Narrative Voice and Agency in Drama: Aspects of a
Narratology of Drama

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> I'm not a theorist. I am not an authoritative or reliable commentator on the dramatic scene, the social scene, any scene. I write plays, when I can manage it, and that's all. That's the sum of it. So I'm speaking with some reluctance, knowing that there are at least twenty-four possible aspects of any single statement, depending on where you are standing at the time or on what the weather's like. A categorical statement, I find, will never stay where it is and be finite. It will immediately be subject to modification by the other twenty-three possibilities of it.[1]

I. A Note on Method

SPEAKING ON THE OCCASION of the National Student Drama Festival in Bristol in 1962, Harold Pinter presents a pointedly personal statement and at the same time rides a barely hidden attack against theory. Drama theorists, Pinter alleges, may think they know what they are doing, but they are actually prone to pronouncing "categorical statements" based on contingent positions. Once one acknowledges all the "possibilities," however, as Pinter does on his part, it is easy to get lost in the multifacetedness of modern reality. I believe this is an accurate representation of the dilemma that threatens both literary theory and interpretive practice. But does this mean that these enterprises are doomed to failure? Hopefully, this is not necessarily so.

Oddly enough, Pinter's dilemma is explicitly addressed in statistical theory, and perhaps there is an interdisciplinary lesson to be learned here. In statistics, the validity of a hypothesis depends on an assessment of the dangers of accepting or rejecting it, and on setting suitable error tolerances. There are two prominent errors: (1) to accept a hypothesis as right when it is wrong (given a fuller set of data), and (2) to reject a hypothesis as false when it is actually true.[2] Of course, truth and falsehood are not so easily accessible in the literary field, and literary theory in particular has to rely on argumentative values such as plausibility, face validity, efficiency, and productivity. In principle, however, the

statistical precept applies. Methodologically, then, this paper will assess the relative costs and merits of interpretive hypotheses and attempt to construct a plausible, consistent, and position-conscious conceptual framework which "explains more phenomena more adequately."[3]

The specific question I am addressing is whether and to what extent drama, like epic narrative, admits of the narratological concepts of a narrating instance or a narrative voice. Heeding Pinter's critique, I will first make an attempt to situate myself within a range of competing approaches to drama (section two). Section three tackles the voice issue by discussing traditional speech-act accounts of drama. Finally, section four reviews Seymour Chatman's argument for a show-er narrator and begins a tentative investigation of voice and other "signs of the narrating"[4] both in the dramatic text and in the dramatic performance. Complementing to some extent Brian Richardson's project in this issue and in earlier articles,[5] the overall aim is to prepare the ground for a narratology of drama.

II. Situating Oneself

In order to address the first of Pinter's charges, let us accept that every modern critic and theorist must identify and question his or her position. The most natural way of doing this is to associate onself with what Stanley Fish calls an interpretive community, a move that often also amounts to dissociating oneself from other interpretive communities.[6] The basic idea is that it is only by balancing competing beliefs that one can take a stand and meaningfully contribute to the issues, politics, and agendas of one's discipline. Of course, any one person can belong to several communities, and each community is likely to break down into several subcommunities. One can be a structuralist or a poststructuralist, one may be interested in the production side or the reception side of a work, one can see the world of artistic forms from any number of aesthetic "isms"—realism, impressionism, modernism, postmodernism, and so forth. The number of positions is large indeed, and the number of intersecting positions is larger still.

For our present purpose, let us focus on three reception-oriented theories of drama. There is only one "truth" that is accepted by all three theories, and that is that plays come in two forms or realizations, texts and performances. The divisions and contentions arise in the wake of this axiom, giving rise to questions of terminology, preference, focus, relevance, priority, and privilege. For convenience, the three interpretive approaches will be labeled Poetic Drama, Theater Studies, and Reading Drama, respectively.

(1) The school of Poetic Drama roundly prioritizes the dramatic text. Reading the text is regarded as a uniquely rewarding experience, particularly when set against the shortcomings of actual performances. Poetic Drama's main interpretive strategy is a close reading which aims at bringing out the dramatic work's full aesthetic quality and richness. Points on its agenda are a general critique and dislike of actors, audiences, and theatrical institutions (expressly including the Renaissance public theaters). Buzzwords and catchphrases include "poetic drama," "dramatic poetry," "drama as literature," "theater in the mind," "inferior to the original," and so forth. The author of the following testimonial is playwright Eugene O'Neill: "I hardly ever go to the theater . . . although I read all the plays I can get. I don't go to the theater because I can always do a better production in my mind. . . . Is not *Hamlet*, seen in the dream theater of the imagination as one reads, a greater play than *Hamlet* interpreted even by a perfect production?"[7]

(2) The school of Theater Studies, by contrast, privileges the performance over the text. A play's text is accepted as something that is "intended to be performed," but the performed play is really the only relevant and worthwhile form of the genre. The main interpretive strategies of this approach include considering a performance as the product of historical and cultural theatrical conditions, describing the sociology of drama, analyzing stage codes and semiotics, stage histories, and the dynamics of collaborative authorship. Points on the agenda are establishing a distinctive discipline and attacking Poetic Drama for its academic isolatedness. A typical catchphrase is a play's "coming to life" in performance. Here is a testimonial by a playwright anticipating the project:

Although the dramatist may also be a man of letters, capable of producing novels, poems, essays, criticism, I believe that drama is not simply a branch of literature but a separate little art, with its own peculiar values and technicalities. (And one day, if I am spared, I hope to deal with this subject at some length, if only as a protest against the nonsense often offered us by literary professors and lecturers who write about the drama without understanding the Theatre.) I hope that the plays in this volume can be enjoyed by a reader, but I must stress the fact that they were not written to be read but to be played in theatres, where if properly produced and acted they come alive. A play that has never found a theatre, actors, audiences, is not really a play at all. A dramatist is a writer who works in and for the Theatre.[8]

Had John Priestley actually written that essay on drama as "a separate art" (and one notes he already writes theater with a capital T) it would probably have become one of Theater Studies' foundational texts. As it

is, J. L. Styan's *Drama, Stage and Audience* (1975) is usually taken to articulate the discipline's programmatic views.[9]

