suffers a similar demotion in level: that is, the story he tells exists at a diegetic level immediately higher than the one he occupies.²³

This hierarchy (though Genette doesn't present it as such) is surprisingly enmeshed in ontological anxieties similar to Plato's, though not without reason. Diegesis, understood in the sense of story without narration, is implicitly expected to perform with empirical consistency. Narration, on the other hand, is granted liberties with time and space. As Genette puts it:

The temporality of written narrative is to some extent conditional or instrumental; produced in time, like everything else, written narrative exists in space and as space, and the time needed for "consuming" it is the time needed for *crossing* or *traversing* it, like a road or a field. The narrative text, like every other text, has no other temporality than what it borrows, metonymically, from its own reading.²⁴

Because of this, narrative time is "pseudo-time" to the extent that it is free from the demands of empirical temporality. A narrator can compress the "actual" time of narrated events into the form of a summary; can suspend this time in the form of a narratorial pause; can elide it in the form of a "many years later" transition; can rearrange it in the form of flashbacks and flashes forward. Nonetheless, the events described in any narrative excursion outside empirical time are, by convention, understood as linear and sequential; in fact, it is precisely this conceptual framework that makes such excursions possible in the first place. For instance, a flashback, or what Genette calls an "analepsis,"²⁵ borrows its time frame metonymically, both in relation to other temporally situated events in a narrative, and to our expectations of how time operates in the real world. We know that Odysseus' tale to the Phaiakian court is analeptic not only because he is recounting it in the past tense, but also because we know the order of events independent of their telling. He cannot encounter Nausikaa and Alkinoös before blinding Polyphemos and leaving Kalypso—not in the empirical world, at least, where events unfold always in order. This is possible only in the

pseudo-time of narrative, whose liberties and dislocations depend nonetheless on a basic understanding of empirical time.

Second-person narrative is of course subject to this dual temporality, perhaps more so because it unfailingly signals directed discourse. Wherever the second person is, speech is. And this, one would think, would make the second person somewhat easy to locate in terms of narrative level. The *you*, after all, as mentioned earlier, is always addressed in the present of the narrating instance; it always takes on the temporality of its source, the speaker. To find the narrative level of the *you*, therefore, one need only determine the narrative level of the *I*. Thus, addresses of the “Reader—I married him” sort are rightly assumed as aimed at the reader; not only because the reader is addressed by name, but also because of the perceived isochrony between the narrating instance and the *you* which signals it.

At this point, however, we encounter our first narratological interdiction involving integrity of narrative level. This interdiction reflects the asynchrony of textual narrative and its audience, as outlined earlier in this chapter. Strictly speaking, a text cannot directly address anyone. Thus, for narratology, the empirical reader and the empirical author are not actual participants in a narrative. Rather, they are represented by textual “surrogates”: narrators the reader can “construct” in his or her imagination, narratees with whom he or she can identify. The distinction between empirical author and narrator, in other words, is irrelevant to narratological study. Whether we are being addressed by Charlotte Brontë or her surrogate, Jane Eyre, is of no consequence to the extent that both are denied commerce with the empirical realm. The actual author, in fact, or “implied author,” is of little use to narratology, however useful he or she may be to literary studies in general as a historical figure, a product of a certain culture, a certain era, and so on. Likewise with the actual reader, who, despite his or her historical situation and role in “constructing” the text in a reader-response sense, nonetheless exists outside of that text, outside the heterocosm.

So, immediately we have a boundary that, at least for analytical purposes, prevents intercourse between the heterocosm and the real world. Any perceived intercourse on the

part of an empirical reader is thereby dismissed as an “effect” of discourse, a mimesis of speech used by the narrative to create the illusion of participation in the world of readers. To take *Jane Eyre* as an example, because she is an extradiegetic narrator, she can only address someone in extradiegesis, whether or not we as readers interpret her addresses as such. There is no addressing someone *from* one narrative level to another. Jane’s present must be the addressee’s present; hence the creation of a “surrogate” narratee to correspond with her condition as extradiegetic. The same applies to movement into the story, into diegesis, which like the empirical realm represents an ontology separate from extradiegesis. Because Jane is telling her story subsequent to the events it describes, she exists on a narrative plane separate from those events and therefore cannot access them directly. Helen Burns and St. John Rivers, though they exist in Jane’s narrative, no longer exist in her life; there can be no communication between them except “within the zodiac of Jane’s wit.”

To some extent, these interdictions belie the experience of reading and writing fiction, for examples of violation of narrative level abound in literature. The “Dear Reader” violation, which seeks to move outward from the extradiegetic realm into the empirical, is a staple of eighteenth-century literature especially. Movement in the other direction, from the extradiegetic into the intradiegetic, is another staple of literature in the sense that it falls under the broad category of apostrophe. To account for these narrative phenomena, narratology maintains its insistence on the integrity (and impermeability) of narrative level and classifies any violations as “transgression.” Thus, for McHale, movement of the first kind, into the empirical realm, constitutes an “upward” transgression, with “an addresser on a lower plane pretending to communicate directly with a superior addressee.”²⁶ Movement in the other direction, into diegesis, represents a “downward” transgression for the same reason: it is addressed to a character who “*does not exist* on the extra-diegetic narrator’s level.”²⁷

The values here may seem inverted compared to Genette’s. McHale takes a more ontological approach to narrative: fiction is ontologically inferior to real life, being only a representation of it, and thus we have “downward” into the story, whereas for Genette the

same movement ratchets “higher” the closer it gets to pure diegesis. At any rate, both share in common their insistence on the boundaries between narrative level, and using these boundaries we can now attempt a typology of the narrative circuits in the second person.

First, and least problematic, are those cases in which an intradiegetic character addresses another intradiegetic character. This circuit would include direct address in dialogue between characters, as well as any instances of self-address in interior monologue. Second, we have those cases in which an extradiegetic narrator addresses an extradiegetic narratee. This would include typical “author addresses reader” circuits such as those found in Sterne’s Tristram Shandy (which occasionally reverses roles and has an extradiegetic narratee such as “Madam” address the extradiegetic narrator), as well as those less transgressive cases where the narrator and narratee are not explicitly identified as producers and consumers of a particular book: for example, the “Call me Ishmael” that opens Moby Dick, which is not explicitly directed at “the reader” and could as easily be construed as addressed to an unidentified extradiegetic narrator, perhaps a fellow salt sitting dockside with Ishmael. Third, we have those cases in which an extradiegetic narrator addresses an intradiegetic character. This would include all examples of narratorial apostrophe, an isolated but repeated instance of which we find in The Odyssey when the poet says, “Then, O swineherd Eumaios, you said to him in answer.”²⁸ It also bears mentioning that a character can apostrophize another character, which nonetheless transplants the same misalignment of time and place to the intradiegetic level. Finally, we have those cases in which an intradiegetic character addresses an extradiegetic narrator or narratee, or even the empirical author. Examples of this circuit are far less common, not to mention more disconcerting and therefore more scandalous (Pirandello takes it to an extreme in his play Six Characters in Search of an Author, and a similar strategy can be found in John Barth’s epistolary novel LETTERS), but we will encounter one or two in the course of this study.

These, then, are the basic circuits of communication found in second-person narrative, and in the chapters that follow we will both resort to this typology as a reference and

question some of its assumptions. In particular, we will try to situate these assumptions in relation to the larger concern in literature with identity and reality, particularly as pursued in postmodern fiction. One aspect of this concern involves concepts of subjectivity and its representation in narrative, a topic we will explore for the remainder of the chapter.

Some Philosophical Considerations

The word *subject* needs to be considered in all of its senses when analyzing second-person narratives. The philosophical sense of the word, a commonplace in discourse in the humanities, essentially equates with “self”: the ego or “thinking agent,” as opposed to the objective world or “everything outside of the mind.”²⁹ This sense of the word, however, which often resonates with notions of the Sovereign Self and agency, has in many circles become inseparable from other senses of the word. *Subject*, as in “a loyal subject” or “subject of the state,” has come to signify that being or “site,” as Foucault would put it, in which subjectivity is constituted by cultural forces. Here agency is deferred in large measure to forces “outside of the mind”: the actions, and especially thoughts, of a subject are not entirely his or her own, but instead influenced or even dictated by a cultural codex that not only precedes us, but also constitutes our identities.

Generally speaking, it is between these two poles that concepts of subjectivity shuttle. And we might mention here that, to the extent any notion of the subject implies outside control or influence, the concept of subjectivity verges on confusion with that of objectivity. *Object*, as defined in dictionaries and grammars, is that which is acted upon in one way or another, presumably by a subject or force separate from it. An object “receives the action of a verb,” or is “governed by a preposition”; it is “what is aimed at; that towards which the mind is directed in any of its states or activities.”³⁰ These definitions, in their syntax alone, strongly suggest not only the passivity of objects, but also a controlling entity outside of them. One theoretical extreme of subjectivity, then, can be seen as a type of objectivity, leaving us to wonder precisely *what* is acting on the subject known as “man.” For critics

such as Foucault and Louis Althusser, this *what* is largely without referent: it escapes our comprehension as individuals, it encompasses us, it forces us to describe it in a language also subjected to it. Thus, to take Althusser's version of the *what* as an example, "Ideology has no history" because it is merely a concept invented to cope with those unknowable forces to which it refers; we are outside of it and at the same time constituted by it, creating it as it creates us, and therefore to be a subject is also always to be the object of a cultural process.³¹

In practical terms, however, and if we limit ourselves to the sphere of narrative, the concept of subjectivity is manageable enough as a scale of power relations and agency, especially to the extent that narrative involves a basic communicative transaction apart from any ideological content it may convey. Bearing this in mind, we can perhaps add to past analyses of second-person narratives and say something about how the second person relates to concepts of subjectivity. To accomplish this, we will need a representative second-person text of sorts, one somehow able to convey the whole spectrum of basic subject positions made possible by the form, whether by design or accident. Luckily, in 1817, Walter Scott published such a text.

At the outset of Rob Roy, the only of Scott's novels written in the first person, the narrator Frank Osbaldistone speaks of a "venerable peer and great statesman" during the reign of Henry IV: Sully, who "appointed no fewer than four gentlemen of his household to draw up the events of his life."³² The resulting memoir is remarkable not only in the general sense that it has been "reduced" into the form of history, a word with considerable sociopolitical resonance for contemporary readers and critics, but also because of its narrative mode. Sully's memoirs, Frank tells us, are written "in propria persona," which is to say, in the second person:

And thus, instead of telling his own story, in the third person, like Julius Caesar, or in the first person, like most who, in the hall, or the study, undertake to be the heroes of their own tale, Sully enjoyed the refined, though whimsical pleasure, of

having the events of his life told over to him by his secretaries, being himself the auditor, and probably the author, of the whole book. (7)

This book, aside from being a literary curiosity, is a parable of the problem of textual narrative. Living as we are in an age in which the disappearance or even death of the author has become a critical motif, the question naturally arises: What are we to make of Sully's text, addressed as it is to the author himself, who is now both literally and theoretically dead? On the one hand, we could attempt an "archeological" inquest into the cultural circumstances surrounding the creation of this text and simply reduce the author to a "function" of discourse in the sense that Foucault and others use this word. Doing so would no doubt reveal a larger circuit of power in which Sully serves as a conduit or relay, lending his voice to the master narrative of, say, early British monarchy. Thus, we might argue, along with Foucault, that Sully's "function as an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society."³³ And in this sense, Sully would merely be an instrument or organ of culture, which would be the case regardless of his narrative persona, first, second or third.

On the other hand, we might look at the empirical context of the narrative itself and ground our analysis in the relation between speech acts and writing. Sully, it appears, recites his own story to the gentlemen of his household, ostensibly the other "subjects" in the communicative circuit, who in turn render his narrative in written form to be read back to him. Additionally, in a gesture that further guarantees the relative determinacy of spoken communication, Sully orders that this narrative be cast in the second person, which in a sense makes him both addresser and addressee. Both the *I* and the *you* of his text, Sully enjoys a kind of "supersubjectivity" by occupying both positions in the standard communicative circuit. While normally this circuit involves at minimum two subjects defined in relation to their position in space and time—a relation which presupposes potential reciprocity among speaking subjects, including the privilege of acting as the primary reference point in a discourse—Sully has created an unbreakable "loop" that somehow exists

both inside and outside of himself. Unlike self-address as we find in some interior monologue, this loop fixes Sully's discourse as an empirical event in the external world but at the same time demands his presence in that event. Once removed from the communicative circuit, once denied participation *in propria persona*, Sully is *subject to* the helplessness of another's interpretation, as indeed happens when Frank reconstructs Sully's character based solely on his textual remains.

These remains, however, are separate from the tightly-controlled empirical act of communication from which they result. Historical speculation invites us to imagine Sully's narrative within the context of England in the first few decades of the 1400s. Publishing as we think of it was still in gestation, awaiting the arrival of Caxton. Books were few and mostly limited to the uppermost strata of society, to the court and the nobility. Publication and other forms of mass communication, in other words, were probably inconceivable at the time, and under these circumstances it is easier to imagine a book written for oneself, designed solely for use within the limits of one's own estate and in one's own presence.

And yet, there is the problem of the text itself, which in Sully's absence can no longer guarantee its original communicative intention. Seen in this light, the disappearance or death of Sully renders him an "absent sovereign" of the sort Foucault describes in The Order of Things apropos the Velasquez painting Las Meninas. Sully, like the Spanish ruler, offers himself to be represented in text, but this representation becomes unstable if Sully is not there to actively participate in it. Nevertheless, when analyzed in terms of the empirical moment of representation, we find that both Velasquez and Sully's chroniclers give the sovereign back to himself as subject and object. In the painting, the monarch is given back what he sees: the room in which the sitting for the portrait takes place, the audience to the sitting, the artist, the canvas upon which the portrait is being painted, the mirror at the far end in which the faces of the royal couple dimly appear—all are oriented as if seen through the gaze of the sovereign subject. Likewise, in Sully's memoir, the statesman is given back what he says: the events of his own life, his narrative, which includes his ordering and

interpretation of these events, are “played back” to him in such a way that he retains referential centrality in the discourse, even while being cast (at least nominally) in the subordinate role of the second person or non-speaking subject.

The complement to these portraits of experienced subjectivity is the objective dimension of text, which has limits within the presence of the sovereign. Obscuring these limits, of course, is the nature of text itself. On the one hand, the canvas-within-the-painting, a canvas on which the sovereign-as-object is presumably represented, is invisible to the Spanish monarch’s gaze. Its back is turned to him; he cannot see himself objectified, and Foucault pursues this spatial necessity as a metaphor both of the sovereign subject’s self-invisibility and the unstable nature of “man” as conceptualized by humanist discourse, that is, as an object of study. Nevertheless, if we return again to the empirical setting, we can perhaps reconstruct a fuller picture from textual remains. The Velasquez painting, when analyzed in terms of the basic communicative circuit, involves two positions—two “paintings” or perspectives. In one, the objects are oriented around the gaze of the subject: the perspective of the sovereign is represented and acts as the organizing principle to which all the different lines of sight and perspectives ultimately refer (or perhaps “defer” is more accurate). In the other, that which we as spectators are not allowed to see, nor the sovereign himself, the perspective of the artist is represented. This, in a sense, is the portrait of Velasquez’ own subjectivity, though tellingly we are not able to view it. What finally allows the two paintings to merge, also allowing the sovereign to escape invisibility, is the simultaneity of both: that entitled Las Meninas, and the portrait contained within—the implied portrait, in other words, which acts as a *precondition* of Las Meninas.

Setting aside for the moment the question of the sovereign’s presence as an organizing subjectivity around which the painting is constructed, and whether or not this alone is grounds for a limited resurrection of the deceased author/subject, we can perhaps draw a stronger parallel between Las Meninas (including its unseen complement) and Sully’s memoir in the empirical setting for which it was intended. The Spanish monarch, at least

when considered as a real historical figure, has access to both “subject positions” in the communicative circuit which is the two paintings. He can witness his own subjectivity from the position of the *I* in Las Meninas, and he can witness himself as *you* viewed from the subjectivity of Velasquez in the “portrait inside the painting.” Thus, far from being invisible, the sovereign in this case is oppressively visible, both as a center of subjectivity and the dominant object in a text. Likewise, Sully can witness his own subjectivity from the position of the *I* (creator and speaker of the narrative, consciousness around which text is constructed) and that of the *you* (nominal object of the narrative, addressee).

In both cases, the “other half” of the communicative circuit is commandeered by the speaking/seeing subject. Velasquez, we can assume, is obliged to function in a mode that narratologists sometimes call “camera.”³⁴ The expression of his own subjectivity is subordinated to the need, enforceable by the sovereign, to accurately represent another’s subjectivity *and* objectivity. The same, obviously, could be said of Sully’s chroniclers, who lend their voices as Velasquez lends his hand and eye to “speak” a representation of the sovereign dictated by that sovereign. If the subject, in other words, is defined as a consciousness through which the world is perceived, then Velasquez and Sully’s chroniclers, all of whom exist in the narratives they produce as nominal authors and speaking subjects, are subordinated to the object of these narratives—the present, sovereign subject who in one way or another directs all reference towards himself. It is as if the sovereign is asking the artist to create a picture of “Me seeing myself being seen”; or, as with Sully, a narrative of “Me speaking myself being spoken.” In both instances, the artist or chronicler is cast in the passive voice, empirically as well as grammatically.

To return to Foucault’s analysis, then, we find that it demands the isolation of the painting from the presence of the sovereign subject, who under such conditions exists only as the dimmest of reflections in a distant mirror. The “never-ending flicker,” as Foucault describes it, generated by this curious parable of representation, Las Meninas, is the undecidability of subject positions.³⁵ But this undecidability is possible only in terms of the

isolation of subject from representative object. Only when the monarch ceases to occupy that privileged locus around which all the lines of the painting converge can we, as spectators, insert our gaze into the painting and usurp the role of the sovereign. Likewise, only when Sully ceases to occupy his place in the communicative circuit over which he presides, his memoir, can we (or Scott's Frank Osbaldistone) interpret his character based solely on his textual remains. In both cases, we must remember, the usurpation is an assumption of another's place in more than the spatial sense. This bears emphasizing: however much the subjectivity of Sully is refracted, like the monarch in the mirror, within the text that outlives and therefore alone represents him, his subjectivity remains as a residue in the text. It is infused into the lens through which later witnesses interpret this subjectivity, and it exerts a force not reducible to contemplation of an object. To stand in the place of the sovereign, in other words, is to experience a representation of his subjectivity, however much or little it is mingled with our own, or however much we revise or resist it in our imaginations.

Even Frank, quick as he is to demonstrate how Sully's text escapes the purpose of "his own special communication" and becomes "ludicrous" (7), understands this aspect of representation. His mistrust of text versus speech makes his invocation of Sully more than a flattering contrast between his own role as relatively minor figure in the tale of Rob Roy and Sully's as the egocentric sovereign of his memoir. As Frank says to his (absent) addressee, Will Tresham:

the tale told by one friend, listened to by another, loses half its charms when committed to paper; and . . . the narratives to which you have attended with interest, as heard from the voice of him to whom they occurred, will appear less deserving of attention when perused in the seclusion of your study. (5)

The question must be asked: What are these "charms" and where do they reside? In the presence of spoken communication, in the "voice" as directed at a *you*? It would be tempting to think that Frank is nibbling at the edges of a Sassurean moment in which language, sundered from the voice, surrenders itself to debasement of one kind or another. However,

at the same time he articulates the fact of textual absence, he expresses a faith in the possibility of subjective resurrection in written form. "Throw, then," he advises Tresham, "these sheets into some secret drawer of your escritoire till we are separated from each other's society" (6). Following Frank's death, Tresham will presumably be able to reconstruct the author from the "faithful transcript of my thoughts and feelings" he has left behind to represent him (6). And this will be achieved not only through Frank's confidence in narrative's ability to "faithfully" represent subjectivity, but also through a mimesis of an empirical speech act. For Rob Roy, as should now be clear, is itself a narrative delivered in the second person, like Sully's memoir. It is a transcription of narratives its intended audience has already "attended with interest," and in this sense the doubts it raises in its framing preface are ironically recuperated within its own alleged empirical intention.

How do we, after so long a detour, return to the idea of the second person as a parable of the problem of textual narrative? To begin with, we can use the circuit of subjectivity established in Las Meninas, Sully's memoir and Rob Roy as a model for the "subject positions" the second person can convey, either directly or indirectly, when sundered from its intended or alleged empirical setting and subjected to the nature of text. Under these conditions, this circuit yields four possible positions: those of the empirical author and reader, both understood in traditional narratological terms as outside the ontological moment of narrative, and those of the narrator and narratee, both understood as inside the ontological moment of narrative.

Thus, with the sovereign removed as a stabilizing force, we are provisionally free to insert ourselves or the author (or one of our surrogates, narrator and narratee) into the privileged locus of the *I-You*. We are obliged, however, to use the qualifier "provisionally" at this point because the sovereign's perspective is not necessarily obliterated in his absence, in the sense that it can be supplanted by another dominant consciousness, depending on the configuration of the narrative. Some critics have argued for the possibility of a "true" second-person form in which no central consciousness is locatable, giving rise to "multiple

subjectivity” shared among all participants in a narrative.³⁶ But this condition, which exists only theoretically in a few texts, requires no small amount of suppression—of identifying references aimed at characters or readers, of authorial presence (easier to deny in theory than in fact), and, most of all, of cognitive habits formed in the empirical world, which readers often bring to the textual.

Foremost among these habits, as mentioned earlier, is the common principle that every *you* mutually constitutes an *I*. This *I*, which in the reader’s mind can be assumed by the empirical author or a more or less identifiable narrator, is ultimately the source of the narrative and therefore inescapable. Thus, the argument for perfect multiple subjectivity in second-person texts, however appealing its political implications (pluralism, incorporation of difference and the discourse of others), falters to the extent that it depends on an absolute suppression of the *I*, forcing us to imagine a “subjectless utterance” more radical even than Ann Banfield’s.

Moreover, the concept of perfect multiple subjectivity, when predicated simply on our inability to attribute the *you* to any one participant in a narrative, which in turn allows us to entertain the idea that it applies to all, often fails to take into account any difference in subject positions, an oversight which in some ways works against the ideals of plurality and incorporation of difference. To put this another way, when the identities of all the participants of a narrative are gathered within the *you*, fusing all the subject positions in a single, inextricable mass, we have as much potential for an idealized intersubjective text as we have for a hidden reconstitution of the sovereign. The *I-You*, if not adequately divided among the participants in a narrative, is as likely to become monologic when taken as an indivisible whole. As readers we can easily naturalize the undecidability of such second-person narratives—for example, as interior monologue of a character or narrator, or even our own as represented by a camera-like author, both of which short-circuit the very ideal of multiple subjectivity.

All this is to say that any analysis of second-person narrative which relies too heavily on the dislocations of text, or the nature of the shifter isolated from its empirical underpinnings, runs the risk of overshooting its well-intentioned mark and enthroning another, perhaps worse sovereign—a textual sovereign who, like his material counterpart in Las Meninas or Sully's memoir, commandeers the *I-You* and forces us either to usurp his place *in toto* and imagine all discourse directed at us, or to watch from the sidelines. The better way, it would seem, and the one more conducive to the inclusion of otherness, would be to preserve the logic of the communicative circuit as freed from the absent sovereign, which means acknowledging the presence of the *I* at the same time we seek to locate the *you* in relation to it (or vice-versa).

By doing so, we affirm what the second person is best able to convey: the idea that the communicative circuit joins together subjectivities sundered in physical space or otherwise isolated in their own identities. While it is true that this circuit can be arrogated by one sovereign or another, we should always remember that, left on its own, it is enough to encourage a dialectic of self and other, without requiring an erasure or suspension of identity. Ultimately, if the ambiguity of identity in second-person texts accomplishes anything, it is to promote the idea that there are subjects other than us in this dialectic, and that we or they can occupy either position at any time. The next step, the step which moves us towards plurality and a consciousness of the discourse of others, is simply to recognize that we alone are never enough to complete the circuit. Whichever subjectivity we occupy in the communicative *I-You*, we need our complement. As Merleau-Ponty puts it:

My own field of thought and action is made up of imperfect meanings, badly defined and interrupted. They are completed over there, in the others who hold the key to them because they see sides of things that I do not see. . . . Likewise, I am the only one capable of tallying the balance sheets of their lives, for their meanings are also incomplete and are openings onto something that I alone am able to see.

. . . Our experiences thus have lateral relationships of truth: all together, each possessing clearly what is secret to the other, in our combined functionings we form a totality which moves toward enlightenment and completion. . . . We are never locked in ourselves.³⁷

Or, as Michel Butor has expressed it: “each time we wish to describe a real progress of consciousness, the very birth of language, or of speech, the second person will be the most effective means to do so.”³⁸

In the following chapters, we will examine a “progress of consciousness” as it unravels in a second-person text, first in Italo Calvino’s If on a winter’s night a traveler, then in Thomas Pynchon’s Gravity’s Rainbow. We can proceed with the notion, established above, that the textual phenomenon of vacancy, which is particularly potent when invested in the second-person pronoun and its association with spoken communication, allows for a fragmenting of the sovereign consciousness and its reconstruction as new subjectivities. These subjectivities, designated by the *you*, will not always be “shifty” in the sense that they never commit to a single identity, though some examples of second-person narrative do approach this condition. More often they can be assigned, permanently or in succession, to one of the participants in a narrative, depending of course on the extent to which any of these participants is aligned with the *you* through identifying references such as direct address to the “reader” or specific descriptions of person. These devices all partake of the absent sovereign and his dispersion in text, the net effect being a sequence or plurality of subjectivities that illustrates the degree to which “we are never locked in ourselves.”

Notes

¹ The Epic of Gilgamesh, trans. Maureen Gallery Kovacs (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989), 3.

² Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre, ed. Richard J. Dunn, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1987), 395.

³ Gérard Genette, Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980), 245.

⁴ See John R. Searle, "What is a Speech Act?" Critical Theory Since 1965, eds. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle, 4th ed. (Tallahassee: Florida State UP, 1986), 60-1.

⁵ Joseph Greenberg, "The Second Person Is Rightly So Called," Principles and Prediction: The Analysis of Natural Language, eds. Mushira Eid and Gregory Iverson (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1993), 10.

⁶ Greenberg, "The Second Person," 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸ Ann Banfield, in a theoretical model that continues to generate controversy, has suggested the possibility of a subjectless utterance, an utterance to which no *I* is attached. See Banfield's Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982).

⁹ Greenberg, "The Second Person," 11, 13.

¹⁰ Bertrand Russell, Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1948), 69.

¹¹ Greenberg, "The Second Person," 14.

¹² *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴ This is the case even in Banfield's theory of subjectless utterances.

¹⁵ Genette, Narrative Discourse, 244.

¹⁶ Plato, The Republic, trans. Richard W. Sterling and William C. Scott (New York: Norton, 1985). A distinction needs to be made here between this use of the term "mimesis" and the same term as used by Plato elsewhere in The Republic: that is, "mimesis" as the quoted speech of a character, with no authorial mediation, is somewhat different from "mimesis" as an imitation of reality, though the one is obviously derived from the other. Plato's mistrust of mimesis in the broader sense—as a representation at one remove from the

thing itself—is well known, although he seems to prefer mimesis as a narrative mode over diegesis. His analysis of the opening scene of *The Iliad*, in which he transposes the quoted speech between Agamemnon and Chryses into reported speech, implies a dilution of truth-value where authorial mediation is concerned, though plainly Plato's own transposition of this scene into diegesis closely follows the original. This preference of mimesis over diegesis, in relation to the larger idea between imitation and reality, is not without its own irony: Plato is speaking, after all, not as himself, but as Socrates.

