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Author and Narrator

Transdisciplinary Contributions to a Narratological Debate

Edited by
Dorothee Birke and Tilmann Köppe

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Contents

Dorothee Birke and Tilmann Köppe
Author and Narrator: Problems in the Constitution and Interpretation of Fictional Narrative —— 1

Tilmann Köppe and Jan Stühring
Against Pragmatic Arguments for Pan-Narrator Theories: The Case of Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter" —— 13

Frank Zipfel
Narratorless Narration? Some Reflections on the Arguments For and Against the Ubiquity of Narrators in Fictional Narration —— 45

Vincenz Pieper
Author and Narrator: Observations on *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* —— 81

Dorothee Birke
Author, Authority, and 'Authorial Narration': The Eighteenth-Century English Novel as a Test Case —— 99

Julian Schröter
Interpretive Problems with Author, Self-Fashioning, and Narrator: The Controversy Over Christian Kracht's Novel *Imperium* —— 113

Adrian Bruhns
Fictional Narrators and Creationism —— 139

Regine Eckardt
Speakers and Narrators —— 153

Tobias Klauk
Serious Speech Acts in Fictional Works —— 187

Claudia Hillebrandt
Author and Narrator in Lyric Poetry —— 213

Markus Kuhn and Andreas Veits
Narrative Mediation in Comics: Narrative Instances and Narrative Levels in Paul Hornschemeier's *The Three Paradoxes* —— 235

Julian Schröter
Narrator and Author: A Selected Bibliography — 263

Notes on Contributors — 269

Index — 273

Dorothee Birke, Freiburg, and Tilmann Köppe, Göttingen

Author and Narrator: Problems in the Constitution and Interpretation of Fictional Narrative

'Who speaks?,' in Gérard Genette's famous phrasing, is one of the central questions in the narratological analysis of fiction. The interest in the text as a *tale* also requires a concern with its *teller*. Classical narrative theory, as represented by Franz K. Stanzel's and Genette's influential work, has proposed to answer this question by positing and describing a fictional narrator as the entity responsible for the production of the words we read. This move has allowed a generation of narratologists to focus on the study of 'what's on the page,' without having to concern themselves with the person ultimately responsible for the production of the text, i.e. its author. Since the 1990s, however, the tables seem to have turned: the 'return of the author,' after his widely promoted burial at the hands of poststructuralist critics, has also had an impact on narrative theory.[1] Increased attention has been paid, for example, to a rhetorical approach to narratology which advocates an interest in the text's production and reception, condensed most prominently in Wayne C. Booth's concept of the 'implied author.'[2]

Rather than circumventing a concern with the author as a relevant category for textual analysis, then, the concept of the narrator gives rise to further questions about the conceptualization and analysis of voice in fictional texts. These questions have become the subjects of lively and at times highly controversial debates. The present volume is intended as a contribution to these debates. It manifests the status of narrative theory as a transdisciplinary project by collating

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1 For works on the return of the author, see in particular Maurice Biriotti/Nicola Miller (eds.), *What is an Author?*, Manchester 1993; Fotis Jannidis/Gerhard Lauer/Matías Martínez/Simone Winko (eds.), *Rückkehr des Autors: Zur Erneuerung eines umstrittenen Begriffs*, Tübingen 1999; Peter Jaszi/Martha Woodmansee (eds.), *The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature*, Durham 1994; Peter Lamarque, "The Death of the Author: An Analytical Autopsy", in: *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 30/1990, pp. 319–331; Eugen Simion, *The Return of the Author*, Evanston, IL, 1996. A brief survey of the concept of the author in the context of narrative theory is provided by Jörg Schönert, "Author", in: Peter Hühn/John Pier/Wolf Schmid/Jörg Schönert (eds.), *Handbook of Narratology*, Berlin 2009, pp. 1–13.

2 See Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction: The Quest for Effective Communication*, Malden, MA, 2004 [1961]. For rhetorical approaches to narrative and the author after 1990 see e.g. James Phelan, *Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology*, Columbus 1996; Richard Walsh, *The Rhetoric of Fictionality: Narrative Theory and the Idea of Fiction*, Columbus 2007.

approaches from different disciplinary backgrounds – literary studies, philosophy, linguistics and media studies – in order to deal with a number of different, albeit closely related, problems:

- Does every piece of narrative fiction feature a fictional narrator that is to be distinguished from its author?
- What are the success conditions for attributing a fictional narrator to a work of narrative fiction?
- Is the assumption that there is a fictional narrator in every piece of narrative fiction helpful, or even necessary, when it comes to the interpretation of fictional narratives (that is, is the claim that there is a fictional narrator in every piece of narrative fiction somehow *pragmatically* superior to its negation)?
- How should critical interpretations of works which feature what Stanzel has called 'authorial narration' conceptualize 'voice'?
- Can the claim that there need not be a fictional narrator in every work of narrative fiction be reconciled with prevalent linguistic theories of sentence meaning according to which an utterance context is indispensable for our understanding of sentences?
- How are we to describe and make sense of utterances which do seem to make a contribution to the content of the fiction and our world at the same time?
- In how far is the author/narrator distinction fruitful for the description of genres other than narrative fiction (examples discussed in this volume are lyric poetry and graphic novels)?

A more detailed survey of the questions asked by our contributors will be given in the second part of our introduction, and we will also sketch some of their answers. Before we take a closer look, however, we need to give a brief introduction into the aspects of the author/narrator distinction that serve as a background to the problems discussed in the articles.