(3) Finally, Reading Drama is a school that envisages an ideal recipient who is both a reader and a theatergoer—a reader who appreciates the text with a view to possible or actual performance, and a theatergoer who (re)appreciates a performance through his or her knowledge (and rereading) of the text. Its interpretive strategies include performance-oriented textual analysis, paying particular attention to the "secondary text" of the stage directions,[10] and comparing the reading of plays to the reading of novels. Points on its agenda include the rehabilitation of the text as a piece of literature, and the promotion of a cross-disciplinary exchange between critics, theorists, and theater practitioners. A typical catchphrase is "virtual performance";[11] programmatic textbooks include Keir Elam's *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (1980) and Manfred Pfister's *The Theory and Analysis of Drama* (1984), and there is also a recent collection of essays entitled *Reading Plays,* edited by Hanna Scolnicov and Peter Holland.[12] The following passage may serve as a testimonial: "*Krapp's Last Tape* shares the formal ambiguity of all dramas: it is at once a text to be read and reread and a guide for live performance. . . . Indeed, the reader's awareness of a potential performance partially constitutes the text's meaning; if we are to make sense of the play, we must read with especially active visual imagination."[13]

The foregoing survey emplots three approaches to drama theory as the dialectic stages of a Fichtean thesis-antithesis-synthesis cycle. Accepting Stanley Fish's premise that the beliefs of an interpretive community determine what "counts as a fact" as well as "what is central, peripheral, and worthy of being noticed" (*IT* 337), both literary criticism and theory are here accepted as being largely rhetorical in nature. As Fish claims, literary critics are perpetually in the business of validating and reinforcing current community beliefs, often also of persuading members of other interpretive communities to join the club (*IT* 16). Bearing in mind the relativity thus introduced, the present writer roundly embraces the beliefs of Reading Drama. Not only is Reading Drama the most circumspect of the three schools surveyed, it also explicitly supports the present essay's own agenda of bringing narratology to bear on the theory and analysis of plays. As for my position within narratology itself, I consider myself a member of the community of cognitively oriented postclassical discourse narratologists.[14]

Although I have isolated only three, not twenty-four, positions on drama, we are clearly already looking at a version of the Pinterian world picture. What we have before us is a large and heterogeneous corpus of objects (dramatic texts, virtual and real dramatic performances); we are

confronted with a wide range of largely contradictory approaches and responses that all seem more or less right or wrong under specific community perspectives. And yet, as far as I can see, recognition of the multiplicity of the phenomenon clears the air rather than incapacitates the project. Indeed, surveying the available options, we are in a better position to assess their relative strengths and weaknesses.

III. Speech-act Theories of Drama

As is well known, speech-act theory treats sentences and texts as pragmatically situated acts performed by speakers addressing hearers. It makes no difference to a speech-act theorist if the speaker is a writer or if the hearer is a reader—the contexts may be slightly different, but the speech acts are considered to be identical. For drama, too, a number of theorists and authors assume that the text straightforwardly issues from an authorial "Superspeaker" with a perceptible voice of his or her own (*DP* 3). As Edward Albee puts it, "I cut my plays because I overwrite. I get infatuated with the sound of my own voice and I put in all sorts of scenes and speeches that I am very fond of."[15] While this view affirms the basic similarity of written and spoken texts, it is a position that is naturally contested by commentators of a deconstructionist persuasion. In a nutshell, the speech act theorists' alliance of written text and audible speech nicely circumscribes the problematic of textual "voice," and one has to investigate where speech-act theory leads us in this matter. The accounts to be scrutinized in the following are those of John Austin, John R. Searle, Richard Ohmann, and Gérard Genette.[16] One might as well say at the outset that drama generally plays second fiddle in these accounts; often enough it is assigned the unthankful role of a foil or exception that can readily be excluded from further consideration.

The speech-act theory of fiction originates with John Austin's incidental observations on a particular type of "infelicitous" pragmatic context. Noting that performative utterances are heir to certain "kinds of ill" (*HTD* 21), he observes that "a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. . . . Language in such circumstances is in special ways—intelligibly—used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use—ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration" (*HTD* 22). One doesn't have to be a card-carrying deconstructionist to recognize the impact of Austin's exclusionary gesture, his privileging of normal circumstances,[17] and the marginalization and disqualification of

what does not fit the language philosopher's current focus of interest. From today's perspective, whether deconstructionist or not, all of Austin's points beg the question, indeed, they invite the positions they so explicitly exclude. Far from leading to "kinds of ills" or "etiolations," the ability of language to deal with nonserious, imaginary, or hypothetical scenarios is now generally accepted as crucially indicative of human thinking, cognition, and linguistic competence itself.[18]

Recognizing Austin's patchy treatment of fictional utterances, Searle initiates a closer inquiry into what he terms the "logical status" of fictional discourse. Analyzing the beginning of Iris Murdoch's novel *The Red and the Green*, Searle argues that the author cannot be held accountable for the truth of the text's assertive statements. Instead, suspending the rules of reference and sincerity that apply in "serious" or "real-world" utterances, "the author of a work of fiction pretends to perform a series of illocutionary acts, normally of the representative type" (TLS 325). Having established this formula (which conspicuously haunts all subsequent accounts), Searle then briefly turns to what he terms "two special cases," first-person narratives and "theatrical plays." In first-person fiction such as Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories the author is "not in fact pretending to make assertions, he is *pretending to be* John Watson" (TLS 328). As for drama, "it is not so much the author who is doing the pretending but the characters in the actual performance"; in other words, "the author of the play is not in general pretending to make assertions; he is giving directions as to how to enact a pretense which the actors then follow" (TLS 328). Quoting the first few lines (including the initial stage direction) of John Galsworthy's play *The Silver Box*, Searle then works his way up to the famous "recipe" metaphor:

It is instructive to compare this passage [from Galsworthy's play] with Miss Murdoch's. Murdoch, I have claimed, tells us a story; in order to do that, she pretends to make a series of assertions about people in Dublin in 1916. What we visualize when we read the passage is a man pottering about his garden thinking about horses. But when Galsworthy writes his play, he does not give us a series of pretended assertions about a play. He gives us a series of directions as to how things are actually to happen on stage when the play is performed. When we read the passage from Galsworthy we visualize a stage, the curtain rises, the stage is furnished like a dining room, and so on. That is, it seems to me the illocutionary force of the text of a play is like the illocutionary force of a recipe for baking a cake. It is a set of instructions for how to do something, namely how to perform the play. (TLS 328–29)

One notes how Searle moves from an account of what happens in the process of composition ("when Galsworthy writes his play"), to what the

text means when "we" read it, to the practical question of "how to perform the play." It is easy to see that this moving focus—which unproblematically invokes positions from both Theater Studies and Reading Drama—puts a Pinterian price on any "categorical statement" that issues from it, especially the pretense and the recipe formulas. Obviously enough, what is a feature of one mode of existence—say, the instruction quality of the dramatic text—may not exist as a feature of the other (the performance). Moreover, what is true of one set of recipients (readers) may not be true of another (actors). If one accepts Fish's "anti-foundationalist" argument that it is the recipients who are a text's true "makers" (*IT* 327) the resulting problem may clearly be more serious than is apparent at first glance.

There are other weaknesses in Searle's exposition of the matter. No reason is given why third-person fiction should be the central phenomenon on whose ground drama and first-person fiction show up as "special cases." Furthermore, one notes how the concept of nondeceptive pretense is made to serve as the common denominator of all three types of fiction: in third-person narration the author pretends to recount; in first-person narration he or she pretends to be a narrator; in plays, the actors pretend to be characters and to perform acts. Actually, the common ground is entirely slippery. If the author can pretend to be a first-person narrator then one might well ask why she or he should be unable to pretend to be a heterodiegetic narrator. More generally speaking, if fiction is to be derived from an underlying concept—a big *if*—then why must it be reducible to pretense and not, say, make-believe, fabrication, imitation, simulation, or impersonation? (But any of these alternatives could immediately be questioned in turn.) Finally, there are many scenarios where the pretense formula is singularly unenlightening. If Murdoch "tells a story" and does it by "pretending to recount to us a series of events" (TLS 325), then it looks as if telling amounts to pretending to tell, a paradoxical notion which complicates rather than explains things. If an "actor pretends to perform . . . speech acts and other acts" (TLS 328), then, strictly speaking, stage directions are not instructions to do something but to pretend to do something—here, too, the pretense tag can apparently be added or dropped at will. Admittedly, when a stage direction specifies *Hamlet dies,* the actor better pretend to die rather than do the real thing. Then again, when a stage direction specifies *exit, stage left* (an example we will encounter again), the actor better walk off; pretending to leave won't do. Would *pretends to kiss her* be realized on stage as a pretended pretense? Evidently, there is some unaccounted-for devil in the detail here.

Searle also indicates that a reader who reads the initial stage direction of Galsworthy's play will "visualize a stage, the curtain rises, the stage is

furnished like a dining room, and so on." But according to Searle's own account, the text does not contain instructions to visualize this and that, but "instructions for how to . . . perform the play" (TLS 329). What Searle fails to notice at this point is that an ordinary reader (that is, one who is neither an actor nor a director) is rather an unsuitable addressee for the text's assumed illocutionary force. In fact, to instruct an ordinary reader "how to perform the play" is just as infelicitous as, say, asking an infant to prepare a dinner for four. Of course, as Patricia A. Suchy points out, actors and directors are readers, too;[19] indeed, it seems sensible to say that theater practitioners read the text like ordinary readers before they read it as professionals with a view to a possible production. As readers, they will probably visualize and (lest we forget) vocalize this and that like everybody else rather than get up and do what they are apparently instructed to do. Imaginative reading, one can conclude, comes first because it is a necessary precondition for understanding, and only then, if at all applicable (closet drama is always a troublesome exception, especially to Theater Studies), for directing and acting. Even though Searle draws attention to the imaginative basis of reading in the conclusion of his essay, he fails to establish this crucial link between imaginative reading and the preparation and execution of the performance.

When Genette reopens "the question of the illocutionary status of narrative fiction" (AOF 30), he begins by seconding many of Searle's claims, including postulating third-person narrative as the general fiction paradigm and reading the standard narrative sentence of epic fiction as pretended assertion. Also as in Searle, first-person narration is seen as an author pretending to be a narrator, and after briefly situating both first-person fiction and drama "on the sidelines," they are "set aside" from further consideration (AOF 31). In contradistinction to Searle, who denies the existence of fiction-specific speech acts, Genette argues that fictional assertions might be explained as either or both of two indirect speech acts: (1) as *directives* (invitations) to join the author in imagining the fictional world, (2) as *declarations* creating the fictional world.

In so far as Genette follows Searle, the questions and objections that were raised above can simply be reiterated: third-person fiction is an entirely arbitrary paradigm that is likely to produce contingent (that is, invalid) categorical statements, and it is certainly not "beyond question" that "an utterance that presents all the formal features of assertions but does not fulfill their pragmatic conditions can only be a pretended assertion" (AOF 36). Nevertheless, in his discussion of Searle's comments on drama, Genette helpfully disentangles pragmatic contexts and textual modes:

As for stage directions . . . Searle views them as having a purely "directive" illocutionary status ("instructions for how to do something, namely, how to perform the play"). This is undoubtedly the way they are understood by actors and directors, but not necessarily by ordinary readers (as for the audience, it sees only the way the directions are executed); the reader is just as likely to see them as a description of what is going on onstage (in the fictional diegesis). A direction such as "Hernani removes his coat and drapes it over the king's shoulders" simultaneously describes the character's behaviour and tells the performer what to do. The author's intention is thus undecidable, here; it oscillates between description on the one hand and prescription, or direction, on the other, according to whether the author is primarily addressing a reader (as in the case of Musset) or a theatrical company (as in the case of Brecht). (AOF 32)

Even though these are all pertinent observations, one can quarrel with some of the detail. For instance, there is little point in second-guessing authorial intentions, which are never truly "decidable." Also, if stage directions mean different things in different contexts then one is probably facing a *multifunctional* text rather than an "oscillating" authorial intention (I will return to Genette's analysis of "Hernani removes his coat" below). Finally, there is little need to bother about "primary" addressees because, as Genette points out, the dramatic text comfortably serves both ordinary readers, reading for pleasure, and theater practitioners, reading for work. Indeed, Genette's entirely valid point is that a dramatic text can variously address ordinary readers and/or stage practitioners and change illocutionary force in accordance with the pragmatics involved. Although this may pose a problem for speech-act theory—are we talking of different texts now?—Genette's multiple-addressees hypothesis elegantly solves the problem of infelicitous context which, as we saw above, mars Searle's account.