¹⁷ Qtd. in Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 28.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 213.

²⁰ Ibid., 228.

²¹ Ibid., 215.

²² Ibid., 228.

²³ Genette's term for this nested story-within-the-story is "metadiegetic" (228), but the term is problematic to the extent that "meta," in contemporary criticism especially, carries with it a connotation of "above" or "beyond" or "outside," as opposed to the sense of "within" Genette's use of the term conveys. This study will therefore use the term "intradiegetic" to describe such narrators of second-order narratives.

²⁴ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 34.

²⁵ Ibid., 48.

²⁶ McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 94.

²⁷ Ibid., 93.

²⁸ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (New York: Harper & Row, 1967). This phrase is obviously one of Homer's formulae and begins with the meeting of Odysseus and Eumaios in Book XIV.

²⁹ *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, 1983 ed.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Critical Theory Since 1965*, eds. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle, 4th ed. (Tallahassee: Florida State UP, 1986), 239.

³² Walter Scott, Rob Roy (New York: Penguin, 1985), 7. All subsequent page references will refer to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.

³³ Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" Critical Theory Since 1965, eds. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle, 4th ed. (Tallahassee: Florida State UP, 1986), 142.

³⁴ See Norman Friedman, "Point of View in Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept," PMLA 70: 1160-84.

³⁵ Michel Foucault, The Order of Things (New York: Vintage, 1994), 308.

³⁶ See, for example, Darlene M. Hantzis, "You are about to begin reading": The Nature and Function of Second Person Point of View in Literature, diss., LSU, 1988 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1989).

³⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Adventures of the Dialectic, trans. Joseph Bien (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973), 138-9.

³⁸ Michel Butor, "L'Usage des Pronoms Personnels dans le Roman," Les Temps Modernes 178 (1961): 948.

CHAPTER 2

CALVINO: YOU AS NARRATIVE SEDUCTION

Italo Calvino's If on a winter's night a traveler could safely be called a "challenging" book: not only because it refuses to end the ten novels-within-the-novel (or "incipits") it so enticingly begins, which challenges our expectations as readers accustomed to narrative closure, but also because of its exploitation of second-person ambiguity, which results in a challenge to identity.

This challenge, however, is not offered all at once, but rather in degrees—degrees of what might be called "narrative seduction." That is, the novel uses the second person in a progression of differing modes of address, and we as readers are forced to situate ourselves in relation to them, sometimes taking on the role of *you*, other times directing it elsewhere. The overall goal of this progression of narrative seduction is, naturally, to "draw" the reader into the fictive world projected by the novel. But this ideal identification between the *you* and the empirical reader, their perfect alignment, involves a willing suspension of disbelief literally worlds apart from that conceived by Coleridge. In other words, whereas fiction often asks us to accept on faith the internal world portrayed in a narrative, a world which may include dragons or ghosts or giants, If on a winter's night a traveler seems to be asking us to accept something quite different: the idea that there is no boundary between fiction's world and ours.

How the novel goes about this will be the subject of this chapter. In the process, we will examine what is at stake in blurring the boundaries of fiction with those of reality, and where this blurring fits in with respect to narrative tradition. If, after all, one of the motives of

fiction is to seduce us into accepting a fabricated ontology, as readers we should perhaps also wonder precisely what ontology we are measuring the fabricated one against: On what experiences do we draw to make this comparison? More importantly, how do texts—in particular, second-person texts—exploit these experiences to achieve their goals?

The First Level of Narrative Seduction

It is with these questions in mind that we might turn to the first page of *If on a winter's night a traveler* and confront its explicit appeal to us. Far from being uncanny or unfamiliar, it presents itself as typical direct address to the reader:

You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveler*. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade. Best to close the door; the TV is always on in the next room. Tell the others right away, "No, I don't want to watch TV!" Raise your voice—they won't hear you otherwise—"I'm reading! I don't want to be disturbed."¹

The first thing we notice about this passage is its overt appeal to the act or situation of reading, typical of direct address as practiced by Fielding or Sterne. The addressee is made aware of the narrative transaction: she will be told or is being told a story, and all the language explicitly points to this situation. The second thing we notice—and this is crucial to the postmodern "effect" Calvino later achieves in the novel—is the relative lack of specificity apart from describing the act of reading. The *you*, in other words, has identity only insofar as the pronoun signifies a reader. It does not have a proper name attached to it, nor is it described in individualized physical or emotional terms. Instead, it is treated as a class of beings. What Calvino is addressing, then, is not a particular person, but a potential person, a representative of a class, and this is reflected in the generality of his language:

Find the most comfortable position: seated, stretched out, curled up, or lying flat. Flat on your back, on your side, on your stomach. In an easy chair, on the sofa, in the rocker, the deck chair, on the hassock. In the hammock, if you have a

hammock. On top of your bed, of course, or in the bed. You can even stand on your hands, head down, in the yoga position. With the book upside down, naturally. (3)

This imperative and the suggestions that follow can be applied to virtually any reader. There are few if any obstacles here keeping us from identifying with the *you*, and thus we might say this mode of direct address presents the first of several degrees of narrative seduction made possible by the second-person pronoun. As long as the narrator, in other words, continues to appeal to the empirical reader on this level of generality, there is nothing to stop her from considering herself the object of address (that is, apart from any disbelief in the very possibility of being addressed by a text).

Calvino's narrator, moreover, encourages this identification by momentarily lapsing into what is sometimes called the "impersonal you." This use of the second-person pronoun, a colloquial substitute for *one* often found in travel writing ("From the observation deck you can see all of Paris"), further locates direct address on the level of generality. It should be noted, however, that even the impersonal you presents an opportunity for identification. Whoever occupies the observation deck, in fact or in imagination, can also occupy the *you*, for there is little else beyond the situation itself to particularize identity. This may have something to do with the popularity of impersonal you in travel brochures and advertising in general: imagining, after all, is often a preliminary stage of doing, and the brochure that attempts to induce imagination ("You can see the historic sites of Paris by day and sample its famous cuisine by night") no doubt hopes to induce a consequent action as well. Thus, when Calvino's narrator says, "Of course, the ideal position for reading is something you can never find" (3), we as readers are free to identify with the *you* insofar as it represents us as members of a class, as *one* does, or we can identify ourselves as a "particular case" addressed by the narrator.

At this point, however, identification with the *you* is becoming more complex. In the same paragraph in which the "impersonal you" is introduced, we encounter another, more

forceful appeal to individual identity: the idea of reading on horseback, the narrator tells us, “seems attractive to you” (3). The sentence is unqualified—no “may” or “might” to convey a sense of the hypothetical. Calvino’s narrator, who before has limited himself to imperatives and generalities, or even the potential vacancy left by the impersonal *you*, is suddenly inside the mind of the *you*, reporting its thoughts back to itself. Nevertheless, because it follows a general discussion of readers “in the old days,” as well as the overall tenor of the opening paragraphs, this encroachment can be temporarily defused as a form of direct address to an imagined subclass, membership in which we as readers can choose to assume if we wish. A similar choice is offered in some of the “surjustifications” of Fielding, such as in the following passage from Tom Jones:

Bestir thyself therefore on this Occasion; for tho’ we will always lend thee proper Assistance in difficult Places, as we do not, like some others, expect thee to use the Arts of Divination to discover our Meaning, yet we shall not indulge thy Laziness where nothing but thy own Attention is required, for thou art highly mistaken if thou dost imagine that we intended, when we began this great work, to leave thy Sagacity nothing to do, or that, without sometimes exercising this Talent, thou wilt be able to travel through our pages with any Pleasure or Profit to thyself.²

Here, the narrator is predicting a certain subclass of reader—the lazy type—and cailing on its members to “bestir” themselves to the task of reading. The assumption in this case cannot be applied to all readers, so the empirical reader of the moment is left with a choice: either identify with the addressed “lazy” reader, or imagine a subclass of narratee separate from one’s own imagined class. The same holds with the above example of direct address from Calvino’s narrator: either assume the idea that reading on horseback “seems attractive to you,” as one can imagine oneself in the place of the *you* in travel writing, or assume a place outside whatever class of reader this thought might represent.

This suggestion of a plural readership is common enough to second-person narrative, and with it certain “misalignments” with a particular empirical reader can be neutralized. We

see it in its extreme form in novels such as Sterne's Tristram Shandy, which variously addresses "Sir Critic," "Madam," "Anti-Shandean," "most subtle statesmen and discreet doctors," and so on.³ The fact that the novel is addressing, in alternation or simultaneously, its entire readership works in concert with those instances of *you* in the narrative which are not particularized in terms of subclass. Any one of these attributions, in other words, whose context doesn't quite fit with that of a particular reader can be ascribed to another member of the larger class of readers addressed in the novel, the net effect of which is an expansion of the first level of narrative seduction that nonetheless prepares the reader for the next level.

The Second Level of Narrative Seduction

Hopefully, what is beginning to emerge here is a progression that involves specificity and identification. The degree to which a particular reader chooses to identify with specific traits presented in direct address determines the relative success of what could be called the second level of narrative seduction, in which we are invited to assume a role that may not reflect one's empirical situation or persona. In other words, while a narrator is operating strictly on a level of generality that reflects certain preconditions of reading—the fact that readers need light to see a book, that they must turn its pages or otherwise deal with its physicality—the success of identification with the *you* is all but guaranteed. The same would apply, though to a lesser extent, when the narrator addresses the reader as a hypothetical or "subjunctive" case in the context of a class of readers. When, on the other hand, we are confronted with specific details that don't necessarily reflect our personal experience, we have to make the adjustments mentioned in the previous section. We are forced, in effect, either to imagine an addressee apart from ourselves, or imagine ourselves in the place of the *you*, which in Calvino's novel presents more of a challenge insofar as it doesn't initially identify or name its "other" addressees, as we see in Tristram Shandy.

This compulsion to identify becomes increasingly clear as Calvino's narrator subtly shifts his address from the generic to the particular. Our first potential shock of separation

from the class of readers in its broadest sense (“seems attractive to you”) is smoothed over by a momentary return to the general and the subjunctive: “put your feet on a cushion, on two cushions, on the arms of the sofa, on the wings of the chair, on the coffee table, on the desk, on the piano, on the globe”; “Cigarettes within reach, if you smoke, and the ashtray” (3-4). In the subsequent paragraph, however, the narrator again particularizes the reader:

It's not that you expect anything in particular from this particular book. You're the sort of person who, on principle, no longer expects anything of anything. There are plenty, younger than you or less young, who live in the expectation of extraordinary experiences: from books, from people, from journeys, from events, from what tomorrow has in store. But not you. You know that the best you can expect is to avoid the worst. (4)

Here, the “sort” of reader described is pragmatic and realist, perhaps a little cynical, and it is up to the empirical reader to locate herself either within this subclass (and continue the illusion of identification with the *you*) or outside of it (and construct another narratee apart from herself, assuming the role of passive spectator). However, for those who choose to identify with the attitudes implied in the above passage, Calvino's narrator raises the stakes considerably in the ensuing section. For while the above excerpt deals in habitual thought and behavior, qualities not mentioned in connection with any specific event or situation beyond the experience of reading a certain book, what follows adds another level of particularity: “So, then, you noticed in a newspaper that *If on a winter's night a traveler* had appeared. . . . You went to the bookshop and bought the volume. Good for you” (4).

This passage is a threshold moment of sorts. As in the typical travel brochure, the reader is asked to imagine herself in a place she may never have been, or in a situation that might not reflect her experience. But this time she is not addressed in a future or conditional tense: the action reported here is completed; it is something the reader *did do*, as opposed to something the reader *can do*. Again, Calvino's narrator is careful at this point to mix the particular with the general. In his description of the experience of going to the bookstore and

purchasing If on a winter's night a traveler, for example, the addressee's actions are rendered in specific terms ("You have forced your way through the shop past the thick barricade of Books," "With a rapid maneuver you bypass"), while the bookstore itself and its contents are described generically ("the Books You've Been Planning to Read for Ages, the Books You've Been Hunting For Years Without Success") (5). Moreover, even amidst this accumulation of specificity which the reader must align with her own experience or attribute to another narratee, Calvino's narrator will occasionally revert to the subjunctive. But the alternation is quicker at this point; there is less time to distinguish between levels of generality: "Perhaps you started leafing through the book already in the shop. Or were you unable to, because it was wrapped in its cocoon of cellophane? Now you are on the bus, standing in a crowd, hanging from a strap by your arm" (7). Another example: "Or perhaps the bookseller didn't wrap the volume; he gave it to you in a bag. This simplifies matters. You are at the wheel of your car, waiting for a traffic light" (7). In both cases, the reader is presented a hypothetical situation, in the subjunctive, which carries through into a more particularized and declarative mode.

But this movement, which continues to the end of the opening chapter, never resolves itself into direct address to a particular individual. Just as it begins to acquire the level of specificity we associate with the description of a person or individual experience, it expands again to encompass readers as a class or subclass, as in the following:

the book you have brought with you to your place of employment like a kind of amulet or talisman exposes you to intermittent temptations, a few seconds at a time subtracted from the principle object of your attention, whether it is the perforations of electronic cards, the burners of a kitchen stove, the controls of a bulldozer, a patient stretched out on the operating table with his guts exposed. (8)

The more particularized attitude represented here—relating to a book as if it were an "amulet or talisman"—is extended to a sampling of the class of readers, much in the way Sterne aims certain reader behaviors or attitudes at "Madam" or "Sir Critic." The suggestion,

moreover, is on par with the surjustification of Fielding, in which the outline of an ideal reader is negatively sketched in terms of chastisement. As Fielding calls on the reader to “construct” herself as sagacious, Calvino’s narrator seems to be calling on the reader to assume the attitude towards books described above. This is a central characteristic of what we have been calling the second level of narrative seduction: at the same time the *you* is being moved through levels of specificity, alternately identified as a member of a more or a less particularized class, the narrator is subtly insinuating attitudes or perceptions or behaviors the empirical reader can imagine as her own. Calvino’s narrator, in other words, is asking the addressee to construct herself as a certain “type” of reader whose assumption of suggested traits moves her away from the first level of narrative seduction and onto the second, which, as we shall see, serves as preparation for a third degree of identification.

At this point, however, we might return to the question of narrative plane: where are these seductions taking place? On the first level, we noticed that any identification with the *you* was made in connection with the situation of reading (and, of course, narrating). That is, the reader was appealed to in the context of a particular instance of reading a particular text, but always in terms careful not to move beyond this context. Because of this, the reader can be safely addressed as a member of a class without any threat to identification. On the second level, we noticed a hidden appeal to the reader to assume a more particularized identity, though without any degree of specificity that would necessarily exclude a reader from identification with the *you* (depending, of course, on the reader’s willingness in the first place to imagine herself assuming certain attitudes or occupying certain places, as we see in travel brochures and advertising in general). As with the first level, however, the second remains squarely situated within the context of reading, the natural plane for direct address to the reader. In principle, narratologists say, this plane does not exist—or, more accurately, it exists only as an illusion or “effect” of fiction. The empirical reader, as discussed in the previous chapter, and the empirical author as well, are not actual participants in a narrative. Rather, they are represented by textual “surrogates”: narrators the reader can

“construct” in her imagination, narratees with whom she can identify. Hence, perhaps, the feeling of “ontological scandal” cited by critics such as Brian McHale when a narrator, who by definition exists in the text, at a level ontologically “inferior” to the empirical reader’s, attempts to address this reader directly, especially in those instances of direct address where the narrator presumes to “know” the reader in the context of what, logically speaking, can only be a “communication between strangers.”⁴

At any rate, whether we choose to adopt the ontological boundary narratologists have erected between the empirical reader and author and their textual surrogates, or whether we choose to proceed with our analysis under the power of narrative illusion, we can say that in both cases the circuit of communication as examined thus far seems to exist at the level of reading and storytelling. As we saw in Chapter 1, by convention this level is considered distinct from the level of story itself. Whether judged in terms of communicative act versus content, or in temporal terms (i.e., story precedes its telling, though even this doesn’t account for narrative situations akin to the running commentary of sports broadcasting, where the interval between telling and event is so small as to appear simultaneous), the two levels remain separate. Hence the terms intradiegetic and extradiegetic, which refer respectively to the story itself and the situation of telling that story, and in which we find separation of narrative level in its most explicit formula: inside and outside.

Using this definition, for the time being we might situate the direct address of If on a winter’s night a traveler on the extradiegetic level. The material in the opening chapter describes the actual reading or acquisition of whatever novel is to follow, to the extent that it sometimes appears a transcription of the extradiegetic situation. When we arrive at the final paragraph, our location on the level of extradiegesis is made clear: “So here you are now, ready to attack the first lines of the first page” (9). What we have been reading, in other words, is not the novel itself (or so Calvino’s narrator would have us believe). Instead, we have been *about to begin reading*. But is this entirely accurate? On the one hand, we encounter what appears to be address simultaneous with reading itself: the imperatives, the

questions to the reader, the narrator's general comments on books or his statements about a/the reader's attitude or character. These unfold in real time, in the always "present tense" or what some critics consider the "timelessness" of the empirical act of narrating, and in this sense they are typical of direct address as intended for an empirical addressee (or, as narratologists might say, a narratee created to mimic this role). On the other hand, we have the story of the acquisition of the book itself, which obviously cannot be contemporaneous with the reading of it. Consider, for example, the following: "You turn the book over in your hands, you scan the sentences on the back of the jacket, generic phrases that don't say a great deal" (8). Logically, performing this action and reading about it cannot occur at the same time. Likewise with the entire depiction of the reader seeking out and then purchasing the novel in a bookstore.

The opening chapter of If on a winter's night a traveler, then, is not simply an extended direct address of the conventional type, the type that strives for the illusion of simultaneity between speaker and addressee and which seems to require a strict mimesis of the empirical situation of reading; it is also a story, a diegesis within the extradiegesis. Though it is rendered grammatically in the present tense, with the exception of a few sentences, at this stage in the novel much of it is logically prior to what is sometimes called the "narrating instance." The addressee, in other words, however we identify her, is not only a participant on the level of extradiegesis, whose spatio-temporal restrictions seem to dictate that it remain in the present or risk becoming story; she is also a participant in events recounted by the extradiegetic narrator, whose narrative plane she also presumably occupies. This, perhaps, is the central "illusion" of the novel at this stage. The reader is reading the story of herself reading, leading up to but not including, we are led to believe, the actual reading of the novel itself. As far as the empirical situation of reading is concerned, identification with the *you* is crucial to this illusion: the reader who chooses to identify with the addressee is in effect "primed" for the next degree of narrative seduction. She has the opportunity—if she can resist the urge to construct an "other" addressee out of the misalignment of her own

experience and what she reads in the text—to accept herself as *in diegesis*, a narrative level in which technically she can only exist as a character-narratee.

Again, this possibility is difficult to reconcile with certain narratological principles, making Calvino's novel somewhat of a challenge to analyze. Formulations of narrative level such as Genette's deny any permeability between levels: "The extradiegetic narrator . . . can aim only at an extradiegetic narratee, who merges with the implied reader and with whom each real reader can identify. *This implied reader is in principle undefined.*"⁵ At the same time, for Genette this narratee "does not merge a priori with the reader (even an implied reader) any more than the narrator necessarily merges with the author."⁶ These necessities, all empirically determined, leave us a limited number of options when trying to classify If on a winter's night a traveler. On the one hand, Genette acknowledges the role of definition (specificity) as the primary factor in the process of identification between "real" and "implied" readers. This identification, it follows, is only possible when there is an alignment of narrative level between speaker and addressee, which corresponds, incidentally, with the spatial and/or temporal simultaneity of speech in the communicative circuit. On the other hand, any identification between the fictive and the empirical realm is logically impossible in the first place; books can neither discuss nor address the "real" reader, only her surrogates. Identification, however pleasurable or disturbing, is ultimately and only an illusion, an "effect" of reading and narrating common to written communication.

The implication here is simple and yet reflects a crux of sorts, one which lies at the very heart of Calvino's novel and poses a threat to narrative sensibility far greater than its refusal to end the ten "actual" diegeses it begins. That is, the ability of direct address to simulate or powerfully insinuate the empirical conditions of oral communication as we experience it in our daily lives. This ability of course extends to fictional narrative in general, but it is most noticeable (and problematic) when overtly aligned with *represented* spoken discourse. As Genette says, "a narrative, like every discourse, is necessarily addressed to someone and always contains below the surface and appeal to the receiver"⁷. The movement "below the

surface,” typical of objectivist narrative or the ideal of the invisible artist as conceived by Joyce, can be seen as the opposite extreme of those narratives which explicitly present the extradiegetic dimension of a text. Curiously, though, as Genette reminds us, this former mode is as likely as the latter to encourage identification when the act of communication itself is represented: even in the case of an intradiegetic narrator (whose status in terms of narrative level necessarily excludes us as addressees) addressing an unidentified narratee (which is merely another way of saying “undefined” or “unspecified”), we find that “it is also true that the more transparent the receiving instance and the more silent its evocation in the narrative, so undoubtedly the easier, or rather the more *irresistible*, each real reader’s identification with or substitution for that implied instance will be.”⁸

This narrative strategy has become a commonplace in fiction of our century.⁹ But what is most compelling here is the “irresistibility” of the mimesis of oral communication. So far we have identified two extremes of direct address that strongly invite identification on the part of the “real” reader (the purely extradiegetic and the intradiegetic without a specified narratee), but we have yet to adequately account for Italo Calvino’s puzzling novel, which seems to fall somewhere in the middle. This, perhaps, stems from the ontological barriers between levels on which readers, authors, narrators, narratees and characters, in strict narratological terms, are said to operate. The most fundamental of these barriers, that which divides the fictive or textual world from the real, is explicitly present in If on a winter’s night a traveler, and represented in complex ways usually conditioned by the perceived identity of the second person. For example, in the second *you* chapter:

You have now read about thirty pages and you’re becoming caught up in the story. At a certain point you remark: “This sentence sounds somehow familiar. . . .”

Wait a minute! Look at the page number. Damn! From page 32 you’ve gone back to page 17! What you thought was subtlety on the author’s part is simply a printers’ mistake: they have inserted the same pages twice. (25)

In more ways than one, the book we are reading is not the book we are reading. To be sure, this passage again locates the *you* squarely on the extradiegetic level: the reader, implied or otherwise, is reading the story of herself reading. Also, the fragment of the intradiegetic novel “If on a winter’s night a traveler,” the first of ten such novel-incipits we will encounter in If on a winter’s night a traveler, halts and then vanishes, as if the two objects, extradiegesis and diegesis, cannot occupy the same space.

But nor are we reading the purely extradiegetic. The reader, though addressed from the level occupied by the narrator, remains in part *somewhere else*—reading another book, the book whose signatures have been mistakenly repeated (unlike the novel the empirical reader holds in her hands), a book which can only exist in story and as story, as diegesis, which to some extent serves to locate the reader on the same plane. And nor was the novel fragment just read purely diegetic. It opens “metalingually,” with explicit reference to its status as text: “The novel begins in a railway station, a locomotive huffs, steam from a piston covers the opening of the chapter, a cloud of smoke hides the first paragraph” (10). Moreover, it pretends to defy, in the most flagrant way possible, the ban on communication between fictive levels: “I am the man who comes and goes between the bar and the telephone booth. Or, rather: that man is called *I* and *you* know nothing about him” (11; italics mine).

Who is this *I* addressing the reader from within the story he tells? On the one hand, he is a character in diegesis: the events described are unfolding around him. On the other, he is the narrator of these events, but unlike traditional *I* narrators, he has yet to live through or beyond them. He is intradiegetic, in other words, within the very content of the story he tells, both spatially and temporally. The easiest way to classify him, perhaps, would be to call him a “simultaneous” narrator,¹⁰ but still we have the problem of his implied audience. Unlike the example of an intradiegetic narrator speaking to an unspecified narratee, Genette’s “transparent receiving instance” which irresistibly invites the reader to identify herself as addressee, throughout the “If on a winter’s night a traveler” chapter we have explicit appeals both to the reader and to textual representation: “You, reader, believed that there, on the

platform, my gaze was glued to the hands of a round clock of an old station" (13); "For a couple of pages now you have been reading on, and this would be the time to tell you clearly whether this station where I got off is a station of the past or a station of today" (12).