I The Narratological Distinction of 'Author' and 'Narrator'

The author of a literary work is the person who is responsible for it. His or her responsibility has a number of different dimensions: first, the author of a work is the one who created it and brought it into existence.[3] Thereby, the author fixes

3 Note that the seemingly simple act of bringing a work into existence entails all kinds of theoretical difficulties, see Peter Lamarque, *Work and Object: Explorations in the Metaphysics of Art*, Oxford 2010, pp. 33–55.

the boundaries of the work and, perhaps within certain limits, decides what is a part of it and what is not.[4] Second, being the author of a literary work comes with certain rights and duties. For instance, authors are the initial copyright holders of their works. Moreover, since in writing and publishing their works, they may perform different kinds of speech acts, such as insulting or thanking or praising someone, authors commit acts for which they can be held morally responsible, and they may be prosecuted if they impinge upon someone else's rights by publishing a particular work. Third, authors are often regarded to be responsible for the 'meanings' of their works. The responsibility in question here is some kind of authority: for instance, when two interpretations of a literary work are in conflict with each other, the author's own interpretation of her text may be said to be authoritative. Of course, this claim is as often disputed as it is endorsed – intentionalism in interpretation has been one of the most controversial topics in literary theory for decades.[5]

The three kinds of responsibility mentioned so far are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to issues surrounding 'the author' in literary studies and related fields. Authors are the objects of investigations that may, for instance, focus on a particular author's vita, on the social history of writing, or on the emerging autonomy of the institution of art. The objectives of these investigations, however, need not be rehearsed here.[6] The present volume is concerned with rather specific problems arising from the relationship between the concepts of 'author' and 'fictional narrator.'

Let us begin by introducing the concept of a narrator, leaving the troublesome qualification 'fictional' aside. Put simply, a narrator is a person who tells a story or, in other words, relates a narrative. For a person to be a narrator, it doesn't matter whether she creates her story or merely retells it, and it also doesn't matter whether she believes the content of her story to be true. Classical narratology, as has been outlined above, has originated the widely accepted idea that the narrator of a literary work must be sharply divided from its author. This separation is a kind of First Principle, or dogma, of narrative analysis as it is commonly taught at the moment. What exactly does this dogma amount to? In order to understand its contours, scope and rationale, one needs to have a rough idea

4 This aspect is important for the editor's job of establishing the authoritative version of a work, which may have been handed down in different manuscripts. For some difficulties concerning the identity of works of art, see Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd Edition, Cambridge 1980; Robert Stecker, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, Lanham 2005, ch. 6.

5 For a book-length overview, see Carlos Spoerhase, *Autorschaft und Interpretation: Methodische Grundlagen einer philologischen Hermeneutik*, Berlin 2007.

6 For references, see note 1 above.

about yet another core concept of the debate: that of *fiction*, and more precisely that of *(fictional) storytelling*. Stories can be told with just about any intention. But some stories are told with the particular intention that it be mutually understood between tellers and listeners (or writers and readers) that the story told merely looks as if it conveyed information about matters of fact. The teller does not commit herself to the truth of what she is saying, and listeners agree to engage in a game of make-believe about (instead of believe) what they are told. According to Lamarque and Olsen, fictional storytelling exhibits the following three "main features":

1. A Gricean intention that an audience make-believe (or imagine or pretend) that it is being told (or questioned or advised or warned) about particular people, objects, incidents, or events, regardless of whether there are (or are believed to be) such people, objects, incidents, or events;
2. The reliance, at least in part, of the successful fulfilment of the intention in (1) on mutual knowledge of the practice of story-telling;
3. A disengagement from certain standard speech act commitments, blocking inferences from a fictive utterance back to the speaker or writer, in particular inferences about beliefs.[7]

Given that authors are sufficiently clear about their engaging in the practice of fictional storytelling (for example by labeling their work as 'a novel'), this affects their above-mentioned responsibilities: for instance, they normally cannot be blamed for uttering falsehoods. Moreover, since they usually do not inform about existing "people, objects, incidents, or events," they are often said to create not only their stories, or works, but also the very people, objects, incidents, or events their stories are about.[8] In short, authors of fiction create fictional worlds.[9]

Worlds of fiction are worlds to be imagined. They come in all shapes and sizes. Some of them are very much like our world, some are radically different. In some of them, telling stories itself plays an important part. Thus the opening of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* reads as follows:

> In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since. "Whenever you feel like criticizing any one," he told

7 Peter Lamarque/Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective*, Oxford 1994, pp. 45f. For a critique of some of these assumptions, see Tobias Klauk's contribution to this volume.

8 For more details, see Adrian Bruhns' contribution to this volume.

9 For a useful clarification of talk of 'worlds of fiction,' see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art*, Oxford 1980, esp. Part 3, and Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*, Cambridge/London 1990.

> me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."[10]

Fitzgerald's novel creates the fiction that a man named Nick Carraway tells the story of his encounters with the mysterious millionaire Jay Gatsby. Carraway did not write the novel *The Great Gatsby* – in his world, this novel does not exist at all – but he relates the story of his encounters with Gatsby as something that in fact occurred. Thus, in writing *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald wrote a first-person fictional narrative, and in doing so, he created a fictional teller of matters of fact: a fictional narrator.

Now we have the resources to specify the relationship between the concepts of 'author' and 'narrator' that is at the center of the present volume. In literary studies, the term 'narrator' usually denotes a *fictional* narrator, i.e. a narrator who does not belong to our world but is part of the fiction. And given that fact, it is clear that authors and narrators need to be kept apart: first, authors and narrators belong to ontologically different categories.[11] Nick Carraway has, in contrast to F. Scott Fitzgerald, never enjoyed a spatiotemporal existence, and hence there neither was nor is a way of causal interaction between the two of them. Meeting Nick Carraway on the street is or was no more likely than meeting the number two, or the law of gravity. It is, in short, impossible. Second, fictional narrators may possess sets of properties which are radically different from the sets of properties that can be possessed by authors of fiction. To name but a few, authors of fiction are human beings. Fictional narrators need not be. Authors of fiction are limited to human powers (of knowledge, memory, linguistic ability, etc.). Again, fictional narrators need not be.[12] Third, narrators are subject to none of the three responsibilities mentioned at the outset of our introduction: they do not create the works of fiction they are a part of, they do not hold the author's rights and duties, and they cannot be consulted in order to settle interpretive disputes. (Of course, *in the fiction* things are different: It is fictional that Nick Carraway is the author of his

10 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, New York 1986, p. 1.