In general, Genette's exposition proceeds from a categorical distinction between "dramatic fiction" and "narrative fiction" (AOF 33), a terminologically reified *fiat* that has serious repercussions on the question of voice and narrative agency. In *Narrative Discourse Revisited*,[20] where the subject is treated at length, Genette maintains that there is a "truly insurmountable opposition between dramatic representation and narrative" (*NDR* 41), and he defines "narrative *stricto sensu*" as a narrative conveyed by "a *verbal* transmission" (*NDR* 16–17). Two drastic consequences follow: (1) that drama is a nonnarrative medium lacking a narrator's discourse and voice, and (2) that it is the story dimension of drama, at best, that admits of narratological analysis (*NDR* 16). But here, again, it pays to heed Pinter's challenge and to accept that "drama" is a multifaceted phenomenon. It would clearly be more prudent to say that

the dramatic performance is not normally predicated on a narratorial
"verbal transmission." Already this is only partly true of plays like *Pericles,*
to be discussed below, and it does not necessarily mean that the *dramatic
text* is likewise characterized by absent narratorial voice. From the point
of view of Theater Studies, where everything is considered to be
subordinate to and projected from the performance, it would indeed
seem logical to proceed from an absent-voice premise.[21] In the frame-
work of Reading Drama, in contrast, dramatic text and dramatic
performance, though clearly related, are media in their own right;
hence the text need not in principle inherit the absent-voice quality that
may be constitutive of the performance.

In the context of this problematic, reconsider what Genette has to say
on stage directions, a textual element absent in performance. "Hernani
removes his coat," Genette says, "*describes* the character's behaviour"
(AOF 32, my emphasis). Unobjectionable as this phrasing may be, it is
worth noting that "description of behavior" is rather a fuzzy term in
narratological discourse. As established at length by Genette himself,
albeit in the context of epic narrative, description constitutes a narrative
pause during which story time stops. In Seymour Chatman's helpful
linguistic elaboration, description is based on "stasis" statements typically
predicated on verbs like *be* or *have*.[22] However, the example cited by
Genette is what Chatman terms a "process statement" (*SD* 32), an
element that is part of the representation of temporally sequenced story
events. In other words, "Hernani removes his coat" is not a descriptive
but a narrative (or "diegetic") statement whose enunciating subject
should be a narrator, not the author. Remarkably, Genette also ignores
the possibility of a narrating instance when he finally turns to third-
person epic fiction: "The acts . . . whose status still remains to be defined
if possible, are the speech acts that constitute . . . the narrative discourse
itself: that of the author" (AOF 33).[23] Thus error is piled upon error.
First, a diegetic statement is mistaken for a descriptive statement, and
then the *ultimate* originator of the text, the author, is preferred to the
textually manifest subject of the narrative discourse, the narrator (see
Fludernik, this issue, for discussion of a similar slippage). But there is
method in these errors: the first protects the assumption that drama is
nonnarrative, the second flattens the communicative structure of fictional
texts to a single-level contact between author and reader, creating the
direct relationship between textual elements and real-life illocutions that
can then (and only then) be "explained" in speech-act theoretical terms.

Ignoring the possibility of a text-internal narrating instance, Genette
also ignores another earlier speech-act account which offers a perceptive
glimpse into the complex communicational structure of fictional texts.
Although initially also proceeding on a speech-act based pretense model

of fiction, Richard Ohmann eventually comes to the conclusion that the perspicuous necessary condition of a work of fiction is that it "leads the reader to imagine a speaker, a situation, a set of ancillary events" (SA 14). In this readerly construction of a *quotational* relationship between real-world author and imaginary fictional speaker the pretense formula loses much of its foothold. Indeed, when Shannon and Weaver's mathematical model of communication started to register in the humanities—roughly from the 1970s onwards—the speech-act approach to fiction had to face a powerful rival that avoided the categorical errors identified above and began to explain things more adequately.[24]

IV. Fictional Communication and the Dramatic Narrator

In *Story and Discourse,* Chatman presents his own model of fictional communication distinguishing three levels: author-reader, implied author-implied reader, and narrator-narratee (*SD* 151). Significantly, Chatman's discussion of speech-act theory (*SD* 161–66) is not concerned with defining fiction, and he finds no need to mention any pretended speech acts. Later, in *Coming to Terms,*[25] the same model is used to redefine the concept of narrative agency and to design a new taxonomy of "text types" (*CTT* 115). The first branches in this taxonomy separate narrative from nonnarrative texts; the narrative types are then divided into "diegetic narratives" comprising novel, epic, and short story, and "mimetic narratives" comprising movies, cartoons, and plays. Justifying his design, Chatman first emphasizes that plays and novels are narrative objects of a roughly comparable order: "Plays and novels share the common features of a chrono-logic of events, a set of characters, and a setting. Therefore, at a fundamental level they are all stories. The fact that one kind of story is told (diegesis) and the other shown (mimesis) is of secondary importance. By 'secondary' I do not mean that the difference is inconsequential. It is just that it is lower in the hierarchy of text distinctions . . ." (*CTT* 117). More specifically, it is the "doubly temporal logic" of the narrative genres that turns them into narratological objects: "As has been clearly established in recent narratology, what makes Narrative unique among the text-types is its 'chrono-logic,' its doubly temporal logic. Narrative entails movement through time not only 'externally' (the duration of the presentation of the novel, film, play) but also 'internally' (the duration of the sequence of events that constitute the plot). The first operates in that dimension of narrative called Discourse (or *récit* or *syuzhet*), the second in that called Story (*histoire* or *fabula*)" (*CTT* 9). On the whole, Chatman makes a convincing