This last example sets up a third element which further compromises the stability of narrative level in the chapter: the *I* presumes access to not only the reader's thoughts, but to the author's as well, making his infiltration of the extradiegetic realm seem all the more extensive and "scandalous." Like Joyce's Molly, who in *Ulysses* addresses the empirical author ("O Jamesy let me up out of this"),¹¹ Calvino's *I* is aware of the author's function and presence: "the author, since he has no intention of telling about himself, decided to call the character *I* as if to conceal him"; "the author feels driven to put into this *I* a bit of himself, of what he feels or imagines he feels"; "it is . . . risky to identify with me, risky for you the reader and for him the author" (15). These claims of autonomy apart from the author responsible for the text are, on the one hand, theoretically absurd. They, as all similar transgressions, defy the boundary separating the two worlds of the heterocosm: the fictive world pretends to infiltrate the real. For Genette, such examples of "narrative metalepsis" seldom hold up under scrutiny, nor do they manage to suppress the logic of narrative level: "All these games, by the intensity of their effects, demonstrate the importance of the boundary they tax their ingenuity to overstep, in defiance of verisimilitude."¹²

On the other hand, any permeability in the boundary between fictive and real invites us to imagine for ourselves a fuller experience of textuality. By giving the *I* character of "If on a winter's night a traveler" autonomy apart from the author, Calvino establishes a model that will soon become important in the novel, for the character here has essentially taken on some of the functions of author, a confusion of roles we later see in the incipit entitled "Outside the Town of Malbork," in which the *I* character-narrator describes his fight with Ponko:

The page you're reading should convey this violent contact of dull and painful blows, of fierce and lacerating responses; this bodiliness of using one's own body against another body, melding the weight of one's own efforts and the precision of

one's own receptivity and adapting them to the mirror image of them that the adversary reflects. But if the sensations reading evokes remain scant compared to any sensation really experienced, it is also because what I am feeling as I crush Ponko's chest beneath my chest or as I block the twisting of an arm behind my back is not the sensation I would need to declare what I would like to declare, namely the amorous possession of Brigd. . . . (39)

Aside from its obvious involvement on what properly should be the extradiegetic plane of the narrator, this passage establishes certain correspondences important to the novel, all of which bear on the nature of participants in a narrative and the relationships between them. The *I* character-narrator in this scene, who we later learn is named Gritzvi, is essentially fighting against his doppelganger: Ponko has come to Kudgiwa to re-place Gritzvi, who is being sent to Ponko's home in an exchange arranged by the boys' families. Aside from this literal exchange of roles, there is the threat, imagined by Gritzvi, of a deeper ontological exchange that involves losing one's identity. He says of Ponko's arrival at Kudgiwa:

an outsider was taking my place, was becoming me, my cage with the starlings would become his, the stereoscope, the real Uhlan helmet hanging from the nail, all my things that I couldn't take with me remained to him; or, rather, it was my relationship with things, places, people, that was becoming his, just as I was about to become him, to take his place among the things and people of his life. (37-8)

To trade places with someone, in other words, is to become that person in more than a geographical sense. As is only natural, for Gritzvi this imagined loss of identity is a thing to be resisted, fought, and so he acts out against the most logical of targets: his double, Ponko. His acting out, though, is not entirely a defense of what is his own place. The altercation itself erupts in connection with Gritzvi's encroachment on a picture of Ponko's sweetheart, Zwida, at the very moment Gritzvi is imagining Ponko's future usurpation of his relationship with his own sweetheart, Brigd. The conflation of the two girls in the fight scene represents Gritzvi's desire to preserve his own identity by imaginatively arrogating all of his and

Ponko's "places" for himself, but Gritzvi soon finds that this conflation is nothing less than a symptom of his own conflation with Ponko:

In the tangle of male limbs opposing and identical, I try in vain to clasp those female ghosts that vanish in their unattainable difference; and I try at the same time to strike myself, perhaps the other self that is about to take my place or else the self most mine that I want to snatch away from that other, but which I feel pressing against me and which is only the alienness of the other, as if that other had already taken my place and any other place, and I were erased from the world. (39)

As a metaphor for the confusion of roles developing in the novel, this passage hints at an interplay between concepts of self and other that readers must bring to bear on identification with the *you*. Which address applies to self, and which to other? And what is the basis of these determinations? For Gritzvi, the victim, it would appear, of a typical postmodern crisis of duplication, this basis is under erasure: "the tangle of limbs opposing and identical" is the classic confrontation with the mirror Jorge Luis Borges found so horrifying.¹³ Gritzvi's mirroring by Ponko inspires horror to the extent that it threatens an erasure of self, but this erasure has its parallel in Gritzvi's assumption of the extradiegetic narrator's role. Where has this narrator gone? Has Gritzvi taken his place, or is a similar conflation of identity being projected into the extradiegetic realm? A similar mirror-alignment between story and the extradiegetic realm can be found in the "If on a winter's night a traveler" incipit when the *I* character reveals an epistemological status that corresponds to the reader's. As Carl Malmgren puts it, this episode in the novel "manufactures a condition of similarity between reader and character by foisting an epistemological disadvantage on the latter: the character, like the reader, is ignorant both of his past and future, and only gradually comes to understand the nature of [his] 'mission.'"¹⁴ For example:

Something must have gone wrong for me: some misinformation, a delay, a missed connection; perhaps on arriving I should have found a contact, probably linked

with this suitcase that seems to worry me so much, though whether because I am afraid of losing it or because I can't wait to get rid of it is not clear. (13)

The *I* character, though he is in the story, does not know why: his motives are as unclear to him as they are to us, and he must try to make sense of events as they unfold, as we must. This condition shared with the reader is made even more explicit in a subsequent passage, and it is notable the extent to which the *I* articulates concerns typical to the extradiegetic audience, concerns he, as an intradiegetic character, should not share:

I have already crossed the café a couple of times and have looked out of the front door onto the invisible square, and each time the wall of darkness has driven back inside this sort of illuminated limbo suspended between the two darknesses, the bundle of tracks and the foggy city. Where would I out go to? The city outside there has no name yet, we don't know if it will remain outside the novel or whether the whole story will be contained within its inky blackness. I only know that this first chapter is taking a while to break free of the station and the bar: . . . (13-14)

For Malmgren, this alignment of character and reader “promotes the act of identification between the two,” and he goes on to suggest that Calvino's purpose here is to dramatize “what necessarily happens in the act of reading a fictional text. From a secure position outside the text the reader is gradually drawn into the fictional world, moving from here to there without really being aware of it.”¹⁵ This movement, of course, mirrors that in the numbered second-person chapters that alternate with the novel-incipits: the gradual “drawing in” of the reader is likewise accomplished by an implied comparison with “other” readers or members of the class of readers—those who share with us the situation of “reading Italo Calvino's novel.”

What is beginning to disappear, however, along with any sense of what novel we are actually reading, are the very boundaries that distinguish these separate beings, the implied readers of *If on a winter's night a traveler*. That is, in its mingling of particularized and generalized version of *you*, the novel is striving to erase the “opposing” from “opposing and

identical,” leaving only the identical, as happens with Gritzvi-Ponko. The reader, having by now moved through so many suggestive and subtle models of identification, so many blurrings of ontological status and narrative level, so many examples of sameness, is in all likelihood prepared to align herself with whatever *you* presents itself in the text, in whatever form, on whatever level.

Whether or not a particular reader will enjoy or willingly submit to the experience is of course a matter of individual taste and perhaps disposition. The history of the narrative metalepsis is no doubt conditioned in part by these matters. Thus, Genette, following the example of Borges, can say, “The most troubling thing about metalepsis indeed lies in this unacceptable and insistent hypothesis, that the extradiegetic is perhaps always diegetic, and that the narrator and his narratees—you and I—perhaps belong to some narrative.”¹⁶ But for other readers, such an “unacceptable and insistent hypothesis” might be less troubling.

The Third Level of Narrative Seduction

This, it seems, however one regards it in terms of taste or comfort, is what If on a winter's night a traveler has been aiming at all along: making *you* part of the narrative. The third level of narrative seduction, promoted by Calvino's use of metalepsis in every possible direction, moves forward under the illusion that all indeed is diegetic. What would otherwise be an intradiegetic *I* narrator in full compliance with the logic of narrative level becomes, by direct address to the reader and the extradiegetic situation in general, what might be called an “interdiegetic” narrator. The voice that speaks from the text reaches in all directions, insinuating its presence on all levels. Reciprocally, the *you* in Calvino's novel is addressed as if present in three dimensions—the empirical, the extradiegetic and the diegetic—both narrator and addressee taking advantage of the general collapse of traditional narrative levels into one inextricable “present” whose indefiniteness is patterned after the realities of spoken communication. As Genette says, “It is the nature of immediate speech to preclude any formal determination of the narrating instance which it constitutes.”¹⁷ Speech,

the condition of extradiegesis, takes place in the present, and thus “The transition from one narrative level to another can in principle be achieved only by the narrating, the act that consists precisely of introducing into one situation, by means of a discourse, the knowledge of another situation.”¹⁸ Is there an implied corollary here? Is the audience of this discourse similarly moved from one narrative level to another by reading?

It is here that we must return to the question of the identification of the *you* as addressed from all quarters in the novel. This matter, in the first two chapters, is mainly responsible for the overall sense of confusion between narrative levels, making the *you* a corridor, or a conveyance of sorts, through which occupants of the various planes communicate with one another. What most contributes to this apparently interdiegetic communication is the spatio-temporal nature of the second-person pronoun itself, which to this point most readers would find easy to assume. If we switch gears for a moment and consider Benveniste’s distinction between levels of story—*histoire* (story) and *discours* (narrating)—we find that the latter is always conditioned by speech-markers, by “reference to the enunciation,” as its name would indicate.¹⁹ Hence the distinction between such utterances as “He has gone” and “He went”; or, “I’ve told you about it hundreds of times” and “She told her about it hundreds of times”: in both cases, the former example implies a dual temporality, the moment of speech (present) and the moment of the spoken (past), while in the latter example the moment of speech is transparent, outside the utterance, as we often find in objectivist narrative.²⁰

This implied temporality has something to do, no doubt, with the fact that the dominant tense of *If on a winter’s night a traveler* is present. The use of present tense, in other words, is more than merely a grammatical choice on the part of the author. It is also a precondition of *discours*, which one might argue is the novel’s dominant mode through the first chapters. For Genette, this mode is timeless: “One of the fictions of literary narrating—perhaps the most powerful one, because it passes unnoticed, so to speak—is that the narrating involves an instantaneous action, without a temporal dimension.”²¹ Narrative unfolds from moment to moment, neither past nor future though always at their borders; not coincidentally, speech

shares this instantaneousness. Thus, wherever we encounter the *you* in text, we are in the present tense. Even if we were to recast all the verbs in Calvino's novel in the past tense, the presence of the *you* alone is enough to convey the temporal immediacy of *discours*. The *you* as addressed from every narrative level serves to bring all these levels into the present, regardless of grammatical tense or the usually time-fraught implications of *histoire*.

However, critics and (most) readers of Calvino's novel know that this effect, this conflation of time and narrative level which seems to create a bridge between the empirical and the fictive, soon transforms itself into something less uncanny. This does not occur through any reconfiguration of the novel's basic communicative circuits, nor through a change of tense or any other operation on the level of narrative mechanics. Rather, the transformation is brought about by a process not subject to the gears and cogs of narrative: identification. By the third numbered chapter, the *you* becomes irreversibly particularized: the pronoun is identified with a male, in defiance of this study's attempt to designate the reader with the gender-bias-friendly *she*; "characterological" details accumulate and multiply, idiosyncrasies, experiences. Moreover, as if it were inescapable, the novel shifts towards the side of *histoire*, one of the two poles Genette considers simultaneous narration liable to in general.²² For example, there are far fewer "metalingual references" in the latter half of the book, especially in the novel-incipits. Story begins to dominate (if indeed it hasn't been dominating all along), and the remainder of the novel, in its piling on of particularities and its development of the *you* as a character, rapidly shifts towards the conventionally diegetic, its only distinction from traditional third-person narrative being the preservation of simultaneous narration and the use of the second person to designate the reader, who has now become the "Reader," not quite a proper name, but close.

The majority of readers, one might assume, are not able to carry on the process of identification in the same way at this point, if at all, and switch to the normal mode of identification with a character typical to first- and third-person narratives: in other words, the *you* is no longer perceived as directed at *me* the empirical reader of the moment, but rather at

the Reader, whose situation corresponds to ours only to the extent that he is allegedly reading the same novel we are. This is not to say that any sense of scandal or uncanniness will disappear with a reader's potential total identification with the *you*. We still have a narrative in which the narrator addresses a character in diegesis, or a character addresses a reader or character-reader understood to be on the level of extradiegesis, transgressions all the more troublesome because of the temporal simultaneity implied by the second-person pronoun. Nevertheless, what If on a winter's night a traveler has turned out to be, it seems, is a variant of Michel Butor's use of the second person in La Modification, which the author calls a "didactic narrative": a narrative in which a character-addressee has his own story told back to him.²³ Unlike Butor's novel, however, If on a winter's night a traveler has openly transplanted this dynamic to the extradiegetic realm, and moreover has tried to make us believe that it is reaching outward to the empirical, all through its insistent foregrounding of the act of reading and the path of speech. How are we to contain such a novel once it gets loose (much like those characters in Robbe-Grillet's stories who escape from a painting or a photograph) in our world?

A/The Reader Responds

The answer would seem to be that we can't. At this point, Calvino's novel has escaped the purview of criticism and forced itself fully into the empirical realm of readers. Which is to say that there is no way, really, to determine how and to what degree reader identification with the *you* will move forward after the reader becomes the Reader—that personage who falls in love with and eventually marries Ludmilla; who consults professor Uzzi-Tuzii for a translation of a novel fragment; who cringes at the humiliations Ludmilla's sister, Lotaria, inflicts on texts; who travels to meet the novelist Silas Flannery (a compelling analogue for Calvino himself); who tracks the mercurial counterfeiter-translator Ermete Marana ("Ermete," Italian for "Hermes") to the police-state Ataguitana to solve the mystery of the counterfeit novel-incipits that constitute the novel we are reading, If on a winter's night a traveler.

If there is a critical consensus, an opinion of how the book *should* be read, it is that identification in its fullest sense is impossible due to the eventual development of the Reader character, and that the foregoing chapters should be seen as an elaborate seduction, which corresponds to the larger theme of seduction and eros in the novel. The Reader and the Other Reader, Ludmilla, after all, consummate their relationship as if reading a book:

Lovers' reading of each other's bodies. . . . It starts at any point, skips, repeats itself, goes backwards, insists, ramifies in simultaneous and divergent messages, converges again, has moments of irritation, turns the page, finds its place, gets lost. A direction can be recognized in it, a route to an end, since it tends towards a climax, and with this end in view it arranges rhythmic phrases, metrical scansion, recurrence of motives. (156)

The question remains, however, whether or not an analogous consummation is affected by the empirical reader—or, if so, what the nature of this consummation is. If personal experience is any measure of how readers respond to second-person texts, I can say from my own dealings with the form, both writing and teaching it, that some readers do respond with what could be called “perfect” identification with the *you*. By “perfect” I don’t mean ideal or even gratifying: one fellow fiction-workshop participant was frankly offended and outraged that I, the author, would presume to “speak about her” in such an unflattering way, whereas I thought I was addressing the scoundrel of a character I had created. On another occasion, while discussing Charles Johnson’s second-person short story “Moving Pictures” with a group of students, I was surprised to find that one of them had sustained a similar identification: *you*, even though directed at a richly developed character, was read as *me*.

Are these readers “ideal readers,” as Ludmilla is described by critics and the novel itself? To answer this question, one must perhaps consult the empirical author, who is the only person who can say how he or she wants to be read. This journey out from under the cool and comfortable shadow of criticism and into the glare of real authors can get messy,

however. In describing, metaphorically, his own stance towards his novel, Calvino says that he has become “a more sadistic lover than ever”:

I constantly play cat and mouse with the reader, letting the reader briefly enjoy the illusion that he's free for a little while, that he's in control. And then I quickly take the rug out from under him; he realizes with a shock that he is not in control, that it is always I, Calvino, who is in total control of the situation.²⁴

Comments such as these, with their whiff of literary S&M and their comicbook-villain delivery (“It is I, Calvino!”), no doubt have something to do with “aggrieved” critical responses such as that offered by Ian Rankin, who considers Calvino's novel an exercise in authorial dominance and, what is more, a damaging assault on the idealized version of reader-response criticism. “What is Calvino doing here?” Rankin asks:

Quite simply, he is showing us the limitless power of the novelist over his audience. Having drawn us ineluctably into the narrative, he can do anything he likes with us, twisting our emotions around until, at the end, we emerge as though from a carnival, a carnival where another's hand has been on the control-levers of all the rides.²⁵

This, obviously, is a much darker vision of whatever kind of reader-response the novel does in fact elicit, and Rankin sets it off against the mostly positive implications of the reader's role in constructing fiction as articulated by critics such as Georges Poulet, for whom the reader “gains his experience by forgetting, foregoing himself; dying, so to speak, in order that the text may live.”²⁶ This experience, as far as Rankin sees it, is in this case gained at the expense of the reader and to the benefit of the author. “Calvino,” he says, “lays bare the relationship between author and reader not to break down the barriers but rather to reestablish his own supremacy, the real reader coming to realize his or her role as a willing puppet who will ‘die’ in order to gain” the experience Poulet describes.²⁷

Patricia Waugh, on the other hand, with whom Rankin also takes issue, sees the novel as a dramatization of Roland Barthes' famous announcement of the demise of the author: the

death of the author makes possible the birth of the reader.²⁸ Thus, for Waugh, If on a winter's night a traveler heralds that moment of self-actualization for reader-response methodology: the novel, she says, “addresses the reader in the second person and explicitly discusses the supremacy of his or her activity in realizing the text imaginatively.”²⁹

Rankin’s argument notwithstanding, we are forced to wonder whether or not this is indeed the case, at least somewhat, when we consider the representation of authors in the novel. The character-novelist Silas Flannery, whom many critics consider the voice of Calvino himself,³⁰ does envision a relationship with readers that is parasitic at best, and his experiences with Ludmilla the ideal reader illustrate the extent to which he exists apart from his “function” as author. For example, in the scene in which Flannery spies on Ludmilla, we see him wishing that he could produce the book she is reading:

At times I am gripped by an absurd desire: that the sentence I am about to write be the one the woman is reading at the same moment. The idea mesmerizes me so much that I convince myself that it’s true: I write my sentence hastily, get up, go to the window, train my spy-glass to check the effect of my sentence in her gaze, in the curl of her lips, in the shifts of her body in the deck chair. . . . (170)

It is through this authorial gaze, which is also a sexual gaze, that Flannery can conceive of an ideal text—that is, the book that Ludmilla creates through her reading, the book which “has as its aim the spiritual state of this woman in the deck chair framed by the lens of my spyglass” (169). Part of Flannery’s despair involves the realization that he cannot have Ludmilla the ideal reader, either sexually (as it turns out) or as a muse:

At times I convince myself that the woman is reading my true book, the one I should have written long ago, but will never succeed in writing, that this book is there, word for word, that I can see it at the end of my spyglass but cannot read what is written in it, cannot know what was written by that me who I have not succeeded and will never succeed in being. It’s no use sitting down again at my desk, straining to guess, to copy that true book of mine she is reading: whatever I

may write will be false, a fake, compared to my true book, which no one except her will ever read. (170).

The old metaphor of inspiration, it seems, no longer obtains; the muse-reader now creates for herself. But she has a power beyond even this, one more chilling to Flannery, as we see when he imagines Ludmilla turning the tables and spying on him:

And just as I watch her as she reads, suppose she were to train a spyglass on me while I write? I sit at the desk with my back to the window, and there, behind me, I feel an eye that sucks up the flow of the sentences, leads the story in directions that elude me. Readers are my vampires. I feel the throng of readers looking over my shoulder and seizing the words as they are set down on paper. I am unable to write is someone is watching me: I feel that what I am writing does not belong to me any more. I would like to vanish, to leave behind for that expectation lurking in their eyes the page stuck in the typewriter, or, at most, my fingers striking the keys. (170-1)

The idea of the reader, however much it fascinates him in the form of Ludmilla, is a burden for the author, a reminder of his powerlessness and the extent to which he is a mere functionary, a provider of words to be used by others. Readers are Flannery's "vampires," those famous icons of repressed sado-masochistic desire who transform the lifeblood of others into their own sustenance; they "throng" the desk of his imagination and usurp his role, leading his fiction, in control of him, and his only desire is to escape, "to vanish."

Ironically, Flannery gets his wish when he encounters Ludmilla in person, but it is not quite the escape he had hoped for. In fact, it is far worse, for it represents in another way the "uselessness" of authors to readers. Much like for the study of narratology, for Ludmilla the empirical author is irrelevant, less important than the text itself and the larger structures which govern and in some sense create it. When discussing with Ludmilla her first impression of Silas Flannery the actual person as opposed to the image his books project, the author asks Ludmilla, "My novels give you the idea of an ordinary person?" She replies:

"No, you see . . . The novels of Silas Flannery are something so well characterized . . . it seems they were already there before, before you wrote them, in all their details. . . . It's as if they passed through you, using you because you know how to write, since, after all, there has to be somebody to write them. . . . I wish I could watch you while you're writing, to see if it really is like that. . . ." (190)

Flannery understandably experiences "a stab of pain" upon hearing this: to Ludmilla, he is "nothing but an impersonal graphic energy, ready to shift from the unexpressed into writing an imaginary world that exists independently of me" (190). This prompts him to attempt on Ludmilla the only seduction apparently left in his power, a sexual one, which despite its comic appeal for the reader (as opposed to the Reader, who would be outraged) ends disastrously for the character-author: "I could easily make love with you," Ludmilla tells Flannery, "But this would . . . have nothing to do with the author Silas Flannery whose novels I read. . . . As I was explaining to you, you are two separate persons, whose relationships cannot interact" (191).

These humiliations of the actual author, his reduction to a function, are trebled by Lotaria, Ludmilla's sister. As many critics have observed, Lotaria seems to be an allegory for academic preoccupations of our time.³¹ When we first encounter her, it is in contrast to the Reader and Ludmilla, who read simply for pleasure. To be sure, the Reader's pursuit of reading is wrapped up in his sexual pursuit of Ludmilla, but the novel sanctions this conflation of literature with eros. Lotaria's mode of reading, on the other hand, the novel goes out of its way to impugn, to the extent that she appears the "anti-reader." Her treatment of one of the incipits, "Without fear of wind or vertigo," is less a reading than a maenadic assault on literature itself: the novel is read (in a university forum) and then "Events, characters, settings, impressions are thrust aside, to make room for the general concepts":

"The polymorphous-perverse sexuality . . ."

"The laws of market economy . . ."

"The homologies of the signifying structures . . ."

“Deviation and institutions . . .”

“Castration . . .” (91)

Aside from this reading/rendering, in which we discern psychoanalytic, marxist, structuralist and poststructuralist approaches, there is the literal rending of the text itself, which Lotaria and her peers have dismembered: “the Eurlo-Altaic department had only one copy,” she tells the disappointed Reader, “so we divided it up; the division caused some argument, the book came to pieces, but I really believe I captured the best part” (91). What for Lotaria constitutes the “best part” of a text is later revealed as literary criticism in all its banal violence. As she explains to Flannery, her method involves reducing a work of fiction to word-frequencies as scanned and compiled by a computer; these are then reassembled into a “pre-facto” critical statement which, as Malmgren puts it, “discovers only what it decided beforehand was already there.”³² Thus, from lists such as “blood, cartridge, belt, commander, do, have, immediately, it, life, seen, sentry, shots, spider, teeth, together, your,” Lotaria is able to conclude, “There’s no question: it’s a war novel” (187).

For the author himself, Silas Flannery, the agenda informing this appropriation and dismantling of a text may not be clear, but the underlying methodology is:

I see that my work serves her perfectly to demonstrate her theories, and this is certainly a positive fact—for the novels or for the theories, I don’t know which. From her very detailed talk, I got the idea of a piece of work being seriously perused, but my books seen through her eyes seem unrecognizable to me. I am sure this Lotaria . . . has read them conscientiously, but I believe she has read them only to find in them what she was already convinced of before reading them. (185)

Text, for Lotaria, is little more than pretext, used to confirm what she already believes about literature and society. She does not “forego” herself and “die” for the text, as Poulet would have it. Rather, she makes the text die for her, and in this sense she represents a form of reader-response mentioned neither by Poulet nor his adversary, Rankin, who in an assault

on the author roughly analogous to Lotaria's, dismisses her as a "grotesque caricature" of academics without exploring the idea that normal readers too can do violence to a text.³³

This violence, which JoAnn Cannon likens to "the violation of the text by a reader" invited by Borges' story "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," is mirrored and indeed encouraged by the "multiplication of spurious texts" in If on a winter's night a traveler.³⁴ The agent behind this multiplication is of course the counterfeiter-translator Ernes Marana, that representative of "Apocryphal Power" whose dream is to flood the world with spurious books, and of whom Ludmilla says, "whatever he touches, if it isn't already false, becomes false" (129, 152). It is through Marana that the novel-incipits are conflated or fabricated: "Leaning from a steep slope" and "Without fear of wind or vertigo," though manifestly different stories, are confused together on the level of authorial and national origin; "Outside the town of Malbork" and "Leaning from a steep slope," likewise manifestly different, are confused together on the level of character, with a Zwida and a Mr. Kauderer appearing in both fragments; and so on.

Taken together, these metaphors for the powerlessness of the author over the meaning and indeed identity of his or her text stand in stark contrast to the picture of the empirical author Calvino himself projects ("It is I, Calvino!"). Calvino's alleged double, Silas Flannery, is confronted by the ideal reader (Ludmilla) and the anti-reader (Lotaria), and in both cases he suffers a diminishment of self, as does his fiction. His texts are counterfeited and plagiarized by Marana literally, when they are not suffering similar treatment from Lotaria figuratively, and in the process he is reduced to a function, a conduit through which larger forces communicate with the world, as Ludmilla characterizes him.

Thus, Calvino's own rather startling comments notwithstanding, in his portrayal of Flannery we might wonder exactly on what side of the sado-masochism equation he has placed himself. Which author are we to believe? Calvino the actual author, or Silas his surrogate? This unanswerable question—unanswerable because it resides in the space separating the author who writes (Calvino) from the author who is written (Flannery)—at

long last returns us to the question of the reader versus the Reader. The distinction between these two beings, mentioned at the outset of this section in the form of “a/the reader,” presents a similar critical nonplus in the space designated by the “/.” Certainly, the novel does manufacture a complex of models and duplications that would seem to invite those of us in the unspecified “a” category to become the *you* directed at the Reader: indeed, “This book so far has been careful to leave open to the Reader who is reading the possibility of identifying himself with the Reader who is read” (141), and we see this not only in the temporary equivalence granted the empirical reader (here addressed in the capitalized form), but also in the many seductions, mirror-imagings and confusions of role and function dramatized on every level of the narrative, as discussed throughout this chapter.³⁵

But if the final question comes down to what the book wants us to do (as opposed to what we want to do with the book), or what the evolution of literature wants us to do with the book (as opposed to what the book wants to do with the evolution of literature), we find that all sides of this question are similarly compressed into an equivalence much like that attempted by the novel itself, an equivalence between texts and the world. To take the latter, the evolution of literature, as a first example, we see a distinct progression in our century whose linchpin is the relationship between author and reader. As Malmgren describes it, modernism inaugurates “a willingness or desire on the part of fictionists, for various culturological and epistemological reasons, to give the reader more latitude in interpretation, to transfer interpretive responsibilities to the reader.”³⁶ In the next stage, which Malmgren calls “paramodernist fiction,” the stakes established by modernism are raised: authors now write “fragmented and polymorphous narratives which readers must actively compose.”³⁷ This style of fiction, which Roland Barthes calls “writerly,” attempts nothing less than to make “a reader the producer of the text,” but ultimately renders the reader “intransitive” in the sense that he or she becomes a victim of that “pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of its text and its user, between its owner and its consumer, between its author and its reader.”³⁸ This sundering of the reader from the world takes a

curious turn with the arrival of postmodernism, which presents itself as a return of the author but is really something else. As Malmgren puts it, “postmodernist authors like Barth, Nabokov, Barthelme and Coover set about establishing an almost adversarial relation with their readers by cheerfully and ironically adopting an *author*-ial mask and parodying the role of the response-ible reader. The readerly relations enacted by postmodernist metafiction represent a kind of dead end for narrative.”³⁹

If on a winter's night a traveler, Malmgren argues, is the next logical step in this progression, a “way out of” the narrative cul-de-sac fiction has evolved itself into.⁴⁰ And the solution the novel offers, I would suggest, seems to be housed in the second person itself. The *you* is an overt invitation to interpret, to relate a text to oneself. At the same time, this *you* as experienced in text is inherently and irreducibly plural (as Calvino’s novel itself tries so hard to enact), and thus it encourages the act of interpretation in full knowledge of its own ambiguity. This kind of interpretation, I think, is what Barthes has in mind when he discusses the only way out from under the hammer-and-anvil of readerly or writerly texts:

To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it. Let us first posit the image of a triumphant plural, unimpoverished by any constraint of representation (of imitation). In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; . . .⁴¹

To be sure, Calvino’s novel cannot meet—ideally, at least—all the criteria proposed by Barthes; it is a representation, after all, and partakes of some of its constraints, not the least of which is authorial assertion, which Barthes so famously declared dead along with the idea of the author. But the novel is indeed “a network of lines that enlance,” “a network of lines that intersect,” as its incipits promise. We do “gain access to it by several entrances”: the

you, the characters with whom we identify in the conventional sense, it's simple appeal as story. The novel does have no beginnings, in the sense that it has no ends (which we see in the unanswered incipit "What story down there awaits its end?"). And, finally, there is no entrance "which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one," insofar as the authors, real and represented, in their mutual indecision leave open the possibility.

As far as the other question is concerned—what the book wants us to do (as opposed to what we want to do with the book)—it too depends finally on the indecision implied in a/the reader, an indecision which essentially unites the textual and empirical realms, real readers and authors with fictive ones. Rather than the writerly text which can't be read, and the readerly text which can't be written, If on a winter's night a traveler offers an alternative whose form is the plurality (not separation) implied by "/." Both authors and readers, empirical or textual, are needed to preserve this balance. As it bears on the author, Calvino asks, almost as if addressing Barthes and Foucault directly:

How is it possible to defeat not the authors but the functions of the author, the idea that behind each book there is someone who guarantees a truth in that world of ghosts and inventions by the mere fact of having invested in it his own truth, of having identified himself with that construction of words? (159)

As it bears on the reader, Calvino reminds us that his or her function is equally important:

Don't believe that the book is losing sight of you, Reader. The you that was shifted to the Other Reader can, at any sentence, be addressed to you again. You are always a possible you. Who would dare sentence you to the loss of the you, a catastrophe as terrible as the loss of the I. (147)

Notes

¹ Italo Calvino, If on a winter's night a traveler, trans. William Weaver. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1981), 3. All subsequent page references will refer to this edition and appear parenthetically in the main text.