11 For elaboration, see Maria Elisabeth Reicher, "The Ontology of Fictional Characters", in: Jens Eder/Fotis Jannidis/Ralf Schneider (eds.), *Characters in Fictional Worlds*, Berlin/New York 2010, pp. 111–133. It is important to note that by claiming that the narrator is *part of the fiction* one characterizes his or her ontological status. In particular, this claim must not be conflated with claims about the 'diegetic level' the narrator occupies within the fiction, or his or her relation to his or her story; for elaboration on these categories, see Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin, Ithaca/New York 1980, pp. 227–254.

12 See Brian Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*, Columbus 2006.

story, and it may also be fictional that he is, after completing his story, blamed for, or questioned about, what he has said. Since, however, the novel remains silent about these and countless other things, we do not know them.)

In sum, conflating author and narrator is to make a category mistake,[13] and indeed we know of nobody in literary studies (or indeed elsewhere) who disputes the necessity of differentiating between author and narrator in fictional storytelling.[14] Difficulties and disputes, however, arise when it comes to determining the *scope* of the author/narrator distinction, its *consequences*, and some of its *details*. The contributions to the present volume, to which we shall turn in the next section, critically engage with these issues.

II The Contributions to the Volume

The first three articles explore different angles of a central point of debate: whether *every* work of narrative fiction features a (fictional) narrator,[15] or whether it is at least adequate and helpful to posit that it does. Tilmann Köppe und Jan Stühring have already elsewhere argued for the so-called optional narrator theory, i.e. the idea that it is not necessary for a fictional narrative to feature a narrator.[16] In their contribution to this volume, they tackle a particular objection to optional narrator theory: the so-called 'pragmatic argument' for the ubiquity of narrators, which comes in two variants. The first one claims that assuming that there is a narrator in the fiction is a necessary requirement for interpreting fictional narratives, while the second variant merely claims that the assumption that there is a narrator provides useful guidance for any interpretation and hence should be maintained irrespective of its truth. Köppe and Stühring argue that both arguments fail on theoretical grounds. Moreover, they

13 The notion of a category mistake has been made prominent by Gilbert Ryle, see his *The Concept of Mind*, Chicago 2002, pp. 16–18.

14 Interestingly, though, as with any dogma, the present one had to be invented first, and it took some time for it to be generally accepted; see Monika Fludernik, *Einführung in die Erzähltheorie*, 3rd Edition, Darmstadt 2010, pp. 70f. See also Vincenz Pieper's contribution to the present volume.

15 For the sake of brevity, and unless otherwise indicated, we will stick to the terminology prevalent in literary studies and take 'narrator' to mean fictional narrator throughout.

16 Note that claims for the ubiquity of narrators come in different varieties. Some theorists wish to establish the modal claim that *necessarily* there is a narrator in every piece of narrative fiction while others merely claim that *as a matter of fact* there is a fictional narrator in every piece of narrative fiction. Similarly, some theorists wish to attack the modal claim and some the empirical generalization.

provide a detailed interpretation of the short story "Rappaccini's Daughter" by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Their interpretation does not include any references to a narrator, while at the same time it contains many claims about the story's themes, plot, and narrative structure. Accordingly, the interpretation provides both a counterexample to the claim that it is impossible to interpret a fictional narrative without making recourse to a narrator, and it illustrates how aspects of the narrative such as commentary, evaluation, first personal pronouns or expressive particles may be understood without assuming that they are attributable to a narrator.

Frank Zipfel puts forward an opposing view: in this contribution, he takes issue with Köppe/Stühring's and others' attempts to refute the claim that there is a narrator in every piece of narrative fiction. In particular, he maintains that whether we assume that there is a narrator in every piece of narrative fiction depends on how we conceptualize 'fiction' and 'narration' in the first place. Since there are different ways of understanding these central notions, there are also different ways of answering the question concerning the presence of a narrator. Accordingly, Zipfel maintains that the concrete answers to this question are of no real importance for narrative theory. Instead of trying to argue for the truth of either the thesis that there is a narrator in every piece of narrative fiction or the thesis that there is not, we should concentrate on laying bare the conceptual schemes that underlie our assumptions concerning fictional narration. Moreover, and against Köppe and Stühring, Zipfel maintains that at least some of the critique that has been voiced against pan-narrator theories is misguided.

Vincenz Pieper, in turn, sets out to demonstrate in what ways the assumption that there is a narrator in every piece of narrative fiction can seriously distort an interpreter's understanding of literary works. In his review of the interpretive history of Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, he argues that interpreters who do find a narrator in the novel usually fail to back up their claims with textual evidence. Moreover, they do not provide a rationale for the fictional entity they claim to have detected. According to the view of literary interpretation as proposed by Pieper, this is particularly unfortunate, for it is precisely the objective of interpretation to identify what an author was aiming at, and hence doing, by way of his artistic choices. Creating a narrator is a particularly noticeable artistic choice, so interpreters ought to comment on its rationale. Pieper claims that the focus on an alleged narrator has resulted merely in imprecise descriptions of the novel's narrative structure and actually obstructed interpreters' access to some of the work's most characteristic, and hence interesting, features.

While the contributions by Köppe/Stühring, Zipfel and Pieper thus directly intervene in the theoretical debate about the ubiquity of narrators in fictional texts, Dorothee Birke and Julian Schröter are primarily interested in issues of

authorial self-fashioning and responsibility. They both present case studies of texts in whose reception discussions of 'narrative mediation,' i.e. the rendering of stories by fictional narrators, have loomed large.

Dorothee Birke revisits the central concept of authorial narration and reviews two countervailing tendencies within narrative theory: understanding the concept as a way of marking a strict analytical separation between author and narrator, and a later trend, especially within feminist narratology, to reconsider how 'authorial voice' can actually be said to make reference to the author and his or her authority. Birke goes on to investigate the latter view in more detail and insists that the problem of 'authority' needs to be discussed in a more differentiated way than that suggested by feminist narratologists who see the authorial voice as resting on male hegemony. Conspicuous instances of authorial narration in particular, she argues, often serve to explore and defend rather than simply assert different kinds of authority (e.g. moral or psychological expertise) that have been associated with the novel as a genre. They can thus be understood as a performance of authorship, a rhetorical stance the actual author of the work assumes towards its readership. To bolster her claims, Birke presents a close reading of a passage from Henry Fielding's novel *Tom Jones* (1749), a work that has traditionally been regarded as a (or even *the*) prototypical example of authorial narration.