move to overcome structuralist genre theory's almost exclusive focus on differences and differential definitions. As can be seen, under the appropriate mind set, crucial commonalities get the upper hand, and indeed the narrative quality of drama is now accepted by many post-Genettean critics.[26] However, while the story dimension of a play readily submits to a "story-narratological" or "deep structural" treatment, it remains an unsettled issue so far whether drama should also fall under the sway of what Thomas Pavel has termed "discourse narratology,"[27] the discipline that theorizes narrative acts and narrative situations, modes of presentation, and the functions of narratorial "voice." The key question here is whether text and performance admit of Chatman's "broad" concept of narrative agency (*CTT* 113). In order to develop this concept, Chatman abandons an earlier approach in which narrators were recognized as relatively "overt" speakers only, excluding them from the performance genres, and from certain kinds of epic narratives as well (*SD* 166–95). Acting on a widespread critique of the "narratorless" model,[28] Chatman now considers even a maximally covert narrator a presence rather than an absence. This opens the door to positing a cinematic narrator as a structural element of all films, and, by analogy, to similarly constituted narrative "agents" in all of the other performance genres, including drama. Ultimately the question of narrative agency in drama boils down to whether a play's narrative "agent" (*CTT* 119) shows up as an overt teller figure (like, say, Gower in *Pericles,* Tom in *The Glass Menagerie,* or the Stage Manager in *Our Town*), or remains an impersonal, covert show-er or arranger function.

Chatman's extended concept of narrative agency is crucially based on functional and organizational rather than purely linguistic or textual criteria. In Chatman's model, the narrator need not speak at all and may have no voice at all. As Richard Aczel points out in the essay that triggered the present set of contributions, structural elements such as "organization and arrangement" (rather than explicit linguistic markers) are "integral to the act of narrating itself."[29] Hence, functionally, the narrator is not so much the one who answers to Genette's question "who speaks?" or who betrays herself or himself by using the first-person pronoun but the agent who manages the exposition, who decides what is to be told, how it is to be told (especially, from what point of view, and in what sequence), and what is to be left out. Of course, this is not to deny that a narrator will often overtly speak or write, establish communicative contact with addressees, defend the tellability of the story and comment on its lesson, purpose, or message. In fact, all of this is true of the narrator who appears at the beginning of *Pericles*, a prototypical "epic drama" in Pfister's terms (*TAD* 69):

> *Enter Gower as Prologue.*
> GOWER
> To sing a Song that old was sung,
> From ashes ancient Gower is come,
> Assuming man's infirmities
> To glad your ear and please your eyes.
> It has been sung at festivals,
> On ember-eves and holy-ales,
> And lords and ladies in their lives
> Have read it for restoratives.
> The purchase is to make men glorious;
> *Et bonum quo antiquius eo melius.*
> If you, born in these latter times,
> When wit's more ripe, accept my rhymes,
> And that to hear an old man sing
> May to your wishes pleasure bring,
> I life would wish, and that I might
> Waste it for you like taper-light.
> This' Antioch, then; Antiochus the Great
> Built up this city for his chiefest seat,
> The fairest in all Syria.
> I tell you what mine authors say.
> . . .
> What now ensues, to th' judgment of your eye
> I give, my cause who best can justify. *Exit.*[30]

Introducing himself as a narrator figure on the communicative level of fictional mediation, Gower exerts an uncommon amount of what Helmut Bonheim terms narratorial "conative solicitude":[31] he addresses the audience, shows off with a Latin quote, advertises the story's didactic purpose as well as its proven entertainment value, adds some verbal decor which establishes story-HERE and story-NOW, and finally asks the spectators to see and judge for themselves. Later in the play, Gower reappears as a perceptive moderator who introduces each of the remaining acts and eventually speaks the epilogue, closing the play's mediating frame. As long as he is physically present, he is an overt narrator, and in the scenes in which he is physically absent, he is the behind-the-scene show-er agency in control of selection, arrangement, and presentation. Basically, then, an "absolute drama" (Pfister's default type of play) is like an epic play without overt (but not without covert) narratorial presence; or, putting it more simplistically still, like *Pericles* without the *figure* of Gower but not without the *function* of Gower. In this conceptual framework a narrator can be said to have a voice only when s/he has speeches of his or her own, that is when s/he is the manifest

enunciator of diegetic and descriptive statements or of commentatorial
discourse.

What has been said so far goes for a performance of *Pericles.* The text
itself, more specifically, the secondary text passages comprising stage
directions and speech prefixes (speaker identification tags), reductive as
they are, create a notable complication. As Chatman is quick to argue,
"there is no difference between a sentence in a novel like 'John left the
room' and the playwright's instruction to an actor to exit, stage left"
(*CTT* 118)—a statement that radically contradicts Genette's analysis
(quoted above) of "Hernani removes his coat."[32] Clearly, however,
Chatman's argument for the common nature of epic and dramatic
narrative allows one to go a step further. As was argued above, a play's
text must be read and understood as a piece of narrative fiction before
it may be used as (and possibly turns into) a recipe for performance
containing "instructions" by the playwright.[33] Ryan explains this from a
more dedicated narratological vantage: "the reader treats the [dra-
matic] text as if it were narrative fiction. . . . Stage directions are
processed as descriptive statements, and the speech of characters is
regarded as directly quoted dialogue" (*PW* 87).[34] Indeed, the pressure of
our model forces us to assume that the enunciating subject of the stage
directions is not (or at least not initially) the playwright but a narrator,[35]
that is, in the case of *Pericles, another* narrator. Not at all conforming to
the disqualificatory connotations of a "secondary" text, the stage direc-
tions now constitute a controlling "frame," while Gower's discourse
acquires the status of an "inset," to use the concepts of Meir Sternberg's
quotation theory.[36] Apparently, then—I am saying this with due hesita-
tion—our model must provide a systemic slot not only for Gower as the
first-degree narrator of the play's story, but for the quotationally
superordinate narrative agent of the stage directions who shadows
Gower's first-degree narrative with a first-degree narrative of his/her/its
own. I am doing my best to put this as concisely as possible; at the same
time, I will readily admit that we are facing a crux which may well
require either more adequate exposition or an entirely different model.
In the absence of the latter, let me note in support of a literary first-
degree narrator that a play's secondary text can of course acquire a far
more personal voice than the matter-of-fact voice that pronounces the
rudimentary stage directions of *Pericles.* Bernard Shaw's stage directions
are usually cited as cases in point; consider the following, which comes
with an explicit first-person (plural) self-reference:[37] "*We misuse our
laborers horribly; and when a man refuses to be misused, we have no right to say
that he is refusing honest work. Let us be frank in this matter before we go on with
our play; so that we may enjoy it without hypocrisy.*"[38] There is no stylistic
feature here (certainly not the italics) that marks this as being part of a