² Fielding, Henry. The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling, eds. Martin Battestin and Fredson Bowers. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1974), 614.

³ Laurence Sterne, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), 72, 44, 169.

⁴ Brian McHale, Constructing Postmodernism (New York: Routledge, 1992.), 94.

⁵ Gérard Genette, Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980), 260. Italics mine.

⁶ Ibid., 259.

⁷ Ibid., 260.

⁸ Ibid. Italics mine.

⁹ See, for example, Raymond Carver's short story "Where I'm Calling From" in Where I'm Calling From: New and Selected Stories (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); or the "Cyclops" chapter in Joyce's Ulysses (New York: Vintage, 1990).

¹⁰ Genette's term, Narrative Discourse, 217.

¹¹ Joyce, Ulysses, 769.

¹² Genette, Narrative Discourse, 236.

¹³ For example, in Jorge Luis Borges' parable "The Draped Mirrors," in Dreamtigers, trans. Mildred Boyer (Austin, TX: U of Texas Press, 1993):

Islam asserts that on the unappealable day of judgment every perpetrator of the image of a living creature will be raised from the dead with his works, and he will be commanded to bring them to life, and he will fail, and be cast out with them into the fires of punishment. As a child, I felt before large mirrors that same horror of a spectral duplication or multiplication of reality. Their infallible and continuous functioning, their pursuit of my actions, their cosmic pantomime, were uncanny then, whenever it began to grow dark. One of my persistent prayers to God and my guardian angel was that I not dream about mirrors. (27).

See also Jorge Luis Borges, "The Mirror of Enigmas," Other Inquisitions, trans. Ruth L.C. Simms (Austin, TX: U of Texas Press, 1965). For an example of Borges' use of the theme of personal duplication, see "Borges and I," Labyrinths, eds. Donald A. Yates and James E.

Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964); and "The Other," The Book of Sand, trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978).

¹⁴ Carl D. Malmgren, "Romancing the Reader: Calvino's If on a winter's night a traveler," Review of Contemporary Fiction 6:2 (1986): 109.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Genette, Narrative Discourse, 236.

¹⁷ Ibid., 230.

¹⁸ Ibid., 234.

¹⁹ Gerald Prince, Dictionary of Narratology (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1987), 21.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Genette, Narrative Discourse, 222.

²² Ibid., 217.

²³ McHale, Constructing Postmodernism, 281n.

²⁴ Francine Du Plessis Gray, "Visiting Italo Calvino," New York Times Book Review, 21 June 1981: 23.

²⁵ Ian Rankin, "The Role of the Reader in Italo Calvino's If on a winter's night a traveler," Review of Contemporary Fiction 6:2 (1986): 129.

²⁶ Qtd. in Rankin, "The Role of the Reader," 124.

²⁷ Rankin, "The Role of the Reader," 129.

²⁸ Patricia Waugh, Metafiction (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), 134.

²⁹ Ibid., 42.

³⁰ See, for example, JoAnn Cannon, Italo Calvino: Writer and Critic (Ravenna, Italy: Longo Editore, 1981), 107.

³¹ See Rankin, "The Role of the Reader," 127-8; and Malmgren, "Romancing the Reader," 111.

³² Malmgren, "Romancing the Reader," 111.

33 Rankin, "The Role of the Reader," 128.

34 Cannon, Italo Calvino, 107. The Borges story Cannon takes as her example, which appears in Labyrinths (36-44), is a *locus classicus* of sorts for the concept of reader construction of texts. In it, the narrator presents two identical excerpts from two separate texts, one from Cervantes' Don Quixote, the other from the fictitious author Pierre Menard's version of the novel, which he has not copied or transcribed, but rather reproduced spontaneously (because all texts, especially Cervantes', are "inevitable": all one need be is immortal to duplicate a given text through trial and error [40-1]). Despite the fact that the two texts are literally identical, the narrator finds Menard's version "infinitely richer" to the extent that it exhibits a modern conception of history (43). As for the "respective" styles: "The archaic style of Menard—quite foreign, after all—suffers from a certain affectation. Not so that of his forerunner, who handles with ease the current Spanish of his time" (43).

35 It bears mentioning here that even this announced conflation of empirical reader with "Reader" does not include women readers, at least pronominally (e.g., "the possibility of identifying himself"). Women, it seems, are cast in the novel as "the Other Reader," as Ludmilla is, and given the role of "the Third Person necessary for the novel to be a novel" (141). This assignment, at least in terms of this study's equation of the third person with "the absent one" or communicative non-subject, no doubt deserves further inquiry, if it hasn't received it already.

36 Malmgren, "Romancing the Reader," 106.

37 Ibid.

38 Roland Barthes, S/Z, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 4.

39 Malmgren, "Romancing the Reader," 106.

40 Ibid.

41 Barthes, S/Z, 5.

CHAPTER 3

PYNCHON: YOU AS INTERFACE

It is difficult to imagine a novel more varied or comprehensive in its use of the second person than Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow. Much in the way it seems to exhaust the range of human experience—from sublime to ridiculous, sacred to profane, noble to ignoble, highbrow to lowbrow—it seems to exhaust all possible communicative trajectories involving the *you*, though curiously without ever introducing a narratorial *I*.

This alone, this exhaustion of the possibilities of second-person narrative, makes the novel an encyclopedia of sorts on the subject. But it is no Rosetta Stone. Rather, it is a challenge, not always friendly, to interpretation itself. As with other aspects of the novel, the use of second-person in Gravity's Rainbow has generated more controversy than accord. Where one critic sees a direct address to the reader, another sees an apostrophe directed at a character. Where one critic sees a character's interior monologue rendered in second-person, another sees mediation by the narrator. And the list goes on.

This chapter, therefore, in the spirit of the novel itself, will be as much an attempt to clarify the issue of second-person narrative in Gravity's Rainbow as it is an attempt to add to the confusion. Which is to say that the arguments and interpretations presented below are intended not as correctives or absolutes, but rather as alternatives—as offerings. Our first task will be to justify a critical mode—the one endorsed by this chapter—that refuses to make up its mind. Then, we will examine at length a subject sometimes “underinterpreted” in studies of the novel's use of second-person narrative: the narrator himself, the undeclared *I* in the novel's many communicative circuits. Along the way, we will apply our findings to

a selection of second-person passages from the novel, always with an eye towards expanding the range of options offered in past studies on the subject.

Indecision as Interpretive Ideal

If forced to choose a single theme that best describes Gravity's Rainbow, one might choose the theme of indecision. "Of course it happened. Of course it didn't happen," says Pynchon's narrator, summarizing how certain events will be recalled by the character Thanatz.¹ But this paradox, it seems, has not confined itself to a single character or even to the imagined world of the novel. Rather, Gravity's Rainbow, as any good piece of postmodern fiction should, has been able to project its own paradoxes into the real world, where they are less welcome. In May of 1974, for example, the year after Gravity's Rainbow was published, the Pulitzer committee was hopelessly split over whether or not to award the novel the prize for literature. Fiction jurors Alfred Kazin, Elizabeth Hardwick and Benjamin DeMott were unanimous in their selection, saying of the novel, "No work of fiction begins to compare in scale, originality and sustained interest with Mr. Pynchon's book." The advisory board of distinguished journalists, on the other hand, among them Vermont C. Royster of the Wall Street Journal, was less generous, calling the novel "obscene," "unreadable" and, famously, "turgid."² The result: no prize was awarded that year. So, of Gravity's Rainbow one might say, "Of course it won the Pulitzer. Of course it didn't win the Pulitzer."

But the novel's projection of indecision into the real world doesn't stop there. Far from it. On the level of folklore, we have the man himself, Thomas Ruggles Pynchon, Jr., whose reclusiveness rivals and perhaps eclipses that of J.D. Salinger—so much so that one literary journalist of the 1970s (John Calvin Batchelor, now a novelist) was inspired to conduct a missing-persons investigation of sorts, the findings of which could only be called sensational: Pynchon and Salinger, Batchelor concluded, now thoroughly enmeshed in a paranoid fantasy Pynchon himself might have authored, were in fact the same person! When

evidence of Pynchon's actual existence did finally surface (photos of the man at a friend's wedding), this theory collapsed, only to be replaced by Batchelor's equally sensational claim that the author himself was not solely responsible for the texts bearing his name, but instead part of a literary cabal that included William Gass, Grace Paley, Donald Barthelme and, of course, J.D. Salinger. These were the writers, Batchelor argued, behind Gravity's Rainbow, a novel too vast and comprehensive to be produced by one man. To these theories we may add the numerous sightings and alleged encounters, none verifiable, that have fueled the question, "Who is Thomas Pynchon?" which for some, apparently, has led to a deeper philosophical nonplus: "Of course he exists. Of course he doesn't exist."³

A related question arises: Are these fables, these conflicting scraps of Pynchon lore, unreasonable? If so, it is not in defiance of the novel itself, which seems to encourage them. Life imitates art in Gravity's Rainbow, often shockingly. Filmmaker Gerhardt von Göll, for example, creates a masterpiece of Allied propaganda in which a fictitious squadron of African rocket troops, the Schwarzkommando, are presented as operating secretly within the heart of the failing Reich, under the guidance of the S.S. This film, a bit of psychological warfare aimed at the Nazi Aryan dream and its fear of blackness, is smuggled into Holland and planted at a bombed-out rocket battery, to be "found" and made public by the Dutch underground. When, to the astonishment of Allied intelligence, it turns out that there is an actual Schwarzkommando operating in Germany, von Göll is elated. Whereas Pynchon's Oedipa Mass, in The Crying of Lot 49, poses the question "*Shall I project a world?*"⁴ but shuns the implications of the answer, the megalomaniac von Göll takes the next step: he becomes convinced that his film has brought the Schwarzkommando into being. Thus, the barrier between reality and fiction, in Pynchon's "Zone" at least, is somewhat permeable: "interpiercing," as the novel would put it; or, as in Lot 49, an interface where "another world's intrusion into this one" becomes possible.⁵ It should come as no surprise, then, that Pynchon's own existence has been subject to similar interpiercings of fact and fantasy. After all, he himself has done little to discourage us.

Indecision and projection. When at last we arrive at critical interpretation of Gravity's Rainbow, which in an ideal world ought to be an issue apart from the blind alleys of Pynchon lore, we find an equal if not more intense dynamic. On the level of what might be called "popular aesthetics," we have comments of the sort offered by novelist John Gardner, who lumps Gravity's Rainbow in with those works of fiction that, in due time, will "die of intellectual blight, academic narrowness, or fakery."⁶ This comes as little surprise in a book as unfriendly to postmodernism in general as Gardner's On Moral Fiction, whose title says something of its interpretive foundation. But nor do positive reviews on this level tell us much about Gravity's Rainbow. New York Times reviewer Christopher Lemann-Haupt's comment "Fantastically large" is a good example, suggesting as it does the bewildered, inarticulate feeling one has after reading the novel. This is not to say that either of these men's interpretations of Gravity's Rainbow is wholly superficial or even wrong. Both Gardner and Lemann-Haupt do, of course, offer analysis beyond the remarks mentioned here (though not much in Gardner's case), and one has to consider the context in which such analysis is offered: a general assessment of a type of literature, a review. Nevertheless, there is often a suspicion, lurking beneath this analysis, that attempts to interpret the novel are ultimately subject to the kind of failure its characters themselves suffer in their own various searches for "the" truth—both because of their own limited capacities and motives, and because of the elusive nature of truth itself.

"The Schwarzgerät is no Grail, Ace"; so says the character Slothrop's "dumb idling heart" (364). But this does not stop him from pursuing the mysterious "blackapparatus," the one-of-a-kind V-2, serial number 00000, which in the novel functions as a promise of "the" truth. Nor, apparently, has it stopped many critics of Gravity's Rainbow, who seem to be pursuing similar Grails. Here again, this time on the level of serious scholarly interpretation, we find another example of the novel projecting its own world into ours, metaphorically or otherwise. "Wherever we open the novel," says Brian McHale, "we find images of our own behavior as readers and critics": Pointsman's dream of uncovering the truth through

Pavlovian inquiry, whose goal is a “true mechanical explanation” for all human behavior (89); Thanatz seeking the truth in whip scars, which he reads “as a gypsy reads a palm” (484); Säure Bummer, “an adept at papyromancy,” seeking it “through contemplating the way people roll reefers” (442); “psychometrist” Ronald Cherrycoke seeking it in the emanations he picks up from personal effects (146); Tchitcherine seeking it in his quest for the mysterious Kirghiz Light, an addiction to “Holy-Center-Approaching” he later imposes on his quest for half-brother Oberst Enzian (508); Enzian, in turn, seeking it in the “text” of occupied Germany, a “Text, to be picked to pieces, annotated, explicated” (520).⁷

All of these pursuits, McHale argues, should serve as “didactic, even monitory models” that “teach us how hazardous the business of interpretation can be, how prone we are to misread.”⁸ But historically this hasn’t been the case in criticism of Gravity’s Rainbow, and nowhere is this more evident than in analyses of the novel’s use of second-person narrative. By 1985, for example, McHale and others were beginning to notice a tendency, fairly widespread, to interpret the majority of second-person passages in the novel as authorial address in its most conventional form. “Flying in the face of everything we know about the obliquity and indeterminacy of narrative communication,” McHale then wrote, “Pynchon criticism has for the most part persisted in assuming that the empirical author directly addresses the empirical reader from the pages of Gravity’s Rainbow.”⁹

More recently, this “author addresses reader” assumption has been augmented by a wider range of possibilities, each compelling in its own way, but more often than not these alternatives are presented as critical certitude in all its tyranny. Take, for instance, various readings of the “Advent vespers” episode, in which Roger Mexico and Jessica Swanlake attend a church service in Kent:

Come then. Leave your war awhile, paper or iron war, petrol or flesh, come in with your love, your fear of losing, your exhaustion with it. All day it’s been at you, coercing, jiving, claiming your belief in so much that isn’t true. Is that who you are,

that vaguely criminal face on your ID card, its soul snatched by the government camera as the guillotine shutter fell [...] (134)

On the one hand, critics such as Douglas Fowler have interpreted the second-person narrative in this and similar passages conventionally, as the author addressing the reader: "Pynchon . . . shares its meaning only with us, just as a poet does, and his characters have no contact with the images and experiences he creates."¹⁰ On the other, there are those critics who argue that the Advent vespers scene is in fact focalized through a character—or "mediated," as Frank McConnell calls it¹¹—the result being a form of interior monologue or self-address. The character of choice among most critics who argue for this interpretation is Roger Mexico, especially to the extent that much of the episode seems to reflect his personality and concerns: Mexico is the novel's "Dour Young Man," the "cheaply nihilistic" statistician who claims "My mother is the war" and yet, despite his ability to rationalize death and loss in the form of equations, desperately fears losing Jessica (40, 58, 39). There are many passages in the novel to illustrate Roger's exhaustion with war, and equally as many to illustrate both his love for Jessica and his fear of losing her, making him a compelling candidate indeed for addressee in the Advent vespers episode.¹²

However, as McHale has pointed out, this hypothesis is an expensive one. First, it seems to exclude the possibility of narrative apostrophe—that is, the narrator addressing a character. Second, and most problematic, is the question that either of these hypotheses raises: If we are dealing with self-address or narratorial apostrophe, then which character is the object of either of these forms of address?¹³ Not surprisingly, other hypotheses have been suggested to solve this interpretive crux, most of them involving the idea of combined discourse. Scott Sanders, for example, reads the Advent vespers passage as focalized through both Jessica and Roger, while critics such as Joseph Slade and Craig Werner read it as focalized, either simultaneously or in alternation, through both the characters and the narrator.¹⁴ For McHale, all of these hypotheses are plausible, but not only does each work to the exclusion of the others when presented as "the" true reading of the passage, they also

leave out another option, one seldom encountered in criticism of the novel: that is, the possibility that Jessica alone is the character through which the episode is focalized.¹⁵

Faced with so many interpretive options, all compelling to one degree or another, how do we approach second-person passages such as these with any critical certitude? Again, the answer seems to lie in the novel itself—or at least a possible answer. For all their questing after the truth, most of the central characters in Gravity's Rainbow, in one way or another, ultimately abandon their quests. Slothrop, for example, after seeking through a labyrinth of connections and cause-and-effect chains, gives up his search for the S-gerät and its promise of the truth. Interestingly, his abandonment of this quest involves a dispersion of his own identity, a typical postmodern theme that undermines the notion of Self as present, verifiable, there to be seen and known—true, in other words. “Slothrop,” the narrator tells us, “has begun to thin, to scatter,” until at last he is “Scattered all over the Zone” (509, 712). By the conclusion of the novel, only Seaman Bodine “can still see Slothrop as any sort of integral creature any more. Most of the others gave up long ago trying to hold him together, even as a concept” (740). Likewise, Tchitcherine abandons his quest to find his half-brother Enzian, whom the Russian imagines as an alter-identity he must destroy, perhaps to integrate his own identity. Though “haunted” during the first part of the novel, convinced like Slothrop that “*everything is connected*” and thus determined to find a truth-center of some sort, the truth of his own being, by the end Tchitcherine is indifferent to this quest (703). When he and Enzian finally encounter each other, there is no fight to the death, not even a recognition: “Certainly not the first time a man has passed his brother by, at the edge of an evening, often forever, without knowing it” (735).

All of these abandonments, these final indifferences to the truth, point towards a critical mode that seems appropriate for analyzing the novel. They represent a refusal to play the game, which metaphorically is the game of interpretation, and Gravity's Rainbow is fairly explicit about the value of this strategy. We see it articulated apropos the double-agent Katje, who quits her assignment spying on Blicero's rocket squadron:

Indeed, why did she leave Schußstelle 3? We are never told why. But now and then, players in a game will, lull or crisis, be reminded how it is, after all, really play—and be unable then to continue in the same spirit. . . . Nor need it be anything sudden, spectacular—it may come in gentle—and regardless of the score, the number of watchers, their collective wish, penalties they or the Leagues may impose, the player will, walking deliberately, perhaps with Katje's own tough isolate's shrug and stride, say *fuck it* and quit the game, quit it cold. . . . (107)

Here we have the Pynchonian ideal of “meta-solutions—knocking over the chessboard, shooting the referee,” or simply refusing to play, as Katje does (102). It is this ideal that McHale advocates when analyzing such second-person passages as the Advent vespers scene, a practice he calls “metareading”: “Pynchon compels us to reflect on our own critical practices, inviting us to become metareaders, readers of our own (and others') readings—and, more to the point, of our own inevitable *misreadings*.”¹⁶ Hence my caution here in choosing indecision as the novel's main theme. “Choosing indecision” is an oxymoron Gravity's Rainbow seems to force on us. So in the same way that the Pulitzer never awarded seems the prize most appropriate for the novel (a metasolution that might have tickled Pynchon himself), “metareading” seems most appropriate as a critical approach to it.

But if we are indeed doomed to misread the novel, one might ask, why even hazard an interpretation in the first place? The question is a tricky one, and it is doubtful it will be answered here. McHale identifies two distinct critical approaches to Gravity's Rainbow, both reflected in the novel itself: the first, “paranoid reading,” moves forward under the belief (Tchitcherine's) that “everything is connected”; the second, “anti-paranoid reading,” moves forward under the opposite belief—“where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long” (434).¹⁷ Both of these modes, however, have their drawbacks: the first because of its need for certitude, which is so often bought at the expense of equally plausible alternatives; the second because it runs the risk of short-circuiting the evolution of interpretation by leaping ahead to a metasolution before the entire

range of options has been exhausted. Anti-paranoid reading, in other words, is a useful metasolution only to the extent that it encompasses as many compelling hypotheses as possible. After all, if the value of metareading is that it “solicits our participation at a higher, reflexive level of reading,” if the point of an intentionally indecisive interpretive mode is to demonstrate how the novel is “irreducibly ambiguous” and from there examine our own habits as readers and critics, are we not also obliged to fully articulate this ambiguity?¹⁸

All this is to say that, in the true spirit of indecision, both paranoid and anti-paranoid modes of reading are necessary when interpreting Gravity's Rainbow. The shortcomings of the former are obvious; those of the latter are less so, but to the degree that it encourages an interpretive nonplus, anti-paranoid reading can in fact establish itself as yet another form of critical tyranny. We must not, in other words, follow Katje and simply say, “*fuck it* and quit the game cold”—certainly not before we’ve learned all the rules. Nor must we supplant the game with an “anti-game” whose ideal contours reveal nothing of its opposite. To do either would be to follow the villainous Pointsman, “who can only possess the zero and the one”; Pointsman who “cannot [...] survive anyplace in between” (55).

So, for the remainder of this chapter, we will play both games at once and attempt to “survive in between,” all in hopes of liberating a few more interpretive options from what McHale calls the “stranglehold of imposed certitude,”¹⁹ as well as from the potentially deadening effects of the premature metasolution.

Pynchon's Narrator

Controversies over the identity of the second person in Gravity's Rainbow implicitly involve the other half of its narrative armature: the narrator himself. The nature and identity of this narrator seem to have inspired an equal amount of disagreement among critics, but less often is this disagreement presented in relation to the novel's many second-person passages. More frequently, the identity of the *you* is treated separately from that of the undeclared *I* in the novel's many communicative circuits, and it is perhaps this apparent

“vacuum” of identity on the part of the narrator that has discouraged the connection. This is to say that, overall, there is an imbalance in analyses of the narrator that mirrors analyses of his addressees: instead of exploring the full range of narrative possibilities and imagining that Gravity’s Rainbow, at one time or another, exploits them all, more often we find the narrator horribly circumscribed, either by convention or simple interpretive convenience.

To begin with, we have those critics who insist on aligning the narrator of Gravity’s Rainbow with Pynchon himself, as if every instance of direct address in the novel (or nearly all) were the empirical author aiming at the empirical reader.²⁰ Certainly, some instances of second-person address could be said to have this effect, especially the few that seem to invoke the situation of reading itself. But this hardly applies to the majority of second-person passages in the novel. Moreover, it uncovers assumptions about narrative communication that have long been under attack from structuralist and poststructuralist quarters. Of the latter, we will say little in this section, except to mention that, for critics such as Alec McHoul and David Wills, the obsession with Pynchon the man points to a serious fault in analysis of his work. In virtually every study devoted to Pynchon (including, to some extent, this one), “The mysterious author is mentioned—while the category of author is left unproblematic.”²¹ When we read these studies, McHoul and Wills add, we

encounter countless repetitions of the mysteriousness of the actual person called ‘Thomas Ruggles Pynchon’ if, that is, we are told, there is such a person. This obsession with the person or its absence is often posed as a threat: as though the possible absence of an empirical author’s life and character might spell the end of the critical project.²²

For McHoul and Wills, the idea that there is a discoverable truth or “Grand Unifying Theme” in Pynchon’s work goes hand in hand with the “obsession” involving his identity.²³ It is as though concern over the truth of Pynchon’s own “life and character,” mysterious as they are, has boiled over into criticism of his work, the implication in both cases being that

there is a discoverable truth to be had, if only we read more closely. (And who knows what dreams of interrogating Pynchon the man have accompanied this hope?) In short, what McHoul and Wills find lacking in this obsession with Pynchon the author is its dependence on a type of logocentrism: that implied source of truth in the form of an author who, if he would just speak up, could guarantee the meaning of his work; an author who, despite his literal and intentional absence, has nonetheless been “presumed, or made, to speak” in a way that exposes a preoccupation of Western metaphysics—the “living presence” behind representation.²⁴ The result, of course, is a body of criticism that by today’s standards appears stunted: seldom do we find in studies of Pynchon, say McHoul and Wills, contemporary critical theory as practiced by Derrida or Barthes, even though Pynchon’s work so compellingly “transgresses in a way prefiguring poststructural thinking.”²⁵

Aside from these concerns, which we will return to later, are those voiced by structuralist poetics. For McHale, and for the field of narratology in general, the idea of author-as-narrator is entirely irrelevant. According to the logic of fiction, the empirical author is not a participant in the fictional world he or she creates, however much this prohibition is overlooked by critics. Rather, this author “communicates not directly but *indirectly*, using the entire resources of the text, and delegating his or her communicative acts to surrogates: narrators and characters.”²⁶ The implied corollary of this formula bears on the empirical reader, whose own identification with elements of the text is indirect as well. Readers can no more directly participate in the world of the text than narrators can directly participate in the world of readers. Any notion, then, that Pynchon himself is addressing the reader or a character in the text can, by this logic, be dismissed, which narrows the range of interpretive possibilities as far as the narrator’s identity is concerned. On the other hand, at the far extreme of the heterocosm, we have the intradiegetic narrator: that is, a narrator who tells a story from within *the* story, either to a specified or an unspecified audience. This type of narrator, too, has been “empirically ruled out” by McHale, “for the narrator of Gravity’s Rainbow, whatever else ‘he’ might be, does not seem to be a personified character, one who

might plausibly share the same narrated world with the novel's other characters."²⁷ Thus, by ruling out both extremes of the heterocosm (the empirical and the intradiegetic), the only remaining possibility is that the narrator of Gravity's Rainbow is an unpersonified narrator who speaks from outside the "narrated world" he describes.

These interdictions, obviously, the first of which we will follow for argument's sake, hinge not only on the concept of narrative level, but also on the concept of personification. Conventional intradiegetic narrators, for example, are inhabitants of the fictive world they describe, subject to its laws and limits, and therefore unlikely to wield the omniscience or omnipresence typical of third-person narratives. Rather, they will wield an *I* and all that pronoun implies: physical existence, a location in time and space, a historical context—in short, all those things we associate with the human subject.²⁸ The intradiegetic narrator, in this way constrained by the demands of narrative realism, is therefore also unlikely to exhibit any awareness of his own status as a fictional character (though again postmodern fiction in particular is known for such transgressions of narrative level). Thus, we have canonical examples such as that mentioned in Chapter 1: Odysseus, who becomes an intradiegetic narrator in Books IX-XII of the Odyssey when the poet steps aside, as it were, and lets the hero himself deliver his tale to the Phaiakian court. Or, as in the case of Conrad's Heart of Darkness, the proportion of extradiegetic to intradiegetic can be more dramatically lopsided, reducing the former to the status of narrative frame (Marlow, of course, is an intradiegetic narrator only by virtue of this frame, which logically must contain the tale he tells). The outer limit of this progression would seem to involve those narratives in which the extradiegetic frame is concealed altogether: an example would be Raymond Carver's short story "Where I'm Calling From," in which the character-narrator delivers his story without any apparent extradiegetic mediation whatsoever.

But here the definition itself breaks down: what, after all, is the difference between inside and outside when the latter appears to vanish from the text? Does intradiegetic become extradiegetic? Does the character-narrator, simply by telling a tale, however simultaneous it

might be with his or her lived experience, nonetheless establish the same dual ontology we find in conventional narratives? Or has the category of narrator (as opposed to McHoul and Wills' idea of the "category of author") itself become too problematic to fit comfortably within the confines of traditional narratological paradigms? If so, is another form of narrative ontology needed to account for this apparent compression of levels?