Julian Schröter's article engages with a recent controversy about a contemporary piece of narrative fiction: Christian Kracht's novel *Imperium* (2012), which has been perceived by some reviewers as reflecting racist attitudes on the part of its author. Schröter presents a careful examination of a standard defense against such a charge, namely the claim that Kracht's detractors misread the novel by failing to distinguish between its narrator (who is racist) and Kracht the author (who is not). He argues that in interpretive practice, statements about the narrator and the author are related in complex ways, and that Kracht himself foregrounds and exploits such relations in his fictional writing, which is designed to resonate with stances put forward in his non-fiction texts (in particular, the published email correspondence *Five Years*). From the point of view of a theory of authorial self-fashioning, Schröter concludes, a seemingly simple differentiation between the two categories of texts – that the non-fiction reflects the author's own opinions in a serious way, while the fiction does not – appears as untenable. This is because it fails to take into account the extent to which the utterances in both works constitute a self-conscious form of "provocative posing," i.e. a kind of self-fashioning that invites the ascription of certain qualities to the author but at the same time reveals these ascriptions to be misguided.

The three subsequent contributions by Adrian Bruhns, Regine Eckhardt and Tobias Klauk each provide important building blocks for the larger debate by

furnishing in-depth considerations of central problems. As their articles demonstrate, philosophical and linguistic approaches help to gain a deeper understanding of the issues that are at stake.

Adrian Bruhns in his contribution engages with the claim that as parts of fictions, narrators must be understood as creations by their authors. Bruhns examines how this claim relates to the claim that there is a narrator in every narrative fiction. If the second claim is true, we have to assume that every author of fiction somehow creates a narrator, whether they want to or not. Bruhns discusses how this claim fits with two prominent theories about the creation of fictional entities, namely Amy Thomasson's and John Searle's versions of Creationism.[17] He concludes that, given that creating fictional entities is something an author does consciously and on purpose, it is difficult to maintain that authors cannot help but create narrators. But he also shows how defenders of the ubiquity of narrators might amend their theories in order to make them compatible with some versions of a creationist theory of fictional entities.

Regine Eckardt identifies a seeming paradox resulting from the claim that there need not be a narrator in every piece of narrative fiction. The paradox rears its head once one takes into account that our best theories of meaning assume that sentences can only be understood *in context*, that is, in relation to an utterance time, place, utterer etc. It is easy to see that in many cases, the author of the text cannot occupy the utterer's role. Rather, the utterance context is part of the fiction. So how can we possibly reconcile both that (a) we need the assumption that there is a fictional utterer in order to understand the meaning of the sentences *and* (b) we have good reasons to assume that sometimes there is no utterer in the fiction? Eckardt solves this apparent paradox by explaining in some detail what the claim that we need an utterance context in order to understand the meaning of sentences amounts to within truth conditional semantics. It turns out that the claim that there need not be a narrator in the fiction is indeed compatible with these accounts of linguistic meaning. Truth conditional semantics allows for (and indeed offers theoretical resources for explaining) cases in which the sentences in question do not convey much information about their utterance context and hence not enough information to give rise to the fiction of a narrator. Eckardt predicts that it is precisely these cases literary theorists have in mind when they talk of narratorless narrations.

The account of fictional storytelling sketched in section I has it that speakers are freed from certain standard speech act commitments and readers are to make-

17 Creationism is but one family of theories of the ontological status of fictional entities. For an introduction into other theories, compare again Maria Elisabeth Reicher, "Ontology".

believe (rather than believe) what they hear. Thus, when speaking fictionally, authors are understood as merely pretending to assert something about our world, and what they say is instead understood as a contribution to the content of the fiction. This is just another way of saying that authors of fiction do not describe our world but rather make up a fictional world. In his contribution, Tobias Klauk challenges this assumption. He is particularly interested in cases where an author both speaks in accordance with standard speech act commitments *and* makes a contribution to the content of the fiction – at the same time. Klauk argues that this is indeed possible. He identifies a number of conventions which trump the disengagement of standard speech act commitments that is constitutive of the institution of fiction. Moreover, he argues that sometimes it is possible for authors of fiction to perform 'serious' speech acts (i.e. standard speech acts constituted by the respective commitments) within their works without being backed up by any such convention. All of this amounts to a refutation of the claim that in works of fiction, serious speech acts can occur only *within* the fiction, that is, as uttered by a narrator.

The volume's final section pays tribute to the fact that there are also particularly fierce and lively debates surrounding the question whether and how the author/narrator distinction helps in the analysis of genres and media other than narrative fiction.

Claudia Hillebrandt surveys the state of the art in narratological investigations of lyric poetry. In particular, she engages with the claim that an interpreter who classifies a poem as narrative must also posit a narrator who utters this narrative. Her assessment entails a discussion of recent attempts to distinguish different levels of communication in poems, favoring the model suggested by Winko/Borkowski, which specifies different possible relations of author and speaker in a poem. Hillebrandt details different senses in which a poem can be said to be narrative, acknowledging that it indeed makes sense to conceive of many (though not all) lyrical poems as possessing a narrative structure, but insisting that only some of these can adequately be described as featuring a narrator who is distinct from the author.

Markus Kuhn and Andreas Veits come to a differing conclusion with regard to their object of interest: the graphic novel or comic. They outline how a model of narrative mediation for narrative fiction can be expanded so as to describe the medium's specific strategies of representation. In analogy to a model introduced by Kuhn for the analysis of narrative in film, they suggest the concept of a "visual narrative instance" to describe how in addition to verbal forms of narration, comics can narrate through images. The benefits of this multi-layered model are then demonstrated in a case study, in which it is applied to Paul Hornschemeier's graphic novel *The Three Paradoxes* (2006). With its unusually complex and self-

reflexive structure, this work makes full use of the representative strategies available to comic artists and, like many graphic novels, includes references to the author's own biography. It thus presents a particular challenge to the interpreter – and to the narratologist, an opportunity to show how a sophisticated model of narrative mediation can be used to tease apart the various levels of narration that are at play.