stage direction, and similar passages (that is, passages not explicitly referring to "our play") could just as easily have come from a Shavian essay or from a nineteenth-century novel mediated by an intrusive authorial narrator. For another excursion into the realm of genre indeterminacies, compare Shaw's stage direction with the following passage:

The room is as long as an open field. You could shoot a bow here. You could run a footrace. Indeed at the far end the two young ladies and the Germans, Ambassador and the brother of the Duke, are playing a game of shuttlecock.

    There are one dozen windows—outdoing by one the windows Queen Elizabeth set into the gallery at Hampton Court, and these more perfectly symmetrical and larger too. And four of these are bay windows, each with covered seats and cushions, facing four large fireplaces all aglow with the flames and colored smokes of scented woods, each a different composition upon the theme of fire.

This looks and reads like an elaborate stage direction but actually is a passage from a novel (what may tip one off here is the obvious difficulty, for a producer, to realize an affordable *mise en scène*).[39] Although both of the preceding excerpts have been presented out of context, they do illustrate how genre-typical modes of presentation can "operate at each other's service," to use the concept of textual "service" developed by Chatman (*CTT* 10). Specifically discussing the historical emergence of autonomous (unperformable, unrealizable) stage directions,[40] Patricia A. Suchy observes that "[s]tage directions seem to be assuming, with increasing frequency in the modern drama, many of the characteristics of the fictive discourse of other genres; most notably, of the novel. If the voice that tells the performer to bring down the curtain 'to see if it works' speaks in fictive discourse, then the voice that utters these words emanates less from an author than from an author's imaginary, and quite fictive, narrator" (WWC 80). Suchy also cites modern stage directions which employ a mode of reflectorization, that is, the stylistic approximation of a narrator's and a character's discourse (WWC 77).[41] Of course, in studies of epic narratives, it has always been a tradition to use the terms "scene" and "stage direction" in order to describe a camera-eye kind of style (*CTT* 118). However, the preceding considerations seem to suggest that there is a whole area of functional genre correspondences, including mutual crossover techniques of dramatization and epicalization, that merits closer exploration.
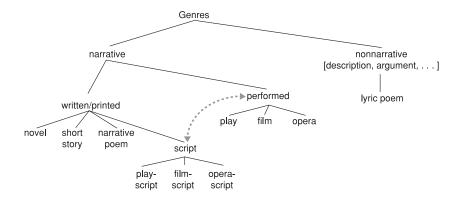
    For a step in this direction, let us assume that the formal combination of stage directions, speech prefixes, and speeches constitutes a recognizable narrative mode called a *playscript mode*. While the term playscript, along with ready-made analogues such as filmscript, radioscript, and so

forth, can be used to explicitly separate the performance genres from their printed (readable) versions, the term *playscript mode* usefully identifies a more general style that one also encounters in, for example, transcripts of interviews, panel discussions, meetings, and trials. What may be especially instructive for the purposes of narratological analysis is the use of the playscript mode in novels (examples that come to mind are Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the "Circe" episode in *Ulysses*, and chapter 25 of *Doctor Faustus*), and, conversely, the use of epic narrative modes in both dramatic text and performance.[42] Clearly, any analysis of the systematic tensions that result from such utilizations of exogenic modes and *corpora aliena* requires a circumspect and genre-conscious narratological framework.

V. Conclusions

The present essay has attempted to lay out the foundations for a model of this kind. Part of the strategy pursued here was to escape from the differences fixation and the exclusionary tactics of both the speech-act accounts of fiction and of classical narratology. Differences must be recognized in order to address a genre's specificity, but differences should not keep one from recognizing relevant commonalities. Chatman is right in emphasizing the narrative nature of drama and the applicability of narratology. Plays have a narrative world (a "diegesis"), which is not distinct in principle from any other narrative world. They have a story and a plot, and even if they do not literally "tell" their story, tellability and experientiality are dramatic criteria as well as epic ones. Moreover, as Chatman rightly points out, plays have the double chronology of all narrative presentations (but should the duration of a performance really be called "discourse" time, one wonders), and they admit of the usual temporal manipulations ("anachronies"). Evidently, too, plays present modal restrictions of narrative information; hence what a play lets the audience see and hear can be treated under the heading of focalization, something that has already been done in film studies.[43] Psychological plays such as memory plays and dream plays clearly employ characters fulfilling the role of internal focalizers. Of course, one of the main points that was argued here was that all narrative genres are structurally mediated by a first-degree narrative agency which, in a performance, may either take the totally unmetaphorical shape of a vocally and bodily present narrator figure (a scenario that is unavailable in written epic narrative), or be a disembodied "voice" in a printed text, or remain an anonymous and impersonal narrative function in charge of selection, arrangement, and focalization. The playscript itself can no

longer be treated as a past or future projection of a theatrical performance; rather, it must be accepted as a "readable" medium *sui generis.* For this reason, the following diagram extends Chatman's taxonomy of text types to include separate positions for "scripted" and performed genres: In this taxonomy, the term "genres" is used rather than Chatman's "text

```
                              Genres
                 ┌──────────────┴──────────────────────┐
             narrative                            nonnarrative
          ┌──────┴──────────┐                [description, argument, . . . ]
          │          ┌ ─ ─ ▶ performed                 │
     written/printed  │      ┌──┼──┐                lyric poem
    ┌─────┼──────┐    │    play film opera
  novel short narrative │
       story  poem  ▼
                    script
              ┌──────┼──────┐
            play-   film-  opera-
            script  script script
```

types" because our model crucially relies on retaining a strict distinction between text and performance, and hence on a narrower-than-usual conception of "text" as a purely verbal medium.[44] For roughly the same reason, the categories "written/printed" versus "performed" are preferred over Chatman's problematic opposition of "diegetic" and "mimetic" types (epic narratives are not in general devoid of mimetic elements). Both scripts and performances are now explicitly assigned separate slots in the hierarchy; and I have added a double-headed arrow to emphasize their special relationship.