It is into the gaps raised by these questions that postmodern fiction so often inserts itself, frequently to the dismay of critics. One method of defusing these questions is simply to continue insisting on the stability and impermeability of narrative level: a narrator is either in diegesis, or outside of it. All else can then be labeled as narrative "transgression," as McHale and others call it.²⁹ To illustrate, if we categorize the many circuits of narrative address used in Gravity's Rainbow, we find two in particular that transgress the boundaries between narrative level. The one, which involves an extradiegetic narrator "pretending" to address an empirical reader in what McHale calls an "upward violation of narrative level," will be examined later; the other, those cases of narrative "apostrophe" in which the extradiegetic narrator directly addresses an intradiegetic character, a case of "downward violation," is especially difficult to analyze, simply because the novel so stubbornly resists the very idea of boundaries, narrative or otherwise.³⁰

If nothing else, Gravity's Rainbow is an assault on traditional concepts of narrative level, not to mention narrative persona, and we see the first symptoms of this assault in various analyses of the novel's use of free indirect discourse, a communicative circuit that poses much the same interpretive problems as second-person address. Jacqueline Smetak, for example, has argued that Gravity's Rainbow is written largely in free indirect discourse, with the narrator's voice often hopelessly entangled with that of the characters.³¹ McHale, on the other hand, excludes this narrative mode from the novel ("in the strict sense") because it is written almost exclusively in present tense: "The main formal criterion for free indirect discourse is the back-shifting of the present-tense verbs to conform with the past-tense verbs of the narrative context."³² Free indirect discourse, in other words, because it must bear

traces of the narration, will typically feature the usual asynchrony between *récit* and *histoire*, such as in the following, from Eliot's Middlemarch:

Dorothea, with all her eagerness to know the truths of life, retained very childlike ideas about marriage. She felt sure that she would have accepted the judicious Hooker, if she had been born in time to save him from that wretched mistake he made in matrimony: or John Milton when his blindness had come on; or any of the other great men whose odd habits it would have been glorious piety to endure; but an amiable and handsome baronet, who said 'Exactly' to her remarks even when she expressed uncertainty, — how could he affect her as a lover? The really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it.³³

In this passage, the presence of the narrator is established by virtue of the past-tense verbs, a marker of the “narrating instance” or speech on the level of extradiegesis. The presence of the character Dorothea Brooke is implied in judgments we can safely attribute to her based on our knowledge of her personality, such as the husband-father ideal she projects on Casaubon. Taken together, these aspects of the passage equal free indirect discourse, or at least a baseline definition of it.³⁴ However, under the same definition, Gravity's Rainbow is denied this narrative mode, and we find (not for the first time) that this interdiction derives its force from ontological assumptions basic to narratology, this one unfolding on the axis of time. Because the novel presumes to speak in the present tense, it takes away from us one of the more reliable signs of extradiegetic narration, forcing us to look elsewhere for proof that the narrator, as McHale argues, is not an inhabitant of the world he describes (i.e., is not intradiegetic). Technically, by virtue of his present-tense narration, he inhabits this world temporally (or at least on a narrative level temporally indistinguishable from that of the events of the novel), and later we will examine ways in which he could be said to inhabit it spatially. But for now we might look at how the interdiction against free indirect discourse, based as it is on the integrity of narrative level, can lead to the same sort of underreadings

McHale criticizes. For example, in the following passage, which McHale calls a “completely unequivocal” instance of character self-address or “interior dialogue,”³⁵ we can construct an equivocal reading simply by reintroducing the narrator’s voice:

Slothrop’s dumb idling heart sez: The Schwarzgerät is no Grail, Ace, that’s not what the G in Imipolex G stands for. And you are no knightly hero. The best you can compare with is Tannhäuser, the Singing Nincompoop—you’ve been under one mountain at Nordhausen, been known to sing a song or two with uke accompaniment, and don’tcha feel you’re in a sucking marshland of sin out here, Slothrop? maybe not the same thing that William Slothrop, vomiting away a good part of 1630 away over the side of that *Arabella*, meant when he said “sin.” . . . But what you’ve done is put yourself on somebody else’s voyage—some Frau Holda, some Venus in some mountain—playing her, its, game . . . you know that in some irreducible way it’s an evil game. You play because you have nothing better to do, but that doesn’t make it right. And where is the Pope whose staff’s gonna bloom for you? (364)

To take this passage as interior dialogue in its strictest sense, as the reported thought of Slothrop, is indeed an easy way to sidestep the common crux of free indirect discourse: whose thoughts are whose? (Which, nonetheless, mirrors the crux we find in questions of second-person address: who is speaking to whom?) But this is done at the expense of certain contextual features, not to mention other possibilities of narrative voice. To begin with, in the scene from which this passage is drawn, Slothrop is delirious, in the grips of some water-borne infection and suffering “hallucinations” and “fever-dreams” (364). In other words, he’s incapacitated in a way that might affect his thinking and reason, which would make this passage suspect as a form of realistically transcribed thought akin to Molly’s interior monologue in *Ulysses*. Beyond that, what makes an interior-dialogue reading of the passage even more problematic is that it obliges us to attribute every thought, along with all the information presented in the passage, to Slothrop himself, when it is

unclear at best whether or not he indeed knows this information. There is little evidence, for example, to suggest that Slothrop knows details about his ancestor William as intimate as those we find in the passage. Likewise, whether or not Slothrop knows the details of the Tannhäuser myth remains unclear throughout the novel. When we first encounter this myth, during the initial Nordhausen episode, it is related to Slothrop not in terms of reported thought, but rather as intuition: Slothrop knows the Tannhäuser myth “in the way you know *someone is there*” (299). It is an undefined sense or presence that, because he cannot articulate it himself, the narrator must articulate for him. Another instance in which we find this intuition of Slothrop’s is in his pursuit of the mysterious Imipolex G, also mentioned in the above passage, though typically Slothrop’s assessment of it is far less rational:

The fear balloons again inside his brain. It will not be kept down with a simple Fuck You. . . . A smell, a forbidden room, at the bottom edge of his memory. He can’t see it, can’t make it out. Doesn’t want to. It is allied with the Worst Thing.

He knows what the smell has to be: [...] though he has never come across any of the stuff among the daytime coordinates of his life, still, down here, back here in the warm dark, among the early shapes where the clocks and calendars don’t mean too much, he knows that what’s haunting him now will prove to be the smell of Imipolex G. (286)

This “haunting,” the psychic residue of Lazlo Jamf’s experiments on “Baby Tyrone” Slothrop, represents the irrational or subconscious element of the adult Slothrop’s quest, which he doesn’t abandon until much later in the novel. Thus, at this point at least, it seems more psychologically consistent to imagine that he is operating on the level of intuition. Taken in this light, the speech tag “Slothrop’s dumb idling heart sez” is more than simply a colorful metonymy; it is also a marker of intuition or foreboding, much in the way a person is often said to know or suspect something “in his heart” rather than his mind. The dualism here, a familiar enough literary device, implies distinct ways of thinking or perceiving. As such, it is an analogue of free indirect discourse to the extent that it involves two voices, one

of which by definition must be articulated by the narrator. The dynamic here is useful for analyzing the instances of second-person address in the passage, especially to the extent that it points towards a narrative posture fairly common to the form. Michel Butor, whose La Modification was perhaps the first second-person novel to receive widespread critical attention, describes this dynamic as follows:

the use of the second person . . . can be characterized in the novel in these terms:
the one to whom his own story is told.

It's because there is someone to whom his own story is told, something about him that he doesn't know, or at least not yet on the level of language, that there can be a narrative in the second person. . . .³⁶

Predictably, though, and perhaps appropriately, the “intuition” reading of the “dumb idling heart” passage doesn't fit neatly into Butor's paradigm, mainly because of the ambiguities of voice. How, for instance, are we to take the word “dumb” as used in the speech tag? Is it meant to be understood in the sense of “mute” or in its colloquial sense, “stupid” or “foolish”? The former would seem to support the hypothesis of intuition: Slothrop's heart is dumb in the sense that it can't speak itself, and therefore the narrator must speak for it. The latter, on the other hand, given the psychological tone of the passage, is equally appealing and the more likely, but it raises the question: Who is making this judgment? Slothrop? If so, we are forced to acknowledge that he may be less incapacitated than the context seems to suggest, or that he is experiencing one of those deliriums, common enough in literature if not everyday life, in which truth is revealed. This interpretation, however, while it moves the passage towards interior dialogue on the context level, at the same time moves it towards free indirect discourse on the level of narrative mechanics. If Slothrop is chiding his intuition in the form of his “dumb” heart, it is being reported in the speech tag itself, which occurs on the supposedly extradiegetic level of the narrator.

Here again, the interdiction against free indirect discourse would oblige us to attribute the judgment “dumb” to the narrator, but this in turn generates another interpretive crux. The tag

“sez”—along with “that” (as used in “that *Arabella*” or “that William”), “Nincompoop,” “Ace,” and “don’tcha”—is generally identified as one of the speech mannerisms typical to Slothrop, which for McHale serve as evidence that the passage is Slothrop’s interior dialogue. This, as McHale admits, is “problematic” because the tag exists “*outside* the presumed interior-discourse passage.”³⁷ No doubt this problem, which essentially involves the barrier between inside and outside, deserves more than the parenthetical treatment McHale gives it, for it raises the possibility of the narrator taking on the dialect of a character, either as a function of free indirect discourse or for some other reason. Thus, McHale’s separation of interior (character’s thoughts) and exterior (narrator’s speech tag) seems to sabotage itself to the extent that, if one insists that the passage after the attribution is Slothrop’s interior dialogue, then the “outside” attribution itself must, by default, be the narrator’s voice, forcing us to allow that the narrator can adopt the speech mannerisms of the characters at will—that is, of course, unless we allow the possibility that Slothrop, in his delirious self-address, is including self-attributions in the third-person as well.

Not surprisingly, this hypothesis is not as far-fetched as it might seem, as we shall soon see. But now, we must reconcile the above reading with yet another interdiction in the form of a definition. On the sole grounds of lacking a back-shifting of tenses, it is difficult to disqualify Slothrop’s “dumb idling heart” passage as an example of free indirect discourse, especially to the extent that doing so forces us to accept McHale’s reading of the passage as interior dialogue. However, technically speaking, free indirect discourse is distinguished from regular or “tagged” indirect discourse both by the speech tag itself, which does not appear in the former, and by the latter’s “more or less literal fidelity” to the “thoughts or utterances” of a character.³⁸ The first part of this definition seems immediately to exclude the passage from the category of free indirect discourse. But again, the grounds for this are unsatisfyingly formal: as with the back-shifting of verb tenses, the speech tag is a reliable sign of the narrator’s presence or (more precisely) the situation of narrating. And yet the former is given as evidence of free indirect discourse while the latter disqualifies it as such?

As for the second part of the definition, it moves indirect discourse towards the realm of interior dialogue, which essentially is a form of direct discourse. The “literal fidelity” of indirect discourse, in other words, makes it more a type of close paraphrasing than the mixture of character’s and narrator’s thought we encountered in the example from Middlemarch. We see this fidelity in Gerald Prince’s illustration of the term: through the operation of indirect discourse, the direct discourse sentence “ ‘I have killed my father,’ cried out Oedipus’ becomes ‘Oedipus cried out that he had murdered his father.’ ”³⁹

Here we seem to have the bare-minimum distinction as formulated by Plato: that between mimesis or reported speech on the one hand, and diegesis or narratized speech on the other. This is hardly adequate to account for the apparent mingling of voices we find in the “dumb idling heart” passage, especially when we take into account one of the supposedly definitive features of free indirect discourse: that is, that “it manifests at least some of the features of the character’s enunciation.”⁴⁰ As we have seen, the passage is full of these features: “sez,” “that,” “Nincompoop,” “Ace.” But at the same time, these features are not unambiguously attributable either to Slothrop or the narrator, as the “sez” speech tag alone would seem to demonstrate. And if the narrator can use this speech mannerism of Slothrop’s, why can’t he use the others? Moreover, if the narrator can adopt these mannerisms at any time, how do we know where the narrator leaves off and the character begins? Because of this ambiguity, one could argue that the narrator in the “dumb idling heart passage” is parodying Slothrop, poking fun at him in his own language; or, one could argue as persuasively that the passage reflects both the narrator’s consciousness and Slothrop’s. Whatever the case, it seems clear that simple formal definitions of free indirect and indirect discourse are insufficient for analyzing this and similar passages in the novel. Either contextual features sabotage the definitions, or the definitions sabotage contextual features. So, of Gravity’s Rainbow one might say, “Of course it’s a novel written largely in free indirect discourse. Of course it’s not a novel written largely in free indirect discourse.”

Yet another alternative, mentioned above, involves the use of self-attribution in the third person, though this option too is difficult to reconcile with contextual issues in the “dumb idling heart” passage. Nevertheless, we do find cases in the novel in which a character could be understood as using this type of self-address. Take, for instance, the scene in which Klaus Närrish is about to be captured by Tchitcherine: “No, Klaus, don’t drift away, please, not onto dreams of some kindly Soviet interrogation that will end in some ermine bed, some vodka-perfumed stupor, you know that’s foolish” (518).⁴¹ Or, the scene in which Horst Achtfaden reflects on his imprisonment aboard the German “Toiletship” *Rücksichtslos*: “You can’t swim upstream, not under the present dispensation anyhow, all you can do is attach the number to it and *suffer*, Horst, fella” (452). Both of these examples, taken in context, have a self-reflexive quality about them, an intimacy typical to what might be called the “specular second person,” such as when we look into a mirror and say things like, “You handsome devil” or “You gorgeous creature.” This specular quality is most apparent with Achtfaden, who is literally locked in an officers’ latrine walled in mirrors: “Achtfaden here, shrugging at all his mirror-to-mirror replications chaining out to port and starboard” (453). Add to this the “reported speech” conversation Achtfaden carries on with himself at one point, and you have a strong case for the specular second person hypothesis:

“Do you find it a little schizoid,” aloud to all the Achtfaden fronts and backs, “breaking a flight profile up into segments of responsibility? It was half bullet, half arrow. *It* demanded this, we didn’t. So. Perhaps you used a rifle, a radio, a typewriter. Some typewriters in Whitehall, in the Pentagon, killed more civilians than our little A4 could ever have hoped to. You are either alone absolutely, alone with your own death, or you take part in the larger enterprise, and you share in the death of others. [...]” (453-4)

This happens to be one of the few less ambiguous examples of this mode of address in the novel, both contextually and orthographically (the quotation marks). It carries into Achtfaden’s imagined conversation with fellow rocket engineer Farhringer, and though the

narrator intervenes at points, few if any of the details given disqualify Achtfaden as the mental “source” of the passage. However, earlier in the scene, there is another conversation going on, one more difficult to classify as self-address:

Look at it this way, Achtfaden. This Toiletship here’s a wind tunnel’s all it is. If tensor analysis is good enough for turbulence, it ought to be good enough for history. There ought to be nodes, critical points . . . there ought to be super-derivatives of the crowded and insatiate flow that can be set equal to zero and these critical points found. . . . 1904 was one of them—1904 was when Admiral Rozhdestvenski sailed his fleet halfway around the world to relieve Port Arthur, which put your present captor Enzian on the planet, [...] here’s a thought—find a non-dimensional coefficient for yourself. This is a wind tunnel you’re in, remember? You’re an aerodynamics man. So—

Coefficients, ja, ja. . . . Achtfaden flings himself disconsolately on the scarlet VD toilet way down at the end of the row. (451-2)

Though some of this passage is recuperable as Achtfaden’s self-address, again there are contextual features that reveal the presence of the narrator: specifically, the information about Rozhdestvenski’s mission to Port Arthur and its relation to Enzian, things Achtfaden could not plausibly know. Also, we have the very strange transition into the second paragraph, in which Achtfaden seems to respond, somewhat peevishly, to the reproaches presented in the first. The question is: Whose reproaches are these? To be sure, Achtfaden the “aerodynamics man” is capable of the conception of history presented above, which in fact aligns nicely with his own “segments of responsibility” idea of historical progress, the rationalization we encounter in his relatively unambiguous self-address. But the presence of the narrator, revealed through information Achtfaden cannot plausibly know, forces us to construe the passage as some form of combined discourse. The question is: What form? Free indirect discourse? According to critics such as McHale and Ann Banfield, the second person cannot appear in free indirect discourse, at least as a “surface form.”⁴² Prince, on the

other hand, whose definition seems to emphasize degrees of voice over narrative level, allows for the possibility of free indirect discourse in the second person: “free indirect discourse,” he says,

is not definable in strictly grammatical terms. It is also (and perhaps more frequently) a function of what might be called contextual features: (1) formal features such as general markers of colloquialism . . . ; more specific markers of a group or class to which a character belongs; even more specific markers of a character’s personal idiom (distinctive words, registers, “intonations”); . . . and (2) semantic features (assessments, interpretations, judgments, “intended meanings” more plausibly attributable to a character than to the narrator).⁴³

This definition, while it moves the Achtfaden passage towards free indirect discourse, makes it no less difficult to disambiguate the two voices we encounter here. Certainly, the aerodynamics jargon qualifies as “specific markers of a group or class” to which Achtfaden belongs. Moreover, conceiving history in terms of this jargon would seem to qualify as a “semantic feature” of Achtfaden’s thought. The question is: Are these features, even if we set aside knowledge Achtfaden could not have, sufficiently distinct from the narrative voice as we know it and therefore safely attributable to Achtfaden? Clearly, the answer is no, for Gravity’s Rainbow abounds in examples of narrative commentary of this sort: the narrator’s descriptive and metaphoric powers encompass the discourses of science, physics, myth, history, philosophy, literature, popular culture; and often this commentary occurs nowhere in the vicinity of a character. When it does, we are forced, as in the Achtfaden passage, to guess at who is contributing what to the conversation.

The Interface

All of this leads us to the essential interpretive difficulty presented by the narrator of Gravity’s Rainbow: the apparent variety of voices at his command and the frequent confusions of attribution this can cause. Most of the time, these confusions occur in the

context of something akin to free indirect discourse: that is, two voices are detectable, but markers such as speech mannerism or semantic features are not reliable enough to disambiguate a particular passage. It should be noted here that these examples usually involve the foregrounding of a character, another of Prince's parameters for free indirect discourse, as well as a proximity to a character's speech or thought.⁴⁴ However, there are many cases in the novel in which speech mannerisms often attributed to a character are used in that character's absence, as though they were a normal feature of the narrator's linguistic register. In the scene, for example, in which Thanatz meets the Polish undertaker who is obsessed with lightning-strike victims, we get passages such as the following:

But the ones who do get hit experience a singular point, a discontinuity in the curve of life—do you know what the time rate of change *is* at a cusp? *Infinity*, that's what! A-and right across the point, it's *minus* infinity! How's *that* for sudden change, eh? [...] That's getting hit by lightning, folks. You're *way* up there on the needle-peak of a mountain, and don't think there aren't lammergeiers cruising there in the lurid red altitudes around, waiting for a chance to snatch you off. (664)

Besides the "A-and," one of the speech mannerisms typical to Slothrop, we find in the passage "jeeppers" and other ejaculations by way of italics characteristic of him. Moreover, we can be fairly sure that none of this material is coming from the Polish undertaker himself, who not only is described as Thanatz' "digital companion" who answers with either "a yes or a no" (663), but who also knows nothing of the lightning-conspiracy fantasia the narrator goes on to unfold:

But does the Polish undertaker in the rowboat care about busting this code, about secret organizations or recognizable subcultures? No, he doesn't. The reason he is seeking these people out is that he thinks it will help him *in his job*. Can you dig *that*, gates? He wants to know how people behave before and after lightning bolts, so he'll know better how to handle bereaved families. (665)

It seems, then, that we have a reasonably unambiguous case here of the narrator using character speech mannerisms for a reason other than combined speech as applied in definitions of free indirect or indirect discourse. We also, it would appear, have examples of direct address not aimed at a character: "Can you dig *that*, gates?" which has the distinction of mirroring character speech while at the same time appearing to be aimed at (or from) someone other than a character. To this we can add the address to "folks" and indeed the sentence which opens the chapter: "You will want cause and effect. All right" (663). Many critics have identified this opening line as direct address to the reader, and the novel offers little to disprove these interpretations.⁴⁵ McHale and McHoul, on the other hand, have separately argued against interpreting the line this way. For McHoul, the line is "not clearly addressed by anyone to anyone at all."⁴⁶ For McHale, it is likewise addressed to no one in particular, but it is precisely this "vacuousness" of reference, he goes on to argue, that encourages readers to "rush in" and fill the interpretive vacuum fiction abhors.⁴⁷

Though to a certain extent valid, formulations such as these seem to shortchange the narrative context: that is to say, talk of "vacuousness" and "not clearly anyone," while somewhat accurate with respect to who the addressee *is*, nonetheless neglects to take into account who the addressee *isn't*. We can be reasonably sure that Thanatz himself, though present in the scene along with the Polish undertaker, is not the addressee in this passage, even in the most oblique sense. Nor, it seems, is Thanatz doing the addressing, for he obviously doesn't know all the information related in the scene. While it is true that we later learn Thanatz has been taken captive by Enzian, and "is telling the Schwarzkommando this now, all this and more" (671), it seems unlikely that "this" includes the direct address pages earlier, though one could argue that "You will want cause and effect" mirrors Thanatz' eagerness to accommodate his captors and therefore could be a marker of combined discourse that pays off in retrospect. To cling to this flimsy hypothesis would involve ignoring much contextual evidence to the contrary, not the least of which are parallel addresses such as "Can you dig *that*, gates?" and their remoteness from any character. It

seems wiser, then, to assume that these examples of address are not aimed at or from one of the characters, but rather at an extradiegetic narratee. This leaves us, for the time being, with three choices: narratorial self-address, address to an unspecified extradiegetic narratee, and address (in defiance of narratological edict) to the reader.

Without deciding on one of these possibilities, we can at least use them collectively as an example of how the narrator is able to operate on the level of extradiegesis, as well as create the illusion (for some) of projecting himself towards the empirical realm of the reader, all the while “exporting” bits of the intradiegetic world in the form of character speech mannerisms. This bears on the notion that the narrator is “not clearly anyone at all,” as McHoul claims, an issue we will discuss shortly. For now, however, we might look at a narrative movement in the opposite direction, towards the intradiegetic, but with an “importing” of linguistic phenomena and similar ambiguities of voice. In the following passage, for example, in which Pfc. Eddie Pensiero is giving a haircut to an unidentified colonel, the voice is not only oddly out of place given the circumstances, but also seems strongly to resemble the register and style of the narrator:

The moment the comb contacts his head, the colonel begins to speak. “Ordinarily, we’d spend no more than 24 hours on a house-to-house sweep. Sundown to sundown, house to house. There’s a quality of black and gold to either end of it, that way, silhouettes, shaken skies pure as a cyclorama. But these sunsets, out here, I don’t know. Do you suppose something has exploded somewhere? Really—somewhere in the East? Another Krakatoa? Another name at least that exotic. . . the colors are so different now. Volcanic ash, or any finely-divided substance, suspended in the atmosphere, can diffract the colors strangely. Did you know that, son? Hard to believe, isn’t it? Rather a long taper if you don’t mind, and just short of combable on top. Yes, Private, the colors change, and how! The question is, are they changing *according to something*? Is the sun’s everyday spectrum being modulated? Not at random, but systematically, by this unknown

debris in the prevailing winds? Is there information for us? Deep questions, and disturbing ones. (642)

The first thing we notice about this passage is that it is somewhat anomalous compared to other examples of reported speech in the novel. On the whole, Gravity's Rainbow uses shorter bursts of reported speech, usually in dialogue between characters. Seldom are long passages of character speech or thought disambiguated from the narrative voice by quotation marks, such as we saw in the Achtfaden passage. More often it is presented in some form of combined discourse, which in fact begins to creep into the episode following the colonel's next long speech.

The second thing we notice, and this is more significant, is that the colonel's speech seems to come out of nowhere. It is not prompted; the colonel begins spontaneously and there is an obvious disconnect from the immediate conversational context—the ongoing exchange of ethnic slurs between Pensiero and Pfc. McGonigle. We also notice, in phrases such as “shaken skies pure as a cyclorama” and the syntax in general, many of the narrator's linguistic patterns, not to mention thematic preoccupations: strange phenomena, paranoia, physics. “Deep questions,” in other words, “and disturbing ones,” which more often the narrator raises *apropos* the characters, lending his voice to what, for them, is inarticulable, as in the following:

Each long haircut is a passage. Hair is yet another kind of modulated frequency. Assume a state of grace in which all the hairs were one distributed perfectly even, a time of innocence when they fell perfectly straight, all over the colonel's head. Winds of the day, gestures of distraction, sweat, itchings, sudden surprises, three-foot falls at the edge of sleep, watched skies, remembered shames, all have since written on that perfect grating. Passing through it tonight, restructuring it, Eddie Pensiero is an agent of History. (643)

Especially interesting in these passages is the strange suggestion that the comb has somehow “activated” the colonel, and that Pensiero is an “agent of History.” One gets the

sense that “History” or some other force has taken possession of both the colonel and Pensiero, and that both are serving as a kind of conduit. The question is, A conduit for what or whom? To be sure, the remainder of the chapter does include material that could be construed as the colonel’s thought, products of a strained imagination. But, as with some of the other passages we have examined, it also clearly contains information that surpasses his knowledge. In fact, it is rather difficult (if not impossible) to imagine the remainder of the chapter as the product of any one character’s mind: it includes, among other things, references to Pointsman, Slothrop and Jamf; two characters never before encountered (Skippy and Mr. Information); a bizarre, futuristic city called Happyville; a story about a sentient lightbulb named Byron. It is nothing less than a “phantasmagoria,” similar to *Pirate Prentice’s* at the opening of the novel (12), but in this case far more difficult to attribute to a single character. It passes through secret cities and histories, through underground headquarters and global conspiracies, before cycling back to the colonel and the comb: “and where is the Comb that will move through *this* and restore the old Cartesian harmony?” (655).

The more relevant question here is: What is the nature of this Comb? In terms of narrative mechanics, at least, the comb offers a ready analogy for the narrator’s use of free indirect discourse, as discussed above. But beyond that, it reflects the novel’s concern with the idea of “mediumistic transferal,” which recurs throughout *Gravity’s Rainbow* as a major thematic motif and a literal event. On the literal level, it is represented by the character Carroll Eventyr, who in séances acts as medium to “control” Peter Sascha. Eventyr considers himself “a victim of his freak talent” (145). He is able to connect to the “other side” and communicate with the spirit world, but he can’t carry the experience back into his own: “There’s no memory on his side: no personal record. He has to read about it in the notes of others, listen to discs” (153). In other words, someone is always “speaking through Eventyr,” not with him; at times he hardly knows “even the identity of the soul that took and used him” (145).

On the metaphoric level, the idea of mediumistic communication is analogous and in fact synonymous with one of the novel's major conceptual schemes: the concept of the interface, the medial position between two worlds, the substance through which they communicate. Gravity's Rainbow is saturated with this concept: Spectro sees the cortex of the brain as "an interface organ, mediating between [Outside and Inside], but *part of them both*" (141-2); Allen Lamplighter considers Eventyr "an interface between two worlds" (146); Tchitcherine thinks of "The Zone" of occupied Germany as an "interregnum" with fluid, permeable borders (294); Enzian, caught between American and Russian forces, hopes to "ride the interface, like gliding at the edge of a thunderstorm" (731); the "Brennschluss Point" of the V-2's flight is described as "an interface between one order of things and another," the gravity-bound and the gravity-free (302); coal-tar is described as the "interface between coal and steel," between the excremental dark of subterranean earth (putrefaction) and industrial process (purification) (166); times zones are presented as an interface (696); words are presented as an interface, existing for Blicero "an eye-twitch away from the things they stand for," or, for Thanatz, as "a screen [...] between himself and the numinous" (100, 668).