The volume closes with a selected bibliography compiled by Julian Schröter, which gives an overview of studies that have explicitly engaged with the theoretical debate surrounding the relationship between the concepts of author and narrator in literary studies. Schröter also identifies "classics of the debate," works that have fundamentally shaped the terms of today's discussions.

This volume has its roots in a workshop conducted in Freiburg on September 13–14, 2012, by members of the Network "Foundational Concepts of Narratology." Some of the contributions are expansions of ideas first presented there; many incorporate questions and insights resulting from our discussions. We would like to thank all participants of the workshop. Our thanks also go to the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies for sponsoring the meeting and this volume and to the Courant Forschungszentrum "Textstrukturen" at Göttingen University for support of the editing process. Special thanks go to Annika Brunck, Nora Skorsinski, Evelyn Waldt, Astrid Schwaner, Hanan Natour, Stefan Guse, Nikolina Hatton and Charlotte Wolff for their help in proof-reading and formatting as well as to the series' editorial assistant, Sara Kathrin Landa.

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Against Pragmatic Arguments for Pan-Narrator Theories: The Case of Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter"

I Introduction

The pan-narrator thesis (PN) is the claim that it is impossible that a fictional narrative does not have a fictional narrator. The optional-narrator thesis (ON) is the claim that both fictional narratives with a fictional narrator and fictional narratives without a fictional narrator are possible. There is a fictional narrator if, and only if, in the fiction there is someone who tells the story that the reader reads.[1]

On a previous occasion, we have argued at some length that ON is true while PN is not.[2] In response to this, we have often been confronted with the claim that PN is somehow *advantageous* for the practice of literary interpretation or, alternatively, the claim that PN is indeed *necessary* for that practice. Call these pragmatic arguments in favor of PN. In this essay, we will prove them wrong.

We will begin with a theoretical discussion of the pragmatic arguments (section II). The bulk of this paper, however, is devoted to a case study. It is obvious that the claim that fictional narratives can only be interpreted adequately by positing a fictional narrator is false if there is an adequate interpretation of a fictional narrative that does not posit a fictional narrator. And that is why, after our theoretical discussion, we will give a fairly standard interpretation of what we consider a fictional narrative which does not have a fictional narrator, namely

1 The claim that there is a fictional narrator if, and only if, in the fiction there is someone who tells the story that the reader reads entails no commitment to substantial claims about this 'someone' other than that it is true of him, her, or even it that he, she or it narrates. In particular, it is sometimes claimed that the fictional narrator can be a mere 'voice' or a 'narrating instance' that is lacking any (other) personal (or indeed human) qualities. Obviously, these claims are meant to convey that it is fictional that a voice narrates or that a narrating instance narrates, and this counts as claiming that, in the fiction, there is a narrator.

2 See Tilmann Köppe/Jan Stühring, "Against Pan-Narrator Theories", in: *Journal of Literary Semantics*, 40/2011, pp. 59–80, for our discussion and refutation of the most common arguments in favor of PN. For a brief evocation of the arguments we discuss at length in the present paper, see ibid., pp. 72f.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844) (section III). Our interpretation focuses on gender roles, it includes claims concerning what is the case in the world of the fiction as well as claims concerning intertextual relations to the biblical story of the Garden of Eden, and it identifies general themes or meanings of the short story. None of these critical claims is formulated in terms of, or backed up by, assumptions concerning a fictional narrator. In section IV, we shall take a step back and explain why they need not be. We will close our discussion with a brief conclusion (section V).

II Two Pragmatic Arguments for PN

There are two arguments for PN that might be called 'pragmatic,' since both refer to the practice of literary interpretation. The first claims that we should adopt PN because it is somehow *advantageous* for that practice (1), while the second claims that PN is *necessary* for the practice of literary interpretation (2). Let us take a closer look.

(1) *The pragmatic argument from the advantageousness of a fictional narrator for interpretation*: proponents of PN might want to claim that PN is – irrespective of its truth – pragmatically superior to ON, as it allows us to interpret all fictional narratives adequately, while being easier to handle. The debate between supporters of PN and supporters of ON is ultimately irrelevant for the practice of literary interpretation. PN, so its supporters claim, works fine and is thus all we need.

We would like to make five points in response to this argument.

The first thing to notice is that this argument is obviously not meant to establish the truth of PN. Advocates of this argument simply urge us to assume that there is a fictional narrator in every fictional narrative *no matter whether this is true or not*. But our question is whether PN is true. So it is hard to see why someone would confront us with this argument.

Second, even if PN was somehow advantageous for the practice of literary interpretation this would not establish the truth of PN. Consider an analogy. It might be quite advantageous for someone hiking in an area where a large number of animals carry rabies to assume that every fox in that area is infected. ("Assume that every fox has rabies! Don't go near them!") Obviously, the assumption is reasonable. But this does not make it true. The debate between ON and PN is about the truth of the claim that there necessarily is a fictional narrator in every fictional narrative. As the first pragmatic argument does not establish the truth of that claim it need not be of any concern to us.

Third, even if the debate between PN and ON turned out to be irrelevant for the practice of literary interpretation, it is surely far from irrelevant for discussions

of narrative communication in narratology. If PN is false, so are standard models of 'narrative communication.'[3]

Fourth, it is far from clear why PN should be advantageous for the practice of literary interpretation and thus pragmatically superior to ON. Advocates of PN might claim that it is easier to handle than ON. But ON is actually a very simple claim: either a fictional narrative has a fictional narrator or it doesn't. Neither possibility can be discounted on theoretical grounds. And ON is very easy to handle. In fact, ON is just as easy to handle as PN for, basically, there are the following three options:

1. If there is good evidence that there is a person in the fiction who tells the story the reader reads, then both proponents of PN and ON will say that there is a person in the fiction who tells the story the reader reads.
2. If it's undecided whether there is such a person in the fiction, then supporters of PN and ON agree that it's undecided whether there is such a person in the fiction (and supporters of PN will hurry to add that in case there actually is no such person in the fiction, then there is of course a 'covert' fictional narrator).
3. If there is no evidence that there is a person in the fiction telling the story the reader reads, then proponents of ON and PN agree that there is no such person in the fiction, but proponents of PN will add that there is of course a covert fictional narrator.