While I will confidently claim that this design opens the door to explaining more things more adequately, it would be imprudent to overlook some potentially fatal dangers. For one thing, the model seems to multiply categories unnecessarily; in particular, without the benefit of the argument offered above, many people will maintain (and not without cause) that stage directions issue from the playwright rather than from a fictional speaker who has no bodily existence in a performance. Hence while our model forces us to include a separate "narrative agent slot" in the drama frame, we must account for the fact that readers, theater practitioners, and spectators will often either leave this slot uninstantiated or else instantiate it with the person of the author herself or himself. Evidently, too, there are ways and means, both in dramatic and in epic narrative, of letting the narrative agency stand back, cover its traces, and refine itself out of existence. Such vanishing

acts may either create the well-attested *effet de réel* of much modern(ist) fiction, or perhaps serve as a destabilizing device.[45] It would be fatal if our model—a professedly cognitive model—suggested that these effects were counterfactual figments of the readerly imagination, hallucinations that could be overcome by inspecting the hard facts of the text. As Erving Goffman points out, in order to attend to the what of a fictional world, we have both the capacity and the willingness (perhaps even the obligation) to "disattend" the puppeteer, the ventriloquist, the director, the stage manager.[46] Nevertheless, sometimes it is also important to attend to the machinery of the dramatic or epic frame and its narrative situation, and this is where the dramatic narrator usefully swims into focus even if s/he is otherwise just a bodiless and voiceless show-er or arranger function indistinguishable from the author. Given the techniques of delegation, quotation, and focalization through other minds, we clearly need to carefully calibrate Chatman's conception of narratorial agency. The potential bonus is obvious, however: if we succeed we will have a concept that allows us to address more adequately a text or a performance's strategies of characterization and persuasion.

So, even if the present account does not solve all relevant problems, even if it creates problems of its own, the benefits are tangible ones. Just as drama theory stands to gain from putting the narratological toolbox to work, narratology will benefit from letting the subversive influence of what is commonly regarded as an "exception" to the narrative model trigger a revision of concepts, a revision that is necessary to keep the discipline alive and kicking.

<div align="right">UNIVERSITY OF COLOGNE</div>

<div align="center">NOTES</div>

1   Harold Pinter, "Introduction: Writing for the Theatre," in *Pinter: Plays One* (London, 1976), p. 9.
2   Sidney Siegel, *Nonparametric Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences* (London, 1956), p. 9.
3   The phrase is used by Brian McHale in "Unspeakable Sentences, Unnatural Acts: Linguistics and Poetics Revisited," *Poetics Today,* 4 (1983), 22.
4   Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* (New York, 1982), p. 7.
5   Brian Richardson, "'Time is out of joint': Narrative Models and the Temporality of the Drama," *Poetics Today,* 8.2 (1987), 299–309; and "Pinter's *Landscape* and the Boundaries of Narrative," *Essays in Literature,* 18 (1991), 37–45.
6   Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980); hereafter cited in text as *IT;* and *Professional Correctness: Literary Studies and Practical Change* (Oxford, 1995), chapter 2.
7   Quoted in James Redmond, "The mind's eye, the worthy scaffold, the real thing: how to read a Shakespeare play," *Reading Plays: Interpretation and Reception,* ed. Hanna Scolnicov and Peter Holland (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 57–58.

8   John Priestley, "Introduction," *The Plays of John B. Priestley* (London, 1948), p. vii.

9   J. L. Styan, *Drama, Stage and Audience* (Cambridge, 1975).

10   The term "secondary text" is due to Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art,* tr. George G. Grabowitz (Evanston, 1973), chapter 30.

11   Michael Issacharoff, *Discourse as Performance* (Stanford, 1989), p. 4; herafter cited in text as *DP.*

12   Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London, 1980); Manfred Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama* (Cambridge, 1984); hereafter cited in text as *TAD;* and Scolnicov and Holland, ed., *Reading Plays* (see note 7).

13   Sue Ellen Campbell, "*Krapp's Last Tape* and Critical Theory," *Comparative Drama,* 12 (1987), 187.

14   For a more detailed definition of these positions, see my "Frames, Preferences, and the Reading of Third-Person Narratives: Towards a Cognitive Narratology," *Poetics Today,* 18 (1997), 441–68, and "'Speak, friend, and enter': Garden Paths, Artificial Intelligence, and Cognitive Narratology," in *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis,* ed. David Herman (Ohio, 1999), pp. 167–94.

15   Cited in *Playwright Versus Director,* ed. Jeane Luere (Westport, Conn., 1994), p. 24.

16   John Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 21–22; hereafter cited in text as *HTD*; John R. Searle, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," *New Literary History,* 6 (1975), 319–32 (reprinted in his *Expression and Meaning* [Cambridge, 1979], pp. 58–75); hereafter cited in text as TLS; Richard Ohmann, "Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature," *Philosophy and Rhetoric,* 4 (1971), 1–19; hereafter cited in text as SA; Gérard Genette, in "Acts of Fiction," *Fiction and Diction,* tr. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, N.Y., 1993), pp. 30–53 (originally published as "Le statut pragmatique de la fiction narrative," *Poetique,* 78 [1989], 237–49); hereafter cited in text as AOF.

17   See Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?,* chapter 11, for a critical discussion of the notion of "normal circumstances."