It is important to remember that few if any characters in the novel are able to function fully as an interface. More often, they are frustrated like Eventyr, who is "floundering in the swamp between two worlds" (217), able to glimpse the "other side," but not to understand or participate in it. The only being, it seems, who comes close to this ability is the narrator himself, who is present in the afterlife "here" and "now" of Sascha and Roland Feldspath; who can, for the most part, articulate the conditions on either side of a given interface (life/death, dream/waking, aboveground/underground, and so on); who has access to the past, present and future and can move between them effortlessly; who can speak in whatever voice suits him, or whatever narrative mode.

In this sense, the narrator of Gravity's Rainbow is himself an interface: "mediating between Outside and Inside, but part of them both." He is the voice through which we access the novel, and his use of characters such as Eventyr, a conduit through which other

beings speak, goes a long way towards dramatizing the nature of textual representation. Clearly, one of the aims of the novel is to foreground and problematize this issue, for the narrator as often uses his capacity as interface to confuse and conceal as he uses it to clarify and reveal. The point of this method, one would think, is expressed in the following: "Outside and Inside interpiercing one another too fast, too finely labyrinthine, for either category to have much hegemony anymore" (681). That is, the interface, while it may provide access, often erases the very distinction between the realms it separates. In a way, this brings the narrator and all of his methodology back around to the basic theme of indecision. If his function is to erase categories or merge them into an indistinguishable whole, what right do we have to categorize him? What if he is simply this function itself, a principle of discourse in operation? "Deep questions," as the unidentified colonel might say, and with disturbing implications for a study that would identify this narrator as more than an abstraction or a discursive ghost. Nonetheless, we will now attempt such an identification, with an eye towards giving the narrator of Gravity's Rainbow a distinct persona that doesn't encroach on the novel's concern with problematizing ontological boundaries.

The Stage Manager

Having described some of the attributes of Pynchon's narrator, we can perhaps construct a "global" hypothesis to account for his role in ambiguous second-person passages in the novel. Any such hypothesis will of course be one among many, some more plausible than others, so we will begin our attempt by examining two in particular. What both share in common, it seems, is their reliance on the generally accepted notion that the narrator of Gravity's Rainbow is disembodied or unpersonified. Typically, evidence for this assertion involves either the absence of a recognizable form of the narratorial *I* or, at the other extreme, the absence of narrative omniscience as conceived by conventional analyses of fiction. Thomas Schaub, for example, makes an impressive case for the "Orphic" nature of the novel's narrative voice, but his hypothesis is an expensive one. "This voice," Schaub

argues, “is omnipresent but not omniscient; it is a fragmented voice that is everywhere at once and so speaks, as it should, in the present tense.”⁴⁸ Such a voice is naturally beyond the limits of the *I* in the sense that the pronoun could be attributed to a conventional character-narrator; in fact, Schaub appears to consider the power of the narrative voice so formidable that he dispenses with the narratological idea of narrator as authorial surrogate and simply refers to the empirical author himself: “Pynchon is speaking from the vantage of the authorial present where succession in time ceases to matter and meaning overwhelms fact”; “the book’s considerable complexity is due in part to the simple fact that the elements of Gravity’s Rainbow are all present to Pynchon. He can hold them together, because they are together for him.”⁴⁹ Because the book is so complex, in other words, and because neither the narrator nor the reader has full access to all the elements and therefore cannot “hold them together,” Schaub makes the author himself supervene and account for all discrepancies: the narrator’s apparent lack of omniscience becomes the empirical author’s *modus operandi*.

On the other hand, we have global hypotheses such as that offered by Smetak, who considers the narrator of Gravity’s Rainbow a “virtual first person narrator” who represents “just another ‘voice’ in [the novel’s] fragmentary universe.”⁵⁰ By “virtual” Smetak seems to mean a character-narrator of sorts, an analogy based largely on the narrator’s lack of omniscience. This interpretation, however, while it relocates the narrator safely within the confines of narrative level, leaving us to sift through troublesome passages for contextual clues, naturally raises the question: Virtual first person narrator in what sense? For McHale, the question seems to stop on the level of pronouns: “This narrator can only be a ‘*virtual* first person narrator’ because he never actually advertises his presence by using the first-person pronoun.”⁵¹ But obviously, and as we have seen, this question involves more than simple pronoun identification. Though McHale considers the narrator of the novel “clearly not a personified character” because of this lack of pronomial specificity,⁵² it is difficult to deny his presence as expressed not only through deictics, but also through the explicit circuits of

communication in which he uses them. The *you*, after all, necessarily implies an *I*, and at some point any analysis of narrative is forced to reckon with this simple fact of discourse. To put it another way, it is one thing to insist on the undecidability of any or all attributions in these circuits; but it would be another thing entirely to exclude the narrator from these circuits simply because they are ambiguous. Because we must allow the possibility that, at one time or another, the narrator can be speaking, whether as an extradiegetic or intradiegetic functionary, we must also allow the possibility that he wields an implied *I* at the very least. And to this we can add those passages in which the narrator seems to be expressing opinions or ideas remote from any character: for example, the famous “Check out Ishmael Reed” line (588), which the majority of critics interpret as a direct address to the reader; or, more subtly, the scene involving the Polish undertaker.

So, following Smetak, one might argue that the narrator of Gravity's Rainbow is “virtual” to the extent that his persona has some of the virtues of first-person character-narrators (opinions, egocentricity as revealed through deictics and speech-circuit markers). At the same time, one must concede to Schaub that this narrator also surpasses the typical virtues of first-person character-narrators (for example, his omnipresence, his access to the thoughts of the characters). Here again we find the novel sabotaging received definitions of narrative form and function—not by refuting them, but by accommodating them, even and especially when they appear to contradict. Because both Smetak's and Schaub's hypotheses hinge on such definitions—narrative omniscience in its conventional form, first-person *I* narration in its conventional form—they are obliged in one way or another to suppress aspects of the narrator which seem to defy categorization. Schaub must suppress the narrator as a persona and default to the author himself; Smetak must personify the narrator to the extent allowable under pronomial definitions, which in turn allows her to support the global claim that the narrator's lack of omniscience is a reflection of the novel's “fragmentary universe” and its implicit denial of an authoritarian “Over Voice” in favor of the heteroglot.

Not surprisingly, both of these hypotheses are powerfully integrative, which is to say they each explain efficiently how the narrative voice operates: Schaub's hypothesis of the "Orphic voice" does work as an interpretive tool and accounts for many of the novel's more problematic narrative strategies; Smetak's virtual first person hypothesis does accord well with the narrator's obvious presence and the many problems of attribution we find in connection with him. Nonetheless, both fall short of providing a mechanism with which to assess the many problematic second-person passages in the novel: Schaub incorporates these problems into a larger authorial design and so dispenses with them; Smetak brings the narrator tantalizingly close to a condition of diegetic presence but is thwarted by the *I*.

There is, however, another alternative which has the virtue of a) synthesizing both hypotheses, and b) creating a mechanism to "de-scandalize" some of the narratological and ontological transgressions discussed throughout this study. Admittedly, this alternative is simplistic and mechanical. Nor is it capable of disambiguating every troublesome passage to which it is applied. But at the same time, it is "inexpensive" and leaves most competing hypotheses largely intact. Essentially, it involves imagining the narrator of Gravity's Rainbow as a kind of "stage manager," such as we find in Thornton Wilder's play Our Town. In this play and its various film adaptations, the stage manager functions as an interface between worlds separated by conventions of representation—the world of the events onstage (intradiegetic), and that of the audience (extradiegetic). For example, at the outset of the play, the stage manager presents himself as an extradiegetic, even quasi-empirical functionary, setting up the props and addressing the audience as follows:

This play is called "Our Town." It was written by Thornton Wilder; produced and directed by A. . . . (or: produced by A. . . .; directed by B. . . .). In it you will see Miss C. . . .; Miss D. . . .; Miss E. . . .; and Mr. F. . . .; Mr. G. . . .; Mr. H. . . .; and many others. The name of the town is Grover's Corners, New Hampshire—just across the Massachusetts line: latitude 42 degrees 40 minutes; longitude 70

degrees 37 minutes. The First Act shows a day in our town. The day is May 7, 1901. The time is just before dawn.⁵³

Much like the "Dear Reader" mode of direct address, this passage operates on the level of extradiegesis by confining itself mainly to the narrative situation, in this case the mechanics of presenting a play. The degree to which the above trafficks in the empirical can be seen by its mention of the actual author and its "slotting" of the play's real-world participants (director, producer, cast members) to accommodate each particular production. As with Sterne's address to his plural audience, Wilder's play-as-text compensates for its own dislocation from its intended empirical setting by creating for itself a generalized real-world context, to be particularized from the outside. The cartographic details, which also seem designed to invoke an illusion of fact independent from the fiction about to unfold, build on this presentation of the empirical, but already the passage is looking inward to the diegetic level: the deictics of time and place, which are not those of any particular audience.

The following lines, and indeed the whole representation of the town and its environs, resort heavily to deictics, both spoken and gestural, which comes as no surprise: the stage manager, after all, is chiefly responsible for representing the alleged material world of Grover's Corners, making him a ready analogue indeed for the narrators we encounter in strictly textual fiction. His descriptions of the town function in lieu of actual stage settings, and he presents them in relation to the one assured "reality" at his disposal: his ego, the reference point from which his voice directs itself to the material objects it describes. Thus, "Well, I'd better show you how our town lies. Up here . . . is Main Street. Way back there is the railway station" (6). "Over there," "over yonder," "still farther over"—an entire town is insinuated, imaginatively projected upon a set with little more than a few chairs and a table, and the empirical audience is expected to join in the illusion.

But this, as much as it resembles the condition of textual representation, is not the limit of the stage manager's power. Beyond his ability to "create" a fictional world out of words, he can project himself into this world as a participant, interacting with the characters in the

same way he interacts with the empirical audience. Typically, the stage manager's interaction with characters involves an extradiegetic function or concern, such as we see in Act One when he interrupts the conversation between Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb, both of whom "nod their heads" to acknowledge his presence (20). The stage manager then directly addresses these characters—"Thank you, ladies. Thank you very much" (21)—at which point the women leave. This curious interplay between intra- and extradiegesis seems to foreground the latter: it has the effect of "breaking frame," and this happens in concert with a transition into purely narrative time, as opposed to story time. The stage manager, using a temporal device Genette calls a "definite ellipsis,"⁵⁴ informs the audience, "Now we're going to skip a few hours" (21), and the following section continues in this extradiegetic mode: there is a "narrative pause"⁵⁵ during which the stage manager calls in Professor Willard to provide historical background; Mr. Webb is then called in for a "political and social report" (23). Both of these interventions involve games with the empirical audience or situation, often humorous. For example, when Professor Willard reports the town population as 2,640, the stage manager gives him a whispered reminder, and the professor corrects himself: "Oh, yes, indeed?—The population, *at the moment*, is 2,642" (22). By occupying the stage that is also Grover's Corners (which is to say, the intradiegetic), the professor and the stage manager naturally become part of its census, despite their overtly extradiegetic function "at the moment." On the other side, Mr. Webb, whose primary role is that of an intradiegetic character, is put in the most transgressive and therefore "scandalous" position of all: he is asked to field questions from the audience, a case of the intradiegetic directly addressing the empirical. Thus, we get the exchanges between Webb and the "woman in the balcony" or the "belligerent man" or the "lady in a box," all actors planted in the audience to further compromise the integrity of the "fourth wall."

In one sense, these examples represent a familiar enough fictional device. This device is old indeed and rough equivalents can be found in Cervantes, Sterne, Fielding. Whether we continue to follow Erving Goffman and call it "breaking frame," or use the Russian formalist

term “exposing the device,” or even the more trendy “metafiction,” the bottom line is that the extradiegetic intrudes itself upon the story, which recedes accordingly. The degree to which this device strikes its audience as “uncanny” or “scandalous” depends, one would imagine, on the audience’s familiarity with it, or even personal taste. However, Wilder’s use of the frame-break differs in an important way from its conventional application: in both cases there is a suspension of *histoire*—the action we are watching halts while the situation of the action is discussed or exposed in what appears to be the empirical realm—but Our Town also opens a two-way corridor between ontological levels in the process. The direction we have explored so far involves movement towards the extradiegetic. The stage manager acts as an organizing principle or magnet for this movement: he draws both the empirical and the intradiegetic into the extradiegetic and thus mediates between the three levels of the narrative transaction. The “plants” in the audience speak to the characters and in this way dramatize the ability of fictional representation to “draw us in.” The characters, likewise, speak to the audience, demonstrating their access to its ontological level. It is important to note the trouble Wilder takes to insure that his characters are understood as such: Webb runs the risk of being construed as the “empirical actor” breaking frame in a conventional sense, so he is kept in character. He enters the stage from his diegetic house; he has just cut his hand carving up a diegetic apple; he speaks of the town as his town and maintains his speech mannerisms and characteristic opinions throughout. It is also important to note the sense of uncanniness Wilder injects into this scene. Webb seems suspicious and guarded when first brought into the extradiegesis: he speaks to the audience as if he were addressing a stranger at his door, or as though he didn’t know how to conduct himself (such as we see in the professor’s confusion over the town’s population). The stage manager must therefore “draw him out,” as it were, with prompts and questions, the same movement the plants encourage in the audience, but in the opposite direction.

At this point, the play has established a corridor between ontological levels much like the one discussed earlier in this study apropos Calvino’s If on a winter’s night a traveler.

Wilder the dramatist, of course, enjoys more access to the material world and can exploit it accordingly. Thus, we get demonstrations of ontological barrier-breaking such as the scene in The Skin of Our Teeth where empirical chairs are passed from the audience to the fictive world onstage.⁵⁶ It is this movement—into the diegesis—that we will examine now, for the stage manager in Our Town has similar properties. Unlike those examples in which we find the stage manager interacting with the characters on what could be called the extradiegetic level, there are times when he appears to interact with them on the intradiegetic level. We first see this in Act One, when George Gibbs “comes careening down Main Street” tossing a ball in the air (27). George then bumps into an “old lady invisible to us” (Mrs. Forrest), ‘us’ in this case meaning the audience, at which point the stage manager assumes an intradiegetic role: “Go out and play in the fields, young man,” he says, “*As Mrs. Forrest*” (27).

Later, in Act Two, the stage manager enters the diegesis “wearing spectacles and assuming the role of Mr. Morgan,” the owner of the town drugstore (64). This assumption of Morgan’s role includes adopting his speech mannerisms and characteristic concerns, as we see in his interaction with Emily and George. Later still, the stage manager assumes the role of minister at George and Emily’s wedding. “In this wedding,” he says, “I play the minister. That gives me the right to say a few more things about it” (71). Finally, in Act Three, which takes place in a graveyard in Grover’s Corners, the stage manager functions as a mediator between the audience (represented by the directly addressed “Mrs. Smith” in the opening sequence) and the now-deceased characters, Emily newly arrived among them.

The parallels here to the narrator in Gravity’s Rainbow are many. The stage manager in Our Town, like the narrator of Pynchon’s novel, governs the unfolding of the play, describing its settings, controlling its movement in narrative time—all the functions, in other words, typical of textual narrators. He is also omnipresent but not omniscient while still manifesting a material presence, which is conveyed in part through the use of speech, of deictics and egocentric reference, the only signs (apart from self-references such as *I* or self-descriptions) to which a textual narrator such as Pynchon’s can resort. The statement, “I

play the minister. That gives me the right to say a few more things about it," is essentially an expression of stage manager's ability to take on the habits and mannerisms of a character: he is able to assume not just the role or "diegetic space" of a character, but also that character's personality, much like we see with Pynchon's narrator, both with the unidentified colonel and with his use of character speech mannerisms and combined discourse in general. Lastly, the stage manager is able to project himself outward to the audience, as well as inward to the characters, which is to say he can interact with the extradiegetic and intradiegetic realms.

The most important aspect of the stage manager's narrative powers, however, is not only their variability, but their implied simultaneity. The stage manager can address a character indirectly, such as when he describes Emily arriving at the graveyard, but his function here is not strictly extradiegetic. True, his narrating does serve to inform the extradiegetic audience, but he does so from the stage that is also Grover's Corners. He is a threshold figure, in other words, with one foot in each diegetic level, who can apostrophize a present character, contrary to the convention of apostrophe as addressed to an absent auditor. Unlike his address to Mrs. Webb and Mrs. Gibb, in which his presence is acknowledged, or his addresses to characters as a character, other of the stage manager's addresses go unnoticed by the characters, though obviously they are physically within his vocal reach. The net effect here is not a movement into one or another level, with the stage manager understood as in diegesis or the characters understood as in extradiegesis, but rather a straddling of levels in which inside and outside become coextensive, the stage manager serving as an interface in the same way he mediates between the audience and the narrated representation of the town and settings themselves.

A similar dynamic is of course a commonplace in cinema, especially in films that play on the Dickensian "Scrooge" plot (for example, 1985's Scrooged), in which characters move about the world unseen and unheard. Or, more recently, we find a narrator exercising similar powers in the Coen Brothers film The Big Lebowski, in which "The Stranger" character-narrator (played by Sam Eliot) directly speaks with "The Dude" (played by Jeff

Bridges) and also discusses him from only a few feet away: "I like your style, Dude"; and, to the audience, "The Dude abides. I don't know about you, but I take comfort in that."⁵⁷

The distinction here between talking to and talking about, together with the close proximity between speaker and addressee-subject as portrayed in film, represents a form of discourse not often encountered or acknowledged in textual narrative. It might be called "stalker narrative" or "spyglass narrative," such as we see in typical private-detective scenarios on television or in film. The "watcher" often directly addresses the "watched" in these scenes, employing a unique form of apostrophe in which the addressee is both absent (in terms of the communicative circuit) and present (in terms of physical location). Thus, the detective who catches his unwitting subject in a compromising position is liable to say, "I've got you now," or something to that effect. It bears mentioning that this type of narrative is in some ways a form of free indirect discourse, in the sense that the object of communication is addressed indirectly, with a conflation of place substituted for the conflation of language and thought found in standard FID. Seen in this light, the stage manager of Our Town has another parallel with Pynchon's narrator to the extent that both talk *about* characters in a way that implies mutual presence—Our Town's stage manager through the visual fact of his proximity to characters, and Pynchon's through his use of deictics and the second person.⁵⁸

Bearing these similarities in mind, we might now look at a few more second-person passages in Gravity's Rainbow. Three in particular fit nicely into the stage manager paradigm, especially to the extent that they make a virtue out of the ambiguities possible in second-person address. The first occurs towards the end of the novel, during that time when the narrative voice is said by many critics to be disintegrating, a device intended to echo Slothrop's own dissolving identity.⁵⁹ This passage, entitled "A Moment of Fun with Takeshi and Ichizo, the Komical Kamikazees," begins in third-person person narrative, describing the life of a cartoonish kamikazee squadron on an island in the Pacific (including a radarman's "improvised haiku"), but then abruptly shifts to the second person:

what? You didn't like the haiku. It wasn't *ethereal* enough? Not Japanese at all? In fact it sounded like something *right outa Hollywood*? Well, Captain—yes you, Marine Captain Esberg from Pasadena—you, have just had, the Mystery Insight! (gasps and a burst of premonitory applause) and so *you*—are our *Paranoid . . . For The Day!* (band burst into “Button Up Your Overcoat,” or any other suitably paranoid up-tempo tune, as the bewildered contestant is literally yanked to his feet and dragged out in the aisle by this M.C. with the gleaming face and the rippling jaw). (691)

Here we have what first appears to be reader-oriented address—with overtones of insinuating reader behavior such as we saw in *If on a winter's night a traveler*—but this address soon switches to a particularized addressee, Captain Esberg, much like the empirical reader soon becomes the “Reader” in Calvino's novel. It is important to note the obvious theatricality of this passage: the parenthetical material has the ring of stage directions, or an equivalent level of narration outside the representation itself; the narrator (here cast as “M.C.”) uses the cadence and language typical of stage announcers. The whole episode, in fact, projects the atmosphere of a theater, which is what the immediate setting turns out to be:

Yes, it *is* a movie! Another World War II situation comedy, and your chance, to find out what it's *really like*, because *you*—have *won* (drumroll, more gasps, more applauding and whistling) an all-expense, one-way trip for *one*, to the movie's actual location [...] You'll while your nights away chasing vampire mosquitoes away from your *own throat!* Getting blind *lost*, out in the middle of torrential tropical downpours! [...] But it won't be all nighttime giddiness and excitement, Captain, because daytimes, up at five a.m. sharp, you'll be out making the acquaintance of the Kamikazee *Zero* you'll be flying! getting all checked out on those *controls* [...] A-ha-hand of *course*, trying to stay out of the way, of those two *Nonsensical Nips*, Takeshi and Ichizo! as they go about their uproarious weekly adventures, seemingly oblivious to your presence [...] (691-2)

A similar passage, this one entitled “Listening to the Toilet,” occurs some pages later, with much the same progression from what appears to be reader-oriented address to address to a particularized narratee. In this case, there is no character in close proximity to whom the address might be attributed, and the “impersonal” or “assumable you” is resorted to heavily, in keeping with the hypothetical tone of the narrator’s discussion of “sun-silence”:

with no warning, the arousing feather-point of the Sound-Shadow has touched you, enveloping you in sun-silence for oh, let us say 2:36:18 to 2:36:34, Central War Time, unless the location is Dungannon, Virginia, Bristol, Tennessee, Asheville or Franklin, North Carolina, [...]—yes sounds like a Roll of Honor don’t it, being read off someplace out on the prairie, [...] the one old man in black up at the microphone, reading off the towns of the war dead, [...]

Well, you’re *wrong*, champ—these happen to be towns all located on the borders of *Time Zones*, is all. Ha, ha! Caught *you* with your hand in your pants! Go on, show us *all* what you were doing or leave the area, we don’t need your kind around. There’s nothing so loathsome as a sentimental surrealist. (695-6)

This “sentimental surrealist,” here addressed directly, does in fact “leave the area,” but in the form of a particularized third-person character whose actions are reported by the narrator. Because of this, critics such as McHale identify this scene as another example of the novel’s narrative legerdemain: “narratee-oriented address in Gravity’s Rainbow,” he says, “often switches to character-oriented address, leaving the reader in the lurch.”⁶⁰ In other words, these and similar passages take advantage of the shiftiness of the *you* to lull readers into a communicative circuit, only to “leave them in the lurch” by revealing the actual object of address in this circuit.

McHale’s reading, however, can be recuperated by the stage manager and the dynamic that surrounds him. The stage manager, it must be remembered, addresses a *plural* audience, as opposed to the “single reader” audience envisioned by McHale. Much like Tristram Shandy’s alternating addresses to “Madam” or “Sir Critic,” the stage manager can

address a range of personages, *but without necessarily excluding anyone from the audience*. The fact that he addresses “Mrs. Smith” in Our Town doesn’t suddenly exclude the rest of the audience from their ontological or narrative level; it simply excludes them from a particular circuit of communication, which the stage manager can reconfigure at will. Seen in this light, the sentimental surrealist and Captain Esberg, besides being particularized characters, are also surrogates for the implied audience—“plants” much like the “belligerent man” or “lady in a box” of Our Town, who represent “us” to the extent that they are cast as fellow audience members and possibly share our concerns and prejudices as narratees.

This identification is crucial, one could argue, both to the intelligibility of the scene and to certain thematic concerns in the novel, which we will discuss in more detail shortly. But for now we can say that the biggest problem with McHale’s reading is that it posits a binary of sorts based on narrative level: “addressee/not-addressee” effectively estranges the reader from the text, acting as a barrier to identification. To be not-addressee, apparently, is to be not only outside a circuit of address, but also outside the realm where the circuit takes place. And yet, even after these apparent transitions to character address, in which we are “left in the lurch” of not-addressee, we are given other opportunities to identify with the overall communicative circuit. For example, “we don’t need your kind around.” Who is the *we* in this sentence addressed to the sentimental surrealist? Are we readers included in this *we*? And what are we to make of the direct addresses we encounter once the sentimental surrealist “leaves the area,” which is the area of direct address, the area that includes *we*, outside of which one becomes the “absent-one,” the third-person? More to the point, perhaps, is the related question: Where, specifically, does the sentimental surrealist go? The answer seems to be that he goes into the diegesis, into “the moment of sun-silence inside the white tile greasy spoon” (696), the hypothetical scene described at the beginning of the episode. But despite the fact that he is elsewhere, we continue to watch him, aligned with the same narrative plane which describes his actions. Moreover, we are invited to join him:

Come into the bulbshine and sit with him, with the stranger at the small public table. [...] See if you can sneak in under the shadow too. Even a partial eclipse is better than never finding out—better than cringing the rest of your life under the great Vacuum in the sky they have taught you, and a sun whose silence you never get to hear. (697)

Obviously, the address in this passage has reverted to a *you* sufficiently unspecified to allow for reader identification. The sentimental surrealist is already in the greasy spoon, already experiencing the sun-silence, as we learn earlier in the scene (“the sound-shadow comes down on him” [696]), so clearly he is no longer the addressee. Thus, we can say that McHale’s reading of the passage is accurate to the extent that it shows a progression of identification from reader-oriented *you* to character-oriented *you*, but misleading to the extent that it doesn’t track the progression back in the other direction, from character-oriented to reader-oriented.

This bi-directional quality of the *you*, its reversibility, functions in parallel with another important aspect of these passages: that is, the apparent movement of narratees between narrative levels. Captain Esberg, an extradiegetic audience member witness to the intradiegetic “movie” of the Komical Kamikazees, is to be placed in that very movie, just as the sentimental surrealist hears the extradiegetic “Roll of Honor” before “leaving the area” to experience the intradiegetic sun-silence. In the case of the latter, we are invited to “Come into the bulbshine and sit with him”; in the case of the former, we are perhaps subject to the same nightmarish “all-expense, one-way trip for *one*, to the movie’s actual location,” insofar as Esberg can be seen as a fellow audience member and therefore, in a sense, our surrogate.

Pynchon’s narrator as stage manager, of course, is the instrument through which these “interpiercings” of narrative level are brought about: interface that he is, he mediates between the representations offered in the novel and the witnesses to those representations. This ability is especially crucial in the third second-person passage we will examine, the leavetaking scene between Slothrop and Bianca on board the *Anubis*. The *you* in this scene

is often ascribed to Slothrop, though the reader, an unidentified narratee or even a combination thereof are plausible candidates as well, a confusion encouraged by passages such as the following:

Of all her putative fathers—Max Schlepzig and masked extras on one side of the moving film, Franz Pökler and certainly other pairs of hands busy through trouser cloth, that *Alpdrücken* Night, on the other—Bianca is closest, this last possible moment below decks here behind the ravening jackal, closest to you who came in blinding color, slouched alone in your own seat, never threatened along any rookwise row or diagonal all night, you whose interdiction from her mother's water-white love is absolute, you, alone, saying *sure I know them*, omitted, chuckling *count me in*, unable, thinking *probably some hooker* . . . She favors you, most of all. You'll never get to see her. So somebody has to tell you. (472).