How do any of these options make PN easier to handle?

Fifth, note that if PN is false, it is not possible for PN to allow us to interpret every fictional narrative adequately. If every fictional narrative has a fictional narrator, PN allows us to adequately interpret all fictional narratives. But if only *some* fictional narratives have a fictional narrator, PN does not allow us to interpret all fictional narratives adequately, for PN will then force us to make wrong assumptions about what is the case in some fictional narratives. (If there is no fictional narrator, then the assumption that there is one is simply a bad

3 See, e.g., the model provided in Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse. Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Ithaca/London 1978, p. 267, and the references to such models in Uri Margolin, "Narrator", in: Peter Hühn/John Pier/Wolf Schmid/Jörg Schönert (eds.), *Handbook of Narratology*, Berlin/New York 2009, pp. 351–369. Moreover, narratological discussions make it clear that the truth of PN has bearings on the theory of fiction as conceived of by narratologists, see e.g. Matías Martínez/Michael Scheffel, *Einführung in die Erzähltheorie*, München 1999, p. 14, p. 17; for critical commentary, see Jan Gertken/Tilmann Köppe, "Fiktionalität", in: Fotis Jannidis/Gerhard Lauer/Simone Winko (eds.), *Grenzen der Literatur. Zu Begriff und Phänomen des Literarischen*, Berlin/New York 2009, pp. 228–266, pp. 237–238, p. 250, pp. 260–262; and Köppe/Stühring, "Against", p. 67.

interpretation of the narrative.) So whether PN allows us to interpret all fictional narratives adequately seems to depend on whether PN is true. It is therefore hard to see how PN could allow us to adequately interpret all fictional narratives *irrespective of its truth*.

(2) *The pragmatic argument from the necessity of a fictional narrator for interpretation*: supporters of PN might want to claim that there necessarily is a fictional narrator in every fictional narrative because it is impossible to adequately interpret or correctly understand a fictional narrative without positing a fictional narrator. Thus, we know that there is a fictional narrator in every fictional narrative as a fictional narrator is a necessary prerequisite for literary interpretation. The argument is a simple *modus ponens*: If we can interpret a fictional narrative, then it has a fictional narrator. We can interpret all fictional narratives. Therefore, all fictional narratives have a fictional narrator.

Our response to this argument is twofold. First, and most importantly, it is simply not true that it is impossible to interpret a fictional narrative while assuming that it does not have a fictional narrator. This is one of the things we will demonstrate in section III. Second, to the best of our knowledge so far no one has put forward an argument for the claim that it is impossible to interpret a fictional narrative that does not have a fictional narrator. But this claim is far from self-evident. As long as it is not backed up by a convincing argument there is no reason to assume that it is true. And as long as there is no reason to assume its truth there is no reason to accept the argument of which it is a premise.

III Intertextuality, Gender, and Some Meanings of "Rappaccini's Daughter"

As our discussion of the pragmatic arguments for PN has shown, it is already clear from a theoretical point of view that both arguments fail to establish the truth of PN (for the first pragmatic argument is probably not even meant to do that while the second argument is based on a premise whose truth has not been established). But in order to show that ON is easy to handle, that it does not make literary interpretation impossible, and that it is, all in all, a jolly good fellow we will now give an interpretation of a fictional narrative that does not have a narrator. In our interpretation we shall use many propositions that might, supposedly, seduce proponents of PN into claiming that there is a fictional narrator involved, concerning, *inter alia*, what is the case in the fiction, evaluations of what is the case in the fiction, commentary on what is the case in the fiction, and themes, meanings or morals of the story. In section IV, we shall address these propositions and explain why we have formulated them the way we have.

There are a number of allusions – both explicit and implicit – to the biblical story of the Garden of Eden in Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter." We will argue that Hawthorne's story can be read as a discussion of and comment on one of the central topics we find in the story of the Garden of Eden. Arguably, gender plays an important role in both stories. Women are depicted as morally inferior and rightfully subordinate to men in the story of the Garden of Eden. As we will show, Hawthorne strongly disagrees with this.

Hawthorne's story opens thus: "A young man, named Giovanni Guasconti, came, very long ago, from the more southern region of Italy, to pursue his studies at the University of Padua" (p. 1333).[4] After having set foot into his room in Padua for the first time, Giovanni notices Rappaccini's garden, which is situated under his window. While Giovanni is standing in his window Rappaccini enters the garden and starts to examine the plants. He displays an extraordinary amount of caution while doing this and gives the impression "of one walking among malignant influences" (p. 1335). Shortly before we learn that Beatrice follows her father into the garden the text reads:

> It was strangely frightful to the young man's imagination, to see this air of insecurity in a person cultivating a garden, that most simple and innocent of human toils, and which had been alike the joy and labor of the unfallen parents of the race. Was this garden, then, the Eden of the present world? – and this man, with such a perception of harm in what his own hands caused to grow, was he the Adam? (p. 1335)

Obviously, there are three explicit allusions to the story of the Garden of Eden in this passage. "The unfallen parents of the race" refers, of course, to Adam and Eve in their prelapsarian state. And that "Eden" and "Adam" refer the reader to the Garden of Eden, respectively Adam, is hardly worth stating. Hawthorne could hardly have made it clearer that his story is somehow related to the story of the fall from grace. Once we take up this cue, a close reading of "Rappaccini's Daughter" reveals a vast number of implicit allusions to the story of Eden, and many parallels, resemblances, and correspondences between the two stories. In this section, we will first point out some of the parallels between the two stories. This will serve as further evidence that Hawthorne wanted his story to be read and understood against the background of the biblical story. Furthermore, it will set the ground for the following discussion on how the way gender is represented in

4 All page references not otherwise marked are to Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter", in: *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Nina Baym (ed.), 7th Edition, New York 2007, pp. 1333–1352.

"Rappaccini's Daughter" relates to the problem of gender in the story of the Garden of Eden.