18   For two recent accounts on "offline thinking" and "mental spaces," see Derek Bickerton, *Language and Human Behavior* (Seattle, 1995) and Gilles Fauconnier, *Mental Spaces* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).

19   Patricia A. Suchy, "When Words Collide: The Stage Direction as Utterance," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism,* 6.1 (1991), 76; hereafter cited in text as WWC.

20   Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988); hereafter cited in text as *NDR.*

21   See Stanton B. Garner, *The Absent Voice: Narrative Comprehension in the Theater* (Urbana, Ill., 1989).

22   Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, 1978), pp. 31–32, 146; hereafter cited in text as *SD.*

23   The inherent contradiction becomes explicit when, in a later essay of the same collection, Genette reserves the formula "A = N" (author = narrator) for the schema of *factual* narrative ("Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative," *Fiction and Diction,* p. 72).

24   Chatman mentions three 1950s studies already distinguishing between authors and speakers (*Story and Discourse,* p. 147). In Germany, Rolf Fieguth's "Zur Rezeptionslenkung bei narrativen und dramatischen Werken," *Sprache im technischen Zeitalter,* 47 (1971), 186–201, is usually cited as the standard exposition. See Ansgar Nünning, *Grundzüge eines kommunikationstheoretischen Modells der erzählerischen Vermittlung: Die Funktion der Erzählinstanz in den Romanen George Eliots* (Trier, 1989) for an extended narratological application of this model. For an explicit rejection of the pretense model on the strength of the embedded fictional discourse model see Félix Martínez-Bonati, *Fictive Discourse and the Structure of Literature,* tr. Philip W. Silver (Ithaca, N.Y., 1981), p. 81; also Dorrit Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore, 1999), pp. 125–27.

25   Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, 1990); hereafter cited in text as *CTT.*

26   See, for instance, Marie-Laure Ryan, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory* (Bloomington, 1991), pp. 87–88; hereafter cited in text as *PW;* Monika Fludernik, *Towards a "Natural" Narratology* (London, 1996), pp. 349–53; hereafter cited in text as *TNN.*

27   Thomas G. Pavel's term is introduced in his book *The Poetics of Plot: The Case of English Renaissance Drama* (Minneapolis, 1985), pp. 14–15.

28   See especially the forceful argument raised against Ann Banfield by Brian McHale in "Unspeakable Sentences, Unnatural Acts"; see also Dorrit Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction,* pp. 127–30. The concluding paragraphs of this essay offer a compromise proposal. Note, too, that a version of the narratorless model is retained in Fludernik's article in this issue.

29   Richard Aczel, "Hearing Voices in Narrative Texts," *New Literary History,* 29 (1998), 492.

30   *Pericles, Prince of Tyre,* in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works,* ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford, 1988), 1.1–20, 41–42.

31   Helmut Bonheim, "Conative Solicitude and the Anaphoric Pronoun in the Canadian Short Story," *Sprachtheorie und Angewandte Linguistik: Festschrift für Alfred Wollmann,* ed. Werner Welte (Tübingen, 1982), p. 77.

32   But is it right? How is one to account for the fact that epic diegetic statements, unlike stage directions, can appear in the past tense and in the first person?

33   For a similar argument see Marvin Carlson, "The Status of Stage Directions," *Studies in the Literary Imagination,* 24.2 (1991), 42, and further references there.

34   Of course, Ryan's use of the term "descriptive statement" invites the same critique that was leveled against Genette, above.

35   See Suchy's "When Words Collide" and Carlson's "The Status of Stage Directions" for more reasons for positing a narrator as the "speaker" of the stage directions.

36   Meir Sternberg, "Proteus in Quotation-Land: Mimesis and the Forms of Reported Discourse," *Poetics Today,* 3 (1982), 107–56.

37   For an excellent account of Shavian epicalization strategies, see Redmond, "The mind's eye," and E. A. Levenston, "Shaw's Stage Directions," in Scolnicov and Holland, *Reading Plays,* pp. 206–15.

38   Bernard Shaw, initial stage direction to Act 3 of *Man and Superman,* in *The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw* (London, 1971), p. 615.

39   George Garrett, *The Death of the Fox* (New York, 1971), p. 494; see Fludernik's essay in this issue for a detailed discussion of this text.

40   For the term "autonomous stage direction," see Issacharoff, *Discourse as Performance,* chapter 3 ("Reading Stage Directions"). A typical example cited by Suchy is "The curtain is lowered and raised to see if it works," from Ring Lardner's *Cora or Fun at a Spa* (Suchy, "When Words Collide," 75); this example is also referred to in the following quote.

41   See also Fludernik's essay in this issue.

42   See Fludernik (*Towards a "Natural" Narratology,* pp. 350–53) for a discussion of a number of pertinent examples.

43   This presumably requires the framework of post-Genettean focalization theory as sketched in my "Windows of Focalization: Deconstructing and Reconstructing a Narratological Concept" (*Style,* 30 [1996], 241–67) and "More Aspects of Focalization: Refinements and Applications" (*Publications des Groupes de Recherches Anglo-Américaines de l'Université François Rabelais,* 21 [1999], 63–84). For the filmic analogy see Celestino Deleyto, "Focalisation in Film Narrative" in *Narratology: An Introduction,* ed. Susana Onega and José Angel García Landa (London, 1996), pp. 217–33; and François Jost, *L'oeil caméra: Entre film et roman* (Lyon, 1989).

44   Although many drama theorists use terms like "dramatic text," "theatrical text," "performance text," "dramatic discourse," and "text of the production" with reference to

the performance, this constitutes a category error under the present set of assumptions. The debilitating side effects of using this broad meaning of text become obvious when theorists declare that "two sets of reading go on: the dramatic text is read on the page, the theatrical text is read by an audience from the stage" (Mick Wallis and Simon Shepherd, *Studying Plays* [London, 1998], p. 7).

45   For a comment on the destabilizing uses of nonnarrated modes, see Christine Brooke-Rose, "Narrating Without a Narrator," *Times Literary Supplement,* 4058 (31 December 1999), 12–13.

46   Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston, 1986), p. 207.