A typical argument for Slothrop as addressee—such as that presented (though by no means insisted upon) by McHale—would run something like this: temporally, the scene is situated in the brief moment between Slothrop's ascent by ladder to the deck of the *Anubis* and his encounter with Ensign Morituri in the next chapter; that is, it occupies a thin sliver of time relative to the chronology of the novel and therefore represents a “flashback” of sorts, “unfolding in Slothrop's memory in no more ‘real time’ than it takes him to climb a few steps of the ladder.”⁶¹ To support this interpretation, McHale cites as evidence deictics along the lines of “this last possible moment below decks here behind the ravening jackal” (an allusion to the bow ornament of the *Anubis*), which seems to establish Slothrop both spatially and temporally as a point of reference, making him the most logical candidate for addressee. Hence McHale's surprise that some critics have insisted that the addressee is an extra-diegetic narratee or, even more bluntly, the empirical reader, who is technically denied presence in the text.⁶²

This reliance on Slothrop's actual presence in the scene, however, is itself subject to alternative readings and can be made to wobble under the weight of its own logic. For

example, if we take the text's account of Slothrop's exit up the ladder at face value, we are forced to concede that he is no longer in the immediate deictic sphere McHale mentions. In empirical terms, Slothrop is between narrative decks, as it were, somewhere between the place of the abovesited passage and his encounter with Morituri, and this is what obliges us to interpret the paragraphs that follow Slothrop's reported departure as an analepsis of sorts, a flashback in which Slothrop imaginatively projects himself into the scene he has just left. Technically speaking, however, the deictic cited as evidence of Slothrop's eligibility as addressee—"here behind the ravening jackal"—could as easily be ascribed to Bianca, who after Slothrop's exit remains below decks, "Alone, kneeling on the painted steel" (471).

But is this ambiguity alone enough to warrant looking elsewhere for a possible addressee? Probably not. If we allow that the passage is indeed a flashback of sorts, we must also allow that the deictic "here behind" can be assigned to Slothrop as well. But what of the term "flashback" as McHale is using it? Precisely what sort of flashback is Slothrop having here? Is it a flashback rendered as interior monologue? In all likelihood, no: at this point in the novel, Slothrop has yet to encounter Pökler, nor has he learned any of the details of Pökler's life from another source, so we can safely say that the leavetaking passage is rendered in free-indirect discourse at least, if not in some other narrative mode that excludes Slothrop altogether as a physical presence. Thus, McHale's assertion that the passage is "unfolding in Slothrop's memory" becomes problematic to the extent that two different notions of reported thought are in play here. The first, that which attempts strict mimesis of a character's thought, has been ruled out by contextual evidence, as was the case in the "dumb idling heart" passage we examined earlier. The second, that which combines the thought of a character and the narrator, obliges us to look deeper into the context for clues that would establish Slothrop's presence in the scene.

Unfortunately, in the absence of unambiguous deictics or the assurance of interior monologue, we have little to go on, making any claim that there is nonetheless some "ratio of presence" between Slothrop and the narrator even more difficult to defend when we analyze

the thematic emphasis of the passage, which involves the exploitation and abandonment of one of the novel's many "lost children." Certainly, Slothrop will be haunted by Bianca after her disappearance: he will search the *Anubis* for her and, that same evening, imagining he sees her fall overboard, will be washed over the side himself; later, when he returns to the *Anubis* via Frau Gnab's pirate smack, Slothrop will guiltily resume his search for the lost girl and encounter her ghost, hallucinated or otherwise. But in the context of "this last possible moment," Slothrop is not so much flashing back to a scene he has just left as he is in the grips of an elaborate "forgetting": "coming back is something he's already forgotten about. [...] The last instant their eyes were in touch is already behind him" (470-1).

This theme of forgetting permeates the remainder of the chapter, and we notice that, McHale's assertions notwithstanding, Slothrop's presence seems to diminish accordingly. On the one hand, we have technical issues such as Slothrop's announced departure ("he turns his back on her, and up the ladder he goes" [471]), as well as the intervening transition to Bianca's perspective, marked by the line "Alone, kneeling on the painted steel." On the other, we have the expansive analepsis in the subsequent passage, in which the opening deictic seems to function as a fulcrum for the shift in perspective from Bianca to Slothrop:

Her look now—this deepening arrest—has already broken Slothrop's seeing heart: has broken and broken, that same look swung as he drove by, thrust away into twilights of moss and crumbling colony, of skinny clouded-cylinder gas pumps, or tin Moxie signs gentian and bittersweet as the taste they were there to hustle on the weathered sides of barns, looked for how many Last Times up in the rearview mirror [...] Lost, again and again, [...] she looked at him once, of course he still remembers, from down at the end of a lunchwagon counter, [...] both of you, at both ends of the counter, could feel it, feel your age delivered into a new kind of time that may have allowed you to miss the rest, [...] Of course Slothrop lost her, and kept losing her—it was an American requirement [...] (471-2)

It is easy to understand the temptation to interpret this analepsis as unfolding in real time in Slothrop's mind, so strongly does it draw on his past (not to mention its allusion to his memory). But when we look closely at the passage, we find that it could easily be going on without him, and that the apparent shift to his perspective is more a shift to the narrator's. First, there is the question of "Slothrop's seeing heart," a metonymy that, as discussed earlier, can introduce passages of free-indirect discourse in which a character's intuitive knowledge is articulated and expanded upon by the narrator. Also, the sweep of this passage, the breadth of its detail and the way it opens out into second-person ambiguity, suggests a range of experience too wide to fit within the confines of the empirical moment in which it occurs, too wide to unfold within Slothrop's mind except as a vague feeling, a distillation of many encounters with different versions of "her." Thus, while it illustrates beautifully another of Pynchon's parabolic excursions outside narrative time, it is difficult to accept as Slothrop's actual thought—that is, beyond the level of intuition, or something that registers momentarily in his "seeing heart," striking a faraway chord in his personality.

But even this intuition is not assured. The opening line of the analepsis, for example, seems to support the theme of forgetting to the extent that it establishes Slothrop's encounter with Bianca as one in a series—a series whose length and repetitiveness has apparently numbed Slothrop to the philosophical subtleties presented in the passage. Though not perfectly unambiguous, Bianca's "look now—her deepening arrest" after Slothrop's literal departure, "has already broken" his heart, which, even grammatically, seems to suggest a similar but different habitual action completed in the past and therefore less likely to register in Slothrop's consciousness now. This in turn is supported by the sense of futility and resignation the passage conveys: the "failure of perception" attributed to Slothrop in his encounters with lost girls, the "city-reflexes" he develops as a result (472).

Taken in this light, it is equally tempting to exclude Slothrop from the scene almost entirely and imagine that the narrator is using the raw material of Slothrop's past and psyche to comment on the "American requirement" of loss through motion or action, which Slothrop

can as easily represent *in absentia*. In fact, one could argue that any cognizance of his own leavetaking habit makes Slothrop less effective a vehicle for this theme. Slothrop, after all, has moved on, leaving Bianca behind. And it seems thematically crucial, somehow, that he be perceived as such: absent. In the first place, it conforms to his character at this point in the novel, and there is something deliberate about the way the analepsis eventually cycles into a discussion of one of Slothrop's comic-book heroes: "Sundial," whom "The frames never enclosed" and whose natural element is "wind" or "some flow, more or less sheet and vertical: a wall in constant motion" (472). Second, it magnifies his abandonment of Bianca, whereas the long, reasoned analepsis and its apparent compassion for Slothrop, who is cast as the victim of a larger mechanism, would mitigate this abandonment if taken as a conscious rationalization on his part. When at last Slothrop is back on board the *Anubis* and has his surreal encounter below decks, his punishment accords both with a sense of proportional justice and the idea that he is projecting it onto himself in terms that correspond with his unreasoned, unconscious leavetaking from Bianca. The unseen, vaguely supernatural assailant who savagely beats him, the ghost of drowned Bianca "hanging from the overhead" (531)—these apparitions vanish when the lights are switched back on, but it is harder to imagine them existing even in Slothrop's tortured fancy if the leavetaking passage itself is read as his own rationalization of motion and forgetting.

Beyond these uncertainties, there are other challenges to the hypothesis that identifies Slothrop as sole addressee, though even these raise as many questions as they answer. To begin with, Slothrop, at least in a literal sense, is the least likely of Bianca's "putative fathers," a group restricted to participants in von Göll's film on the one hand, and moviegoers such as Franz Pökler on the other, who like many "that *Alpdrücken* Night" reaches a kind of psychosexual critical mass during the scene in which Margherita (Greta) Erdmann's film character is brutally raped. The men in the first category of course represent the question of actual paternity: the actor "Max Schlepzig and masked extras," all of whom took part in the actual (not merely staged) rape of Greta, during which Bianca was conceived.

The men in the second category, on the other hand, among them Pökler, represent “putative fathers” of another order, that of metaphor and complicity. Pökler, for example, engenders Ilse, another of the novel’s lost children, while imaginatively repeating the *Alpdrücken* rape scene on his wife, Leni. Here again we have the theme, discussed earlier apropos von Göll’s propaganda film, of imagination projecting itself into the real world. Taken in this light, Pökler is complicit not only in the rape of Greta, but also in the fathering of Bianca, a complicity the novel encourages with various “mappings on” between Bianca and Ilse.⁶³

One could argue—and reasonably—that this technique of mapping on can be made to intervene at this point and salvage the hypothesis that Slothrop is indeed the addressee in the leavetaking passage. Slothrop, both because he repeats the *Alpdrücken* rape scene with Greta Erdmann during their first encounter and also sexually exploits Bianca, is a logical candidate for such a mapping-on. One could, in fact, argue that he represents a culmination of the crimes, both real and figurative, committed against these two women, not the least of which is the appropriation of their images for surrogate purposes. Whether or not Slothrop appropriates Bianca’s image into his long continuum of lost girls subconsciously or otherwise can be debated to a nonplus, as the interpretation offered above would seem to illustrate; but at the very least, he is guilty of exploiting Bianca’s image when, aboard the *Anubis*, he and the other passengers take part in the surreal orgy sparked by the carefully staged spectacle of Greta spanking Bianca (466-7).

With Greta, on the other hand, the issue is even less clear. Slothrop indeed uses her as a surrogate, but at her urging, and he himself is similarly used, as we see in the following:

Slothrop puts the whip down and climbs on top, covering her with the wings of his cape, her Schlepzig-surrogate, his latest reminder of Katje . . . and they commence fucking, the old phony rack groaning beneath them, Margherita whispering *God how you hurt me* and *Ah, Max* . . . and just as Slothrop’s about to come, the name of her child: strained through her perfect teeth, a clear extrusion of pain that is not in play, she cries, *Bianca* (397)

It is difficult to find an imbalance in the surrogacy here: Greta as Slothrop's fleeting lover, Katje; Slothrop as Greta's Max. If anything, Slothrop is only dimly aware of the psychic drama Greta is superimposing on him. He is not as central a figure in the *Alpdrücken* legacy; despite his intimacy with its key players, he has never seen the film, which sets up a significant contrast with the episode that immediately follows the above:

. . . yes, bitch—yes, little bitch—poor helpless bitch you're coming can't stop yourself now I'll whip you again whip till you bleed. . . . Thus Pökler's whole front surface, eyes to knees: flooded with tonight's image of the delicious victim bound on her dungeon rack, filling the movie screen [...] and Leni no longer solemn wife, embittered source of strength, but Margherita Erdmann underneath him, on the bottom for a change, as Pökler drives in again and again, into her again, yes, bitch, yes. . . .

Only later did he try to pin down the time. Perverse curiosity. Two weeks since her last period. He had come out of the Ufa theatre on the Friedrichstrasse that night with an erection, thinking like everybody else only about getting home, fucking somebody, fucking her into some submission. . . . God, Erdmann was beautiful. How many other men, shuffling out again into depression Berlin, carried the same image back from *Alpdrücken* to some drab fat excuse for a bride? How many shadow-children would be fathered on Erdmann that night? (397)

Here at last we arrive at the crucial question: If Slothrop is indeed being mapped on, on whom is he being mapped? It is difficult to ignore the correspondences between the above and the leavetaking passage. But the correspondence is not only between Slothrop (as imagined as addressee) and Pökler; nor is it only between these men and all the "other men" involved in the *Alpdrücken* episode. There is another plausible addressee, another potential *you* that Bianca is "closest to" during "this last possible moment": it is the implied extradiegetic audience, which at various points in the novel, as we have seen, is represented as inside a movie theater, ostensibly "watching" the novel unfold.

This audience, which at the end of Gravity's Rainbow is identified as "old fans who've always been at the movies" (760), has been a staple of criticism of the novel for decades, to the extent that it is now considered a commonplace and should not be taken as an implied revelation here. Gravity's Rainbow, after all, in addition to resorting heavily to cinematic devices and imagery (slapstick, musical numbers, dance numbers, voice-overs, chase scenes), begins in one kind of theater and ends in another, with the same spectre hanging over it: the descending V-2, which at the outset threatens wartime London and at the end threatens the Orpheus Theater in Los Angeles of the 1970s. Both scenes, of course, involve an imminence that never pays off: the opening vision of the falling rocket blends into Pirate Prentice's dream; in the closing sequence, the rocket, reaching "its last unmeasurable gap above the roof of this old theater, its last delta-t" (760), is beaten to the punch by the concluding line. If it falls anywhere, it falls in the white space that follows.

The rocket's descent, however, is not offered as an unmediated representation. The closing scene is rendered in second-person narrative; it is presented as being watched by an audience: "There is time, if you need comfort, to touch the person next to you" (760). If this *you* is to be understood as the extradiegetic audience in the form of a movie-goer, might we not say the same of the *you* addressed in the leavetaking passage? As with Slothrop, the movie-goer's "interdiction from [Greta's] water-white love is absolute." Though Slothrop has encountered her in "real life," she is a cinematic creature no more accessible to him than her image is to the movie-goer; the screens which prevent access to the "real" Greta may be different (psychological and literal), but the effect is the same. As for the other correspondences, they seem to apply more to the movie-goer than to Slothrop: "slouched alone in your seat," "never threatened along any rookwise row or diagonal all night,"⁶⁴ the strange interior-monologue fantasy of "chuckling *count me in*, unable, thinking *probably some hooker*."

Beyond these correspondences, which apply to Slothrop only figuratively, there is the implied simultaneity of representation and its reception by an audience. As we have seen,

McHale argues “this last possible moment” refers to the interval between Slothrop’s exit up the ladder from belowdecks and his encounter with Morituri. If we accept the theater hypothesis, however, we see that it is also the movie-goer’s last possible moment with Bianca, not only because she is not in the next scene, but also because she disappears from the novel at this point, to return only as a ghost imagined by Slothrop. Taken in this light, Bianca, who has just been abandoned by Slothrop, is in fact “closest” to the movie-goer this last possible moment: first because her situation resembles that of the movie-goer in the sense that both are participants in a representation, both exiled from the realm on the other side of the screen; and second because the scene will soon change and Bianca—a cinematic being, conceived on film, the prototype for all the “shadow children” fathered on Greta “that *Alpdrücken* night,” the one who “favors you most of all” in the way children are said to favor their parents in appearance—will disappear, the end of her scene being the equivalent of death, the movie-goer the only witness to it. However, as with the descending V-2, the movie-goer will never get to see the actual death of Bianca, only the foreshadowed “onscreen” one: “You’ll never get to see her. So somebody has to tell you.”

Who is this “somebody”? I would suggest that it is the narrator, operating in stage-manager mode. Only the narrator has the ability to mediate between the intradiegetic characters and the extradiegetic audience. Only through the narrator as stage manager can the many instances of direct address in the leavetaking passage be made comprehensible. For example, when the passage speaks of Slothrop in the third person (“Of course Slothrop lost her”), McHale is forced to concede that this interruption in what he considers second-person address to Slothrop is “Somewhat problematic.”⁶⁵ If, on the other hand, McHale allowed for the stage manager dynamic, this would not be a problem: the narrator could apostrophize Slothrop and then turn, as it were, back to the audience and speak of him in third person.

This is not to say that every instance of direct address can be unambiguously attributed either to Slothrop or a member of the extradiegetic audience. The narrator’s ability to apostrophize or address a narratee, his ability to “map-on” characters to other characters,

characters to narratees and vice-versa—these things make it impossible to verify the identity of every *you* in the passage.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, by conceiving of the narrator as a stage manager, we have a mechanism for making readings of this and other second-person passages inclusive and far less problematic. Instead of being stuck with one or another possible addressee, and forced into interpretive contortions that defy contextual features, we now have a mechanism which allows for address in sequence, simultaneous address, and most importantly, address between what are traditionally considered impermeable narrative and even ontological levels.

This ability to bridge these levels by way of second-person address is, among other things, crucial to the novel's theme of exploitation and complicity. Critics such as Molly Hite and Marjorie Kaufman, for example, have stressed the importance of reader identification with the *you* in these passages. As Kaufman says of the leavetaking scene and the reader's implied complicity in it, "not just Slothrop . . . but all of us have joined in the corporate act of the murder of exploitable innocence."⁶⁷ Similarly, for Hite "The narrator tends to modulate into direct address whenever a character says or does something that might alienate the reader and provoke an unsympathetically pejorative judgment."⁶⁸ In other words, the narrator uses second-person address as a means of preventing our escape by forcing us to identify with the *you* ambiguously directed at us and a villainous character such as Pointsman. Such is the price of identification, and in this sense the second person can be made to subserve the novel's political agenda. If, like Captain Esberg, we "question the haiku" and draw the narratorial *you* to ourselves, we are rewarded with a trip into the story itself: we are forced to actively engage it, as opposed to passively witnessing it.

McHale is right, however, to observe that this sort of interpretation as often posits identification with the novel's many victimizers as it does with the victimized.⁶⁹ David Seed, for example, calls the novel's use of second-person address "an inclusive device to unite reader with character, particularly with character as victim,"⁷⁰ the victim in this case being one or another character subject to the novel's opaque but nonetheless menacing "They."

Thus, as McHale points out, neither of these approaches are necessarily right or wrong, but rather must be used on a case-by-case basis: that is, they must be used as a local hypothesis, as opposed to a global one.⁷¹ Hite and Kaufman, then, can no more insist on the power of the *you* to implicate us (in a global sense) in the victimizing than Seed can insist the opposite—that the *you* always aligns us with the victimized.

A similar objection could of course be made to the concept of the stage manager. Because this concept is so closely aligned with the various “cinematic” global hypotheses applied to Gravity’s Rainbow in the past, it runs a similar risk of arrogating all instances of second-person address into an interpretive framework whose use is one-dimensional. One form this arrogation can take has already been predicted by McHale: “if we hold consistently to the movie-frame hypothesis, then we have a readymade formula for determining who *you* is in every instance. *You* will always be read as addressed to a narratee imagined to be sitting in a movie theater.”⁷² Hopefully, the stage manager hypothesis as presented here is sufficiently broad to escape this trap, especially to the extent that it encompasses direct address on and across every narrative level, including that of the empirical reader, who, thanks to the model of *interdeictic* movement the narrator as stage manager presents, is free to identify with any level in the narrative transaction.

In this sense, the stage manager paradigm is useful both in global and local terms. Where a particular passage seems strongly to suggest a narrator functioning as an “M.C.” of sorts, we can think of the stage manager as a literal device; or, where a passage refuses to disambiguate an instance of direct address, we can think of the stage manager as a principle of inclusion or a corridor between narrative levels. The key here, naturally, is to come up with a scheme that maintains the novel’s overall elusiveness, its unremitting attack on our preconceptions of narrative voice and representation—in short, its “strangeness,” which, as McHale reminds us, is what “we especially prize” about Gravity’s Rainbow.⁷³ But at the same time, we need to balance the “anti-paranoid” decision not to decide, as implied in McHale’s notion of “metareading,” against our desire to make some sense of a text, even one

as intractable as Gravity's Rainbow, with its implied "abandon all hope, ye who enter here." If the stage manager represents anything, then, it is the ability to play Virgil to our Dante and lead us through a realm often difficult to understand, often horrifying. What finally counts, in other words, what finally makes making sense of the narrative voice useful, is not so much that it helps us understand or verify textual ambiguities such as we find in the novel's use of second-person address, but rather the simple fact that it tells us we are being led.

A Final Parabola

At this point in our analysis, it seems that we have been following the trajectory of one of the novel's many parabolas. We have managed to liberate another possibility with respect to the nature and function of the narrator of Gravity's Rainbow, and along the way have added (hopefully) to the stock of plausible readings of problematic second-person passages. In the end, though, we were forced to surrender to the theme of indecision, much like the V-2, in its parabolic trajectory, is finally forced to surrender to the gravitational pull of the earth.

McHoul and Wills have proposed an interesting way to deal with interpretive cruxes such as those examined above. It is a powerfully integrative global device they call the "material typonym," and for them it demonstrates the "post-rhetorical" nature of the novel.⁷⁴ The material typonym is essentially an expression of the novel's ability to sabotage normal rhetorical operations (e.g., the distinction between fantasy and reality) by "flattening out" their implied dualism and assigning them a sort of residual materialism. McHoul and Wills liken this process to Derrida's use of "conceptual objects": "the matchbox, postcard and umbrella which might be seen on one level as metaphors for a set of ideas," but which Derrida uses "to deconstruct the operations of classical and hierarchical conceptual thinking that favors form over matter" or the ideational over the material.⁷⁵

To illustrate, McHoul and Wills examine the distinction between *use* and *mention* as set forth by formal logic. *Use* can be defined as a "sign's employment as such in a proposition," whereas *mention* involves self-reflexivity: "a reference to [a sign's] capacity as

a sign.”⁷⁶ For example: “The boy threw the ball” (use), as opposed to “‘The boy’ refers to a male child” (mention). In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, this distinction is occasionally problematized, such as in the following (McHoul and Wills’ paradigmatic example):

“You say *what*,” Roger has been screaming for a while.

“I-say,” sez Rózsavölgyi, again.

“You say, ‘I say’? Is that it? Then you should have said, ‘I say, “I say.””

“I did.”

“No, no—you said, ‘I say,’ *once*, is what you—”

“A-ha! But I *said* it *again*. I-*said* it . . . *twice*.”

“But that was after I asked you the question—you can’t tell me the two ‘I say’s were both part of the same statement,” unless, “that’s asking me to be unreasonably,” unless it’s really true that, “credulous, and around *you* that’s a form of,” that we’re the *same person*, and that the whole exchange was ONE SINGLE THOUGHT yaaagghhhh and that means, “insanity, Rózsavölgyi—”
(634)

Here we have a typically postmodern dramatization of textual self-reflexivity transplanted to the fictive world, a strategy similar to that we find in John Barth’s maddening use of quotation marks and parentheses to convey embedded levels of narration in the short story “Menelaïad”: ““(“(“(“(“ ‘Well . . . ’ ”)))))””.⁷⁷ For McHoul and Wills, this exchange between Roger Mexico and Rózsavölgyi not only foregrounds textuality, it also confounds the distinction between use and mention to such an extent that it threatens to disappear:

Notice here how the narrator’s ‘own’ speech-quote marks are dropped and interrupted, threatening the very separation between speakers, and between them and the narrator. . . . The distinction between use and mention is in jeopardy . . . the text, as it were, is becoming *flat* as the levels of use and mention, serious and parasitic, normal and citational, disappear. There are now, perhaps, only material

marks on the page. A material equivalence between signifiers replaces a rhetorical difference between them.⁷⁸

The result, in other words, of the confusion between use and mention is our estrangement from the very distinction between the two. We are left with the simple materiality of text—“marks on the page”—which represents the residual term in McHoul and Wills’ paradigm. Thus:

use/mention // *materiality of text*

This paradigm, essentially, can be reduced into the following equation:

a/b // *substance*

where ‘a’ and ‘b’ represent elements of a given dualism, ‘/’ represents the difference between them, ‘//’ represents their “flattening out” through conflation and self-cancellation, and finally ‘substance’ represents the so-called material typonym.⁷⁹ Unlike the conventional notion of the sign, McHoul and Wills argue, the third term generated here is not recuperable as signifying a “whole.” That is, unlike the Saussurean algorithm, which is able to incorporate the “dual aspect of recto and verso” into a single sign,

recto/verso
sign

in Gravity’s Rainbow the very ability to incorporate is demolished, giving rise to a new type of signification in which the classic model of Saussure becomes “a single side of the signifying relation . . . a token . . . which *betokens* a typonymic object.”⁸⁰ This paradigm, of course, can be applied not only to more explicitly rhetorical oppositions (such as use and mention), but also to thematic and global oppositions many critics deploy to interpret the novel—oppositions which can ultimately be reduced to rhetorical operations. For example, by exploiting the etymological reverberation of parable/parabola, McHoul and Wills are able to demonstrate how the novel is a “parable of . . . a parabola, allowing for rhetorical operations which stretch all the way from the simple metonymy of the book’s title, to the explicated metaphoric sense of the characters’ actions.”⁸¹ Thus, to use two more of McHoul and Wills’ paradigmatic examples drawn from the novel:

But it is a curve each of them feels, unmistakably. It is the parabola. They must have guessed, once or twice—guessed and refused to believe—that everything, always, collectively, had been moving toward that purified shape latent in the sky, that shape of no surprise, no second chances, no return. (209)

Katje has understood the great airless arc as a clear allusion to certain secret lusts that drive the planet and herself. (223)

Here we have the parabola as allegory, as parable, and many analyses of the novel depend on an extrusion of this rhetorical operation to build cases for larger thematic or structural “truths.” However, as McHoul and Wills point out, there is also “the fact of the parabola that is the rocket’s flight, material phenomenon of the simplest order.”⁸² If, in other words, this rhetorical operation relies at some point on reference to “a sense which resides in the world,” and if such operations, as McHoul and Wills argue, work analogically or parodically or in some other way typical to language, then there will always be an element of approximation in doublets like parable/parabola.⁸³ It is this dependence, apparently, this unavoidable necessity of approximation, that Gravity’s Rainbow systematically exploits and undermines. “That purified shape latent in the sky,” the “clear allusion to certain secret lusts that drive the planet”: the referents here are approachable only through rhetorical operations which ultimately remain such, with no self-present link to the thing they attempt to describe.

This, of course, is considered by many to be the basic condition of language, and the degree to which Gravity’s Rainbow seems to push this condition to its limits, or compress it into self-cancellation, goes a long way towards bearing out McHoul and Wills’ argument. Taken in this light, the extracting of the material typonym can be seen as a sort of conceptual *hysteron proteron* —yet another trope the novel exploits⁸⁴—that moves rhetoric back through the signifying chain and its operations of metaphor and opposition, finally leaving us with a conceptual object largely stripped of its associative dimension. The film runs backwards, and the accretion of meaning dissolves into, or at least towards, an object akin to Foucault’s

pipe which is not a pipe. This qualification is necessary, of course, because the typonymic operation McHoul and Wills describe is not meant to be taken as a return of transcendence:

The post-rhetorical is constituted by the form of these cases. The form can only be instantiated, not defined—shown, not said. In the [material typonymic operation] the form is realized thusly: the left-hand side, itself constituted by a dualism, is over-ridden on the right hand side by an object or person (at least something of material substance, no matter how mysterious). Substance, that is, supplants rhetoric—though all this, need we stress, is accomplished within and *as* the play of signs, in themselves, of course, nothing but material points.⁸⁵

Having described this process, we can perhaps now add another example to McHoul and Wills' list, which seems mostly to involve movement on the level of thematics or semiotic oppositional structures ("rocket/penis // *Jamf*"; "reality/fantasy // *cinema*").⁸⁶ The material typonym I would suggest could perhaps be called "post-narratological," in the sense that it attempts to make sense of the novel's disruption of traditional ontologic-narrative boundaries, much in the way it disrupts conventional rhetorical operations. One way to describe this material typonym would be to use the formula: outside/inside // *narrator*. Or, in even more explicitly narratological terms: extradiegetic/intradiegetic // *narrator*. The idea of "narrator" is of course problematic here, so strongly does it imply a unified voice, in defiance of the seemingly polyvocalic experience of the novel itself. However, as with the "category of author" as it concerns McHoul and Wills, there appears to be room for a further examination of the category of narrator. If one of the purposes of McHoul and Wills' study is to remove the empirical Thomas Pynchon from studies of his work and instead conceive of Pynchon as a writing practice, we might perform a similar operation on narratological treatments of the narrator—treatments which ultimately look to the empirical world, the perceived uniformity of space and time, the various realia which present themselves to our senses, for an ontological basis from which to make analogical (parabolic) connections to the act of narrative.