One of the most obvious parallels between the two stories is, of course, that a garden figures prominently in both of them. While in the biblical story it is God who plants the garden and Adam who tends it, in Hawthorne's short story the garden is planted by Rappaccini and tended by both Rappaccini and his daughter Beatrice. Another obvious similarity between the two stories is that there is a river watering the Garden of Eden, and a fountain with an adjacent pool watering the plants in Rappaccini's garden. Furthermore, just as there are two trees at the center of the Garden of Eden, there are a shrub and a fountain at the center of Rappaccini's garden. The two trees in the Garden of Eden are the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eating of the tree of life brings immortality, eating of the tree of knowledge ultimately brings death. Similarly, the central fountain in Rappaccini's garden gives life to the surrounding plants, and the fruits of the central shrub cause death. Also, that there are some plants in Rappaccini's garden which creep "serpent-like along the ground" (p. 1334) is a not too subtle reference to the serpent that seduces Eve. Just as God creates Eve so that Adam is not alone (Gen. 2: 18), Rappaccini turns Giovanni into a poisonous man so that Beatrice does not feel lonely (p. 1351). And just as God creates life, Rappaccini creates new, poisonous life. God appoints Adam gardener (Gen. 2: 15). Similarly, Rappaccini asks Beatrice to take care of (at least some of) the plants in his garden (pp. 1335f.). It is, therefore, quite obvious that Hawthorne went to some length in order to draw the reader's attention to the story of the Garden of Eden. Why did he do that? Our claim is that he did so because he wanted his story to be understood as a comment on and discussion of the biblical story. Note also that the most foregrounded intertextual references in Hawthorne's story are to be found at the beginning of the story: the explicit allusion to the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve, and the obvious similarities between the two gardens all appear on the first pages of the story. Hawthorne thus establishes right at the beginning of his story against which backdrop it is to be read.

Now let us turn to our discussion of gender in "Rappaccini's Daughter." As Richard Brenzo puts it, it is the story of three men and a woman, "who, though she never deliberately harms any of them, and though the men profess to have her good in mind, is nevertheless destroyed by them."[5] This summary makes Beatrice seem rather innocent and the male characters rather guilty. Of course, in order to get a detailed and justified account of the representation of gender in

5 Richard Brenzo, "Beatrice Rappaccini: A Victim of Male Love and Horror", in: *American Literature*, 48/1977, pp. 152–164, p. 152.

"Rappaccini's Daughter," we have to look at how the different characters are presented and at how they interact.

Beatrice's first appearance in the story is when Giovanni sees her for the first time. Roughly, this scene introduces three aspects of her character. First, she is a young, beautiful woman. Second, she is dangerous. Third, she is caring, nurturing, and tender. Of course, there is some tension between the second attribute on the one hand and the first and third attribute on the other hand. We will have to say more about this tension later. Hawthorne puts quite some effort into making sure that the reader's first impression of Beatrice is that of a highly attractive, young, fertile, and beautiful woman:

> "Here I am, my father! What would you?" cried a rich and youthful voice from the window of the opposite house; a voice as rich as a tropical sunset, and which made Giovanni, though he knew not why, think of deep hues of purple or crimson, and of perfumes heavily delectable. [...]
> Soon there emerged from under a sculptured portal the figure of a young girl, arrayed with as much richness of taste as the most splendid of the flowers, beautiful as the day, and with a bloom so deep and vivid that one shade more would have been too much. She looked redundant with life, health, and energy; all of which attributes were bound down and compressed, as it were, and girdled tensely, in their luxuriance, by her virgin zone. (p. 1335)

Note how Hawthorne establishes the fact that Beatrice is extremely attractive several times, even giving the same information more than one time. First, he introduces her voice as "rich and youthful," only to claim next that it is "rich as a tropical sunset" and makes Giovanni think of "purple or crimson, and of perfumes heavily delectable." This establishes, first of all, that Beatrice is young – a property often associated with female fertility and beauty. As sunsets are often associated with romance, it is not implausible to claim that Hawthorne wants the reader to associate romantic love with Beatrice. That her voice makes Giovanni think of colors and odors introduces an element of sensuality. Now that the reader has seen what only her voice can do to Giovanni, Beatrice is finally introduced in person. It is stressed, for the second time, that she is young. Of course, she is "beautiful as the day." Also, she is "redundant with health, life, and energy," all of which are attributes easily associated with fertility. And her fertility is "bound down and compressed, as it were, and girdled tensely, by her virgin zone." She is thus unmarried, and her virgin zone – the public sign of her being unmarried – symbolically restrains her fertility. All this suggests that once she is married she will give life to many healthy children. Shortly afterwards, the text reads:

> Then, with all the tenderness in her manner that was so strikingly expressed in her words, she busied herself with such attentions as the plant seemed to require; and Giovanni, at his

> lofty window, rubbed his eyes, and almost doubted whether it were a girl tending her favorite flower, or one sister performing the duties of affection to another. (p. 1336)

Obviously, these sentences establish that Beatrice is tender, nurturing, and affectionate. Hawthorne thus goes to great lengths to make it clear that Beatrice is young, beautiful, enticing, fertile, tender, nurturing, and affectionate. This, of course, makes her something like a perfect woman. At the same time, however, there is something dangerous about Beatrice. To Giovanni she seems "another flower, the human sister of those vegetable ones, as beautiful as they – more beautiful than the richest of them – but still to be touched only with a glove, nor to be approached without a mask" (p. 1335). Of course, Giovanni's impression is not only that Beatrice is dangerous, but that she shares this attribute and her beauty with the flowers in her father's garden.

As our close reading of this scene shows, Beatrice is introduced to the reader as a truly irresistible and dangerous woman. It might be argued that our analysis fails to appreciate the fact that the analyzed passage is internally focalized from Giovanni's perspective. The only thing we know, so the objection goes, is that *to Giovanni* Beatrice seems beautiful and dangerous. Of course, this objection gains additional force when we take into consideration that Giovanni throughout the story has great difficulty to understand exactly what kind of human being Beatrice is. Now, although it is true that the passage is internally focalized with Giovanni being the focalizer,[6] we don't think there is any reason to doubt the adequacy of his perception of Beatrice. His perception of Beatrice's beauty is validated when Baglioni says that "all the young men in Padua are wild about her" (p. 1337). His perception of her being dangerous is validated when it becomes clear that she can kill with her breath (p. 1339), and when Rappaccini asks her whether she is not happy about her ability "to quell the mightiest with a breath" (pp. 1351f.). Hawthorne's short story does not at any point justify doubt concerning the attributes Giovanni sees in Beatrice when she appears for the first time.