As this study has tried to maintain all along, the nature of written communication has its analogue in speech—not speech as guarantor of meaning or truth, but rather as a material phenomenon experienced in ways different from the experience of writing. The force of Derridean thought makes it difficult if not impossible to assert the primacy of one over the other. Moreover, both speech and writing have a material existence and can ultimately be reduced to the same nonplus. Nonetheless, if we return to the basic condition of oral communication, we can at least insist on the *sensed* difference between speech and writing. If the substance in McHoul and Wills' breakdown of *written* rhetorical strategies such as use and mention is grammatological—marks on the page—then perhaps the analogous substance in the breakdown of speech is simply phonological. Not in the sense that Saussure pursued the term, as the medium to which meaning inheres, but rather in the sense that the sound of speech points towards the material existence of a speaker, and to certain paths of oral/aural communication we experience through our senses, each of which can be regarded as a type of “conceptual object.”

Thus, another option might be: speech/writing // *narrator*. At any rate, the narrator in all of these examples represents the minimal material presence in a text or utterance toward which all these conceptual operations point. It is that (pre)sense of the production of language, and in this sense it can participate in the same parabolic movement from matter to form, object to concept, thing to idea. The *hysteron proteron*, then, that moves us back through the chain of signification to this minimally material sense leaves us with not one, but rather two substances: on the one hand, the graphic; on the other, the phonic. To put it another way, whereas McHoul and Wills would redefine Pynchon as a writing practice, this study would redefine him also as a speaking practice. For his demolition of oppositional doublets like “extradiegetic/intradiegetic” and “inside/outside” is accomplished not only through a destabilization of rhetorical formulas that seek a foothold in the world of sense (for example, fantasy/reality), but also through a destabilization of speech as experienced in the world of sense. *You, here, we, now*—all of the narrator's deictics, the majority of his verb

tenses, his constant reconfiguration of communicative circuits, rely for their effect upon the *sensed* aspect of speech, those “egocentric particulars” or markers of presence which signify and indeed arise from the materiality of spoken discourse.

But if traditional models of communication are true in positing a receiver for every sender, we find that these same conceptual operations apply reciprocally to the reader, who participates in the narrator’s destabilization of speech as represented in text, and indeed is required for this destabilization to have meaning and import. We can perhaps say, then, that part of the “program” of Gravity’s Rainbow involves a parabolic return to the “earth of speech,” or the original condition of language in its infancy, before it was subjected to vast accretions of “meaning” and all the other instabilities poststructuralism has revealed to us in our age. This is not to suggest that the novel has an overtly or consciously positive agenda lurking beneath its surface. Rather, it is to say that Gravity’s Rainbow, in some unspeakable way, reduces itself to an essence of sorts. What this essence is, precisely, is difficult to determine. Perhaps it is simply narrative. Not in the sense of

narrator/narratee
narrative

which seems to suggest a transparent or ideal transmission of meaning, but rather in the sense of narrator/narratee // *narrative*, which incorporates all the elements of the novel that confuse traditional ontologies while at the same time preserving narrative as a fundamental object, a material phenomenon in the world of sense.

This, perhaps, is the one consolation Gravity’s Rainbow leaves us, the one thing we can point towards as readers. Like the Uroboros of myth, the novel consumes itself, and us with it, in its own paradoxes. But, like the Phoenix, it also rises from its own ashes—a far less fabulous bird, admittedly, but a bird nonetheless, which, metaphorically at least, points towards a minimum continuity of language that can be relied upon no matter how bad things get in the world of history, thought, and action.

Notes

¹ Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow (New York: Penguin, 1995), 667. All subsequent page references will refer to this edition and appear parenthetically in the main text. Also, because Pynchon makes heavy use of the ellipsis in his writing, any editorial ellipses used to signify elision in cited text will be placed in brackets (e.g., [...]) to avoid confusion.

² For a fuller account of this controversy, see Peter Kihss, "Pulitzer Jurors Dismayed on Pynchon," New York Times (8 May 1974): 38.

³ This question has lost some of its mystique in the last two years. Since the release of Mason & Dixon (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), there has been a renewed popular interest in Pynchon the empirical author. The result has been a number of egregious intrusions on his private life, which he has managed to keep secret for decades. CNN, for example, tracked him to his home in New York and caught him on film; however, they honored Pynchon's request that the tape not be aired (CNN, which apparently had stalked Pynchon, nonetheless ran a "crowd shot" containing him, perhaps to tantalize curious viewers). More recently, British photojournalist James T. Bone ambushed Pynchon while the author was picking up his six-year-old son from school. The photo from this encounter ran in some editions of the London Times and prompted threats of a lawsuit from Pynchon's publisher.

⁴ Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49 (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 82.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁶ John Gardner, On Moral Fiction (New York: BasicBooks, 1978), 94.

⁷ Brian McHale, Constructing Postmodernism, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 87.

⁸ *Ibid.* McHale points out that, since 1984 at least, the correspondence between the interpretive habits of the characters in Gravity's Rainbow and those of the novel's readers "has become something of a commonplace in Pynchon criticism" (280n). But this in itself, apparently, is no guarantee that a given critic will exercise the mode of reading McHale goes on to advocate.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁰ Douglas Fowler, A Reader's Guide to Gravity's Rainbow (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1980), 24. For other examples of this hypothesis, see Mark R. Siegel, Pynchon: Creative Paranoia in Gravity's Rainbow (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1978), 21; Maureen Quilligan, The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre (Ithica, NY: Cornell UP, 1979), 178; Thomas Schaub, Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois Press, 1981), 62, 66-7, 127-8; Tony Tanner, Thomas Pynchon (London: Methuen, 1982), 88; and Khachig Tölölyan, "War as Background in Gravity's Rainbow," Approaches to Gravity's Rainbow, ed. Charles Clerc (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1983), 65.

¹¹ Frank D. McConnell, Four Postwar American Novelists: Bellow, Mailer, Barth and Pynchon (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1977), 178. For other examples of this hypothesis, see William M. Plater, The Grim Phoenix: Reconstructing Thomas Pynchon

(Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978), 185-6; Robert D. Newman, Understanding Thomas Pynchon (Columbia, SC: U of South Carolina Press, 1986), 112; and Jaqueline R. Smetak, "Who's Talking Here: Finding the Voice in Gravity's Rainbow," Pynchon Notes 20-1 (1987): 96-7.

¹² For an example of Roger's exhaustion, see the passage on page 41 (note, however, that Jessica herself is one of the "alumni of the Battle of Britain," so the passage applies equally well to her). For an example of Roger's fear of losing Jessica, see pages 124-6.

¹³ McHale, Constructing Postmodernism, 104.

¹⁴ Scott Sanders, "Pynchon's Paranoid History," Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon, eds. George Levine and David Leverenz (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), 154; Joseph Slade, "Religion, Psychology, Sex and Love in Gravity's Rainbow," Approaches to Gravity's Rainbow, ed. Charles Clerc (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1983), 185-6; and Craig Hanson Werner, "Recognizing Reality, Realizing Responsibility," Modern Critical Interpretations: Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1986), 96.

¹⁵ McHale, Constructing Postmodernism, 105. McHale cites two passages in particular to support this alternative hypothesis: one on page 129 of the novel, where the "episode openly adopts Jessica's perspective," and another on page 131, where the details (wedding gowns) and concerns (bridehood) could reasonably be aligned with Jessica. In all likelihood, McHale is not advancing this hypothesis in earnest. Rather, he is using it to illustrate the overall undecidability of the episode.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁰ For an example of critics who identify Pynchon with his narrator, casually or otherwise, see Schaub, Pynchon: The Voice, 29; and Werner, "Recognizing Reality," 95.

²¹ Alec McHoul and David Wills, Writing Pynchon: Strategies in Fictional Analysis (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois Press, 1990), 2.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

26 McHale, Constructing Postmodernism, 90.

27 Ibid., 96.

28 One doesn't have to look to far, however, to find examples of unconventional narrators, intradiegetic or otherwise, especially in postmodern literature. In Italo Calvino's Cosmicomics (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968), a book John Barth considers exemplary of postmodern fiction, the intradiegetic narrator *Qfwfq* stretches the definition of personification considerably: in one chapter-story he is a particle of matter floating in space, in another a dinosaur, and so on. An example from Barth's own work would be the narrator of "Night-Sea Journey" from Lost in the Funhouse (New York: Doubleday, 1968), who, though some critics allegedly mistook him for a fish when the story was first published, is actually a sperm cell.

29 McHale, Constructing Postmodernism, 93.

30 Ibid., 94-5.

31 Smetak, "Who's Talking Here," 96-7.

32 McHale, Constructing Postmodernism, 282n.

33 George Eliot, Middlemarch (New York: Signet, 1964), 12-13.

34 There are many other markers of the narrator's presence beyond the back-shifting of verbs in this passage, not the least being the narrative irony with which some of Dorothea's ideas on marriage are subtly satirized. These markers demonstrate, I think, the degree to which free indirect discourse relies on a sense of narratorial presence beyond the dual temporality implied by the back-shifting of verbs. If we were to cast all of the verbs in present tense, would that diminish the apparent presence of the narrator's voice and opinions? David Lodge (in his essay "Mimesis and Diegesis in Modern Fiction," The Postmodern Reader, ed. Charles Jencks [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992], 181-95) seems to arrive at the conclusion that this passage is rendered in FID, though without relying on formal distinctions such as back-shifting of tenses. Instead, he analyzes the context closely for different degrees of presence between Dorothea and the narrator, concluding that the two voices are, in some places at least, "fused together inextricably" (186).

35 McHale, Constructing Postmodernism, 99. McHale prefers the term "interior dialogue" or sometimes "self-apostrophe" to describe a character addressing him- or herself in the second person (92, 99).

36 Michel Butor, "L'Usage des pronoms personnels dans le roman," Les Temps Modernes 178 (1961): 941.

37 McHale, Constructing Postmodernism, 100.

38 Gerald Prince, Dictionary of Narratology (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1987), 43.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 34.

41 See Strother Purdy, "Gravity's Rainbow and the Culture of Childhood," Pynchon Notes 22-3 (1988): 14, for a discussion of this passage. It bears remembering, however, that this scene involving Närrish's capture is shot through with combined speech and (one could argue) free indirect discourse. For example: "It is reasonable to Närrish that he, being smaller, he should sacrifice, if it helps Springer survive, even survive another day . . . wartime thinking, ja, ja . . . but too late to change" (516).

42 McHale, Constructing Postmodernism, 281n. Ann Banfield, Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982). McHale differs with Banfield in that he accepts the subjectless imperative and addressee-oriented adverbials as possible in FID. McHale and Banfield, however, seem to agree that surface forms of address such as *you* or appellatives are exempt from FID.

43 Prince, Dictionary of Narratology, 35.

44 Ibid.

45 See, for example, Charles Clerc, "Introduction," Approaches to Gravity's Rainbow, ed. Charles Clerc (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1983). Clerc sees the "cause and effect" line as addressed "pointedly at the reader" (17), and mentions another popular example of allegedly reader-oriented address: the "Check out Ishmael Reed" line on page 588 of the novel. In Clerc's defense, he does recognize the "chameleonic" and "protean" nature of the narrator's voice, its ambiguity, how its tone "refuses categorization" (17-18).

46 Alec McHoul, "Gravity's Rainbow's Golden Sections," Pynchon Notes 20-1 (1987): 31.

47 McHale, Constructing Postmodernism, 102.

48 Schaub, Pynchon: The Voice, 124-5.

49 Ibid., 126, 125.

50 Smetak, "Who's Talking Here," 101.

51 McHale, Constructing Postmodernism, 282n.

52 Ibid.

53 Thornton Wilder, "Our Town," Three Plays (New York: HarperPerennial, 1985), 5. Subsequent page references to this work will refer to this edition and appear parenthetically in the main text.

⁵⁴ Gérard Genette, Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithica: Cornell UP, 1980), 106.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁵⁶ Thornton Wilder, "The Skin of Our Teeth," Three Plays (New York: HarperPerennial, 1985), 159-60.

⁵⁷ The Big Lebowski, dir. Joel Coen (Polygram, 1998).

⁵⁸ For example, in the Eddie Pensiero scene, which begins with the deictic "These pine limbs, crackling so blue and watery, don't seem to put out any heat at all" (640). Is this Pensiero talking? Possibly. Pensiero is "a connoisseur of shivers" and the diction of the sentence seems to resemble his to some degree (641). Nevertheless, in the passage which immediately follows "These pine limbs," the details could not be plausibly known by Pensiero: details about secret war agenda, large economic movements, etc. Once again, we encounter a situation in which the deictics and speech mannerisms are as attributable to the narrator as to a character, leaving open the possibility of the narrator's personified presence in diegesis, as with the stage manager of Our Town.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Schaub, Pynchon: The Voice, 124.

⁶⁰ McHale, Constructing Postmodernism, 97.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁶² *Ibid.* See, for example, Plater, The Grim Phoenix, 18; and Laurence Rosenheim, "Letter to Richard Pearce in Response to 'Pynchon's Endings,'" Pynchon Notes 17 (1985): 48-9.

⁶³ See, for example, the passage on 576-7: "Ilse, fathered on Greta Erdmann's silver and passive image, Bianca, conceived during the filming of the very scene that was in his thoughts as Pökler pumped in the fatal charge of sperm—how could they not be the same child?"

⁶⁴ McHale notes that "the arrangement of seats in a movie-house is seen as analagous to a chessboard, with ranks, files, and diagonals" (285n), which explains the reference in "never threatened along a rookwise row or diagonal."

⁶⁵ McHale, Constructing Postmodernism, 283n.

⁶⁶ The movie-goer described in the leavetaking scene, for example, is obviously conflated with the original *Alpdrücken* audience: that is, the scene projects both "films" at once, Bianca's and Greta's, forcing us to decide whether the past is being mapped-on to the present and the movie-goer is figuratively repeating the exploitation of Greta on Bianca, or the present is being projected backwards to the original setting, the Ufa Theatre on the Friedrichstrasse. The first interpretation seems most likely, however—again, because of contextual clues. There is an implied exclusion in "of all her putative fathers—Max Schlepzig and masked extras on one side of the moving film, Franz Pökler and certainly

other pairs of hands busy through trouser cloth, that *Alpdrücken* Night, on the other.” The *you* in the leavetaking scene is not identified as a member of either group; rather, he is a “putative father” and “closest to” Bianca in the sense that he witnesses Bianca’s exploitation and is therefore complicit in it. According to some critics, the double-entendre in “came in blinding color” implies that this extradiegetic movie-goer is masturbating to Bianca’s image, just as some *Alpdrücken* movie-goers apparently masturbated to Greta’s image. Whether or not this is understood in a figurative or literal sense, in both cases the complicity takes on a darker, more perverse dimension.

⁶⁷ Marjorie Kaufman, “Brunhilde and the Chemists: Women in *Gravity’s Rainbow*,” *Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon*, eds. George Levine and David Leverenz (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976), 215.

⁶⁸ Molly Hite, *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1983), 146-7.

⁶⁹ McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*, 108.

⁷⁰ David Seed, *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* (Iowa City: U of Iowa Press), 179.

⁷¹ McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*, 108.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 111.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ McHoul and Wills, *Writing Pynchon*, 53.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷⁷ John Barth, “Menelaiad,” *Lost in the Funhouse* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), 157. For obvious reasons, I have omitted the use of quotes as a marker of citation for this example. It should also be mentioned that a further level of textual self-reflexivity is conveyed by Barth’s use of superscripted parentheses, which seem to pertain as much to the quotation marks themselves (a textual phenomenon) as to the ostensibly “real-world” or mimetic utterance these quotation marks signify.

⁷⁸ McHoul and Wills, *Writing Pynchon*, 53. The authors may be relying overmuch on the presence of a distinct narrator’s “voice” in this passage to argue for a “flattening” of the rhetorical distinction between use and mention. The interruption of the “narrator’s ‘own’ speech-quote marks” that McHoul and Wills offer as evidence doesn’t necessarily mean that the narrator is not still “quoting” Roger Mexico in the form of another textual convention. I’m referring here to the common practice, in *Gravity’s Rainbow* and many other narratives, of rendering character thought in normal, unquoted prose, often with an attribution of some sort, but often not. At any rate, it seems at least equally plausible (if not more so) that the unquoted portions of Roger’s paranoid epiphany represent a simultaneous process of speech

and thought, the one opposed to the other in terms of what is sometimes called “third-level” dialogue—that is, ironic dialogue whose superficial meaning differs from the “mental text” of a character. Of course, in this example, we get a representation of both rather than having to infer the mental text from what we know of the character or situation. But however these two texts are presented, it bears remembering that the passage is recuperable both in conventional terms and those advocated by McHoul and Wills. To be sure, there is nothing to guarantee that “we’re the *same person*” is taking place only in the mind of Roger: it could be the narrator articulating what for Roger is inarticulable; one might even argue that it could represent, in part at least, Rózsavölgyi’s own thought; or even the narrator exploiting the shifter ‘we’ to induce a broader, all-inclusive paranoia. But at the same time, nor does the interruption of quotation marks guarantee the confusion of voices McHoul and Wills suggest. Again, there *are* moments in the novel when, other theoretical possibilities notwithstanding, it seems wiser to assume a simpler explanation for textual ambiguities.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 61, 66n.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 54.

⁸¹ Ibid., 60.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 59.

⁸⁴ For example, the scene which begins on page 203, in which the history of Slothrop’s family is “played backwards,” one of the novel’s many uses of “filmic” devices:

“Ghosts of fishermen, glassworkers, fur traders, renegade preachers, hilltop patriarchs and valley politicians go avalanching back from Slothrop here, back to 1630 when Governor Winthrop came over to America on the *Arabella*, [...] on which the first American Slothrop had been a mess cook or something—there go that *Arabella* and its whole fleet, sailing backward in formation, the wind sucking them east again, the creatures leaning from the margins of the unknown *sucking in* their cheeks, [...]

Or the hysteron proteron involving the (de)production of the V-2: “Rockets dismantle, the entire film runs backwards: faired skin back to sheet steel back to pigs to white incandescence to ore, to Earth” (139).

⁸⁵ McHoul and Wills, *Writing Pynchon*, 61.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

As early as 1965, literary criticism was starting to realize what fiction had known all along: that second-person narrative is a viable and indeed richly promising form, with uses far beyond those established in conventional reader address or the epistolary novel. Bruce Morrisette, whose contributions to study of the *nouveau roman* were both seminal and prolific, was also one of the first serious taxonomers and admirers of second-person narrative, saying of the form:

narrative “you,” although of comparatively late development, appears as a mode of curiously varied psychological resonances, capable in the proper hands of producing effects in the fictional field that are unobtainable by other modes or persons. Narrative “you” generates a complex series of perspectives whose multiple angles deserve to be explored.¹

Morrisette was of course responding to the aftermath of French novelist Michel Butor’s second-person novel (alluded to elsewhere in this study) La Modification, the critical response to which represents a kind of “map of misunderstanding” the form can inspire. Essentially, this was because Butor had untethered the second person from its familiar moorings. Whereas readers in the past were accustomed to locating the second person in one or two conventional personae—“Dear Reader,” or an epistolary correspondent, or a similar character understood as addressed in dialogue within the story—“l’innovation de Butor,” though not exactly an innovation, ushered in a new awareness of the possibilities of

narrative *you*, both as a subject of criticism and as a textual phenomenon to which readers would have to adjust.²

This adjustment, it seems, has not come easy, if in fact it has arrived at all. The various readings of Butor's novel around the time of its publication demonstrate the extent to which the second person resists easy categorization: some critics confidently declared the *you* to be the reader; others strongly objected to this possibility because of the misalignment of the experiences presented in the novel and one's own experience as an empirical reader; still other critics, among them Luc Estang, saw the "subject-object ambiguity" latent in the form.³

Decades later, we find a similar dynamic in criticism of second-person narrative, a similar range of "reader-response" that appears to demonstrate what If on a winter's night a traveler and Gravity's Rainbow dramatize in separate but analogous ways. That is, the stubbornly ambiguous versatility of *you* the reader, *you* the character, *you* et cetera. Even the keenest critical analyses of these two remarkable novels—Brian McHale's, for instance—falter at some point because of this versatility, as no doubt this study, far more humble, has likewise faltered in one way or another. To hazard an opinion of *you*, it seems, is as risky as identifying with it. But at the same time, second-person narratives, with their growing prominence in contemporary literature, continue to invite and perhaps even demand identification. Even in their most intractable and resistant form, they promise, as Calvino's novel does, that "The you . . . can, at any sentence, be addressed to you again. You are always a possible you."

It is this potential, perhaps, that makes the form both appealing and vaguely unsettling. Roland Barthes, in his own analysis of Butor's La Modification, aptly uses the term "interpellation" to describe the relationship between narrator and character as constituted by the *you*, which in this case is made to symbolize not only a communicative circuit, but also a creative circuit that "establishes the consciousness of the hero."⁴ This study would make a similar proposal: that the *you* can variously "establish the consciousness" of all parties involved in a narrative, in the sense that consciousness brings into play our powers of

identification , projection and analysis. These powers, obviously, cannot be exercised complacently or using outmoded models. Rather, they must be used to generate new approaches to the form, approaches useful both to readers and critics. Hence the calls from critics such as Darlene Hantzis, who at the end of her own treatment of second-person narrative suggests, "Future studies might construct a thorough, systematic articulation of the theoretical climate from which second person point of view texts emerge."⁵

In the decade that separates Hantzis' study from this one, the calls have continued, but only intermittently. There is a surprising scarcity of critical material devoted to the form, especially in proportion to the growing number of second-person texts waiting to be analyzed (most notably, short stories written in second person). Hopefully, this study has contributed in some small way to the overall critical armature needed to address these texts. Its purpose, on the one hand, has in part been to loosen the hold of certain narratological strictures on the form both by reintroducing the dynamics of oral communication and examining ways in which the empirical reader can make a claim on second-person texts.

Predictably, however, in the process this study was forced to concede that the intersection between the empirical world and the heterocosm is problematic to say the least, and that second-person narrative both solves and perpetuates the problems it signals. But this should not be seen as a defeat. Rather, it should be seen as one step in a process that will hopefully continue. This process, after all, at least as presented here, can claim a small part in a larger constellation of concerns within postmodern literature that center around fundamental human questions: questions of identity and meaning and existence. To put it another way, for every question the *you* raises, as well as for every question it fails to answer, other possibilities, other avenues of inquiry are liberated, and this is what makes postmodernism the frustratingly wonderful movement that it is.

The best way to conclude this study, then, is probably to issue another call, using the vocative of course, the natural element of the *you*, and hope that critics and readers alike will continue to answer.

Notes

¹ Bruce Morrisette, Novel and Film (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1985), 109.

² Morrisette offers a fuller treatment of the history of second-person narrative than offered here, and along the way makes a compelling case for Rex Stout's How Like a God (1929) as "the first thoroughgoing second-person novel" (124).

³ See Morrisette, Novel and Film (130-6), for a more detailed account of the critical controversy surrounding La Modification.

⁴ Qtd. in Morrisette, Novel and Film, 132.

⁵ Darlene Marie Hantzis, "You are about to begin reading": The Nature and Function of Second Person Point of View in Literature, diss., LSU, 1988 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1989), 142.

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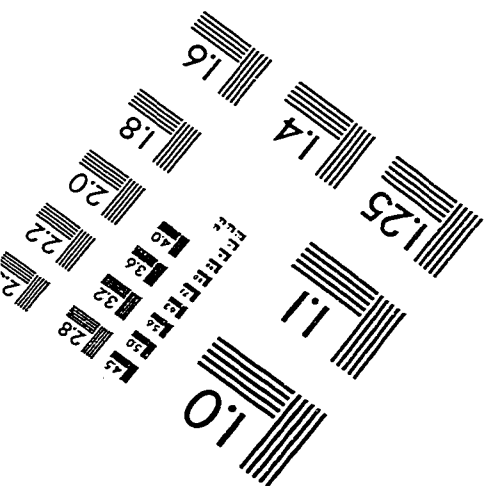
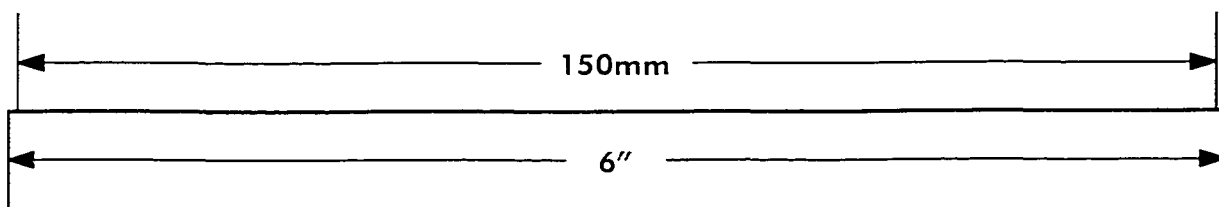
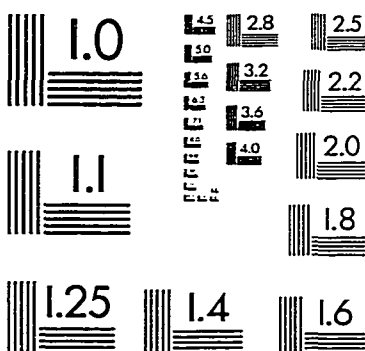
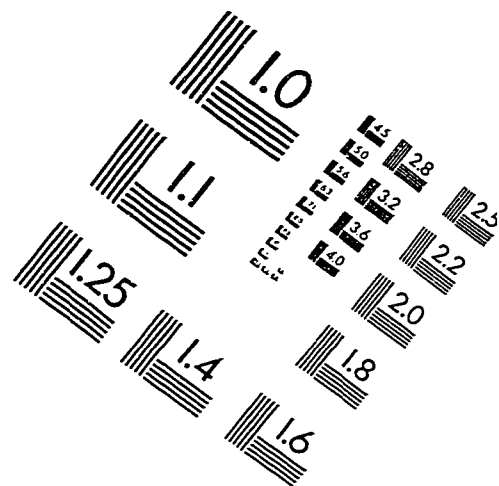
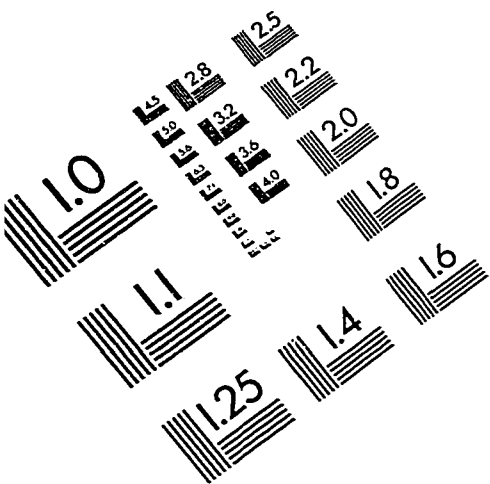
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