When Giovanni sees Beatrice for the second time, he is struck by the "expression of simplicity and sweetness" (p. 1338) on her face. This perception is slightly

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6 That the whole passage where Giovanni sees Rappaccini and Beatrice for the first time is told from Giovanni's perspective is quite obvious. Consider how it begins: "While Giovanni stood at the window, he heard a rustling behind a screen of leaves, and became aware that a person was at work in the garden. His figure soon emerged into view, and showed itself to be that of no common laborer [...]" (p. 1334). What the reader is told is thus what Giovanni hears, what he becomes aware of, and what he sees. This is a clear indication of internal focalization. Furthermore, when Beatrice appears the reader is explicitly told what she makes Giovanni think of (p. 1335), which again indicates that the passage is internally focalized.

at odds with the fact that just instants later her breath kills an insect, and that the bouquet Giovanni tosses her withers immediately in her hands (p. 1339). This juxtaposition of conflicting claims is indeed typical for the characterization of Beatrice: she is very dangerous, yet innocent and of pure heart. How, then, does Hawthorne establish her innocence? First of all, during their first meeting Giovanni wants to pluck one of the blossoms from the garden's central shrub. Beatrice knows that this would kill him, and prevents him from doing so. She then hides her face and runs away. In this scene, Beatrice gives the distinct impression that she does not want Giovanni to come to harm and is very unhappy about the poison she and the plants have been imbued with. Secondly, and again in order to protect Giovanni, she never kisses him. Whenever he tries to kiss her, she "grew so sad, so stern, and withal wore such a look of desolate separation, shuddering at itself, that not a spoken word was requisite to repel him" (p. 1345). Clearly, Beatrice suffers from her loneliness. Still, she does not allow Giovanni to come to harm just to satisfy her desire for him. Third, once Giovanni himself has become poisonous, Beatrice is shocked at this, and assures him that she is not to blame (p. 1350). Finally, when Giovanni shows her the potion given to him by Baglioni she drinks of it, telling him to wait for the result. She thereby saves Giovanni and sacrifices her own life. As Brenzo points out, it "is unclear whether she knows that drinking the antidote will be fatal, but the 'peculiar emphasis' she puts on the words 'I will drink – but do thou await the result' (p. 1351) indicates that she suspects it will be deadly and accepts her death quite happily while saving Giovanni's life at the same time."[7] To sum up, it is safe to say that Beatrice is irresistibly attractive, and very dangerous, but also a good, kind, and innocent person. Thus, although at her first appearance she seems to be a sort of femme fatale, in the end she clearly is not "this kind of female, essentially malignant, deliberately harmful to men."[8]

We shall begin our discussion of the three male characters with Rappaccini. One of the key scenes for an understanding of this character is his first appearance in the story:

> While Giovanni stood at the window, he heard a rustling behind a screen of leaves, and became aware that a person was at work in the garden. His figure soon emerged into view, and showed itself to be that of no common laborer, but a tall, emaciated, sallow, and sickly-looking man, dressed in a scholar's garb of black. He was beyond the middle term of life, with grey hair, a thin grey beard, and a face singularly marked with intellect and cultivation,

7 Brenzo, "Beatrice Rappaccini", p. 164.
8 Ibid., p. 154.

> but which could never, even in his more youthful days, have expressed much warmth of heart. (p. 1334)

These sentences establish three of Rappaccini's core characteristics. First, as he is "emaciated, sallow, and sickly-looking" he is obviously in poor health. Secondly, he is a scholar, and a man of intellect. Third, he lacks "warmth of heart," which probably means that he lacks empathy, maybe has trouble connecting with his emotions, and might not be too benign a man. In this scene, Hawthorne does not only introduce Rappaccini but also one of the most important conflicts of his story – that between intellect and feeling. Rappaccini squarely stands on the side of intellect and cold reason. This fact is stressed by Hawthorne several times. When Giovanni meets Baglioni by chance and Rappaccini walks past, Baglioni describes the way Rappaccini gazes at Giovanni as "a look as deep as nature itself but without nature's warmth of love" (p. 1341). In a later conversation with Giovanni Baglioni says about Rappaccini that "he is as true a man of science as ever distilled his own heart in an alembic" (p. 1347). The heart, of course, is an established symbol of feeling, emotion, and love. Apparently, Rappaccini lacks all of this. But Hawthorne goes even further when he gives us the image of a scientist distilling his own heart. Scientists distill substances in order to gain knowledge. During this process the things distilled are destroyed. If the heart symbolizes emotion, and love, then the process of distilling a heart is the symbolic destruction of these. If a scientist distills his own heart, he destroys his ability to feel emotion and love. The image of science that Hawthorne gives us is thus that of a man destroying his ability to feel love and emotion in order to gain knowledge. Thus, Hawthorne does not only see love, warmth of heart, and emotion as opposites to science and knowledge. He symbolically says that science actually destroys all of these. If we are correct and this is what Hawthorne had in mind, it is of course relevant for our understanding of Rappaccini. He is a scientist. As such, he does not only lack warmth of heart, he actively takes part in its destruction. This is Rappaccini's fourth attribute.

Fifth, as Beatrice puts it, her father's science is "fatal" (p. 1350). It his hardly possible to overstate this point. Rappaccini creates poisonous plants and turns Beatrice and Giovanni into human beings capable of killing with their breath.

Sixth, we need to discuss Rappaccini's motivation. After all, what he does is quite peculiar. He creates extremely poisonous plants, turns his daughter into a poisonous woman, thereby isolating her from other humans, and then turns Giovanni into a poisonous man so that Beatrice is no longer alone. He then tells them to "pass on [...] through the world, most dear to one another, and dreadful to all besides!" (p. 1351)

The Garden of Eden is the cradle of humanity. Rappaccini's garden is the new Eden. So Rappaccini's garden is the cradle of a new humanity. The new humans