READING

BETWEEN

THE LINES

Discussing Narration in the Literature Class

DEPARTMENT of ENGLISH and GERMAN STUDIES UNIVERSITAT AUTÒNOMA DE BARCELONA
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Reading Between the Lines
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Discussing Narration in the Literature Class

Department of English and German Studies
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Preface

One word that suffers continuous change in its meaning is culture. At some distance from a biology laboratory is its contemporary usage, close to the idea of a set of rules or norms that may or may not have been reached by consensus but that are definitely present and definitely felt. It would be fair to say that modern universities demand from their humanities faculties a culture of publications, which is essentially a euphemistic rephrasing of the old adage of publish or perish. At the same time, consistent pressure is exercised over lecturers to be excellent teachers: *good* is now a word emptied of its meaning. What seems to be a pincer movement needs to be studied in further detail, as it is certain that this double requirement is not made up of equal halves: everyone knows that an excellent researcher who is a poor communicator will not be considered in the same way as an excellent teacher who publishes little.

Additionally, the university teacher is put under more pressure by a set of circumstances that are accepted as normal, yet an objective outsider would not take very long to point out certain inconsistencies, to use an understatement. Younger staff, in particular, are well aware that student questionnaires about their teaching performance—a term replete with theatricality—can indeed exercise an influence over their future; perhaps an article or two as to how these questionnaires determine strategic decisions on what to teach and how to assess would make interesting reading for teachers and policy makers alike. The situation is somewhat exacerbated by a certain frustration at what seem to be impractical pedagogical journals that ignore normal class practice in favour of ideal or theoretical models. On a purely anecdotal level, while attending a course on the case method, all participants noted how the instructor was somewhat caught on the wrong foot by a law lecturer asking how to apply what he had learnt to classes verging on a hundred students. This professional division between theoreticians and practitioners is, of course, not unique to the university; anyone who has built a house or redecorated a flat has surely heard architects be less than diplomatic in their judgement of builders, and the latter no less forthright in their opinion of the former. The divide has widened considerably in the last few years due to the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) or, as
it is more colloquially referred to, ‘Bologna’. In a degree with a relatively high demand such as English Studies, the EHEA has simply increased the workload to a nearly unjustifiable level, while research still remains the career’s top priority. Are we heading towards an inevitable clash of values?

The essays in this volume provide its contributors the opportunity to speak about their profession in a style and approach that is rarely available: jargon-free and dedication-full. The chapters respond to a selection of edited contributions that emerged from a one-day conference held at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona on December 14, 2012. The seminar represented the culmination of a project funded by the Generalitat de Catalunya, more specifically by the AGAUR (Agency for the Management of University and Research Grants), to whom we are greatly indebted. Its title was Between the Lines: Comprehensive Reading of Literary Texts in a Foreign Language, and its aim was to analyse the role of the narrator in students’ understanding of literature, that is, for students for whom English is a foreign language. The point of departure was to wean students away from various identifications, the most obvious being the correlation between narrator and author. Although that might seem a simple task, one would have to be rather foolhardy to dismiss this unholy alliance as something readers, at any level, soon overcome before moving farther up the slopes of Mount Parnassus. Hopefully, readers of this volume will find conclusions they can well understand and others that they may not, but we believe we have participated in a debate that requires a lot more attention. The enthusiasm shown by the participants in the parallel sessions gave the impression that not nearly enough attention is given to the practicalities of teaching literature. Is it assumed we naturally know what to do without further ado? After all, something is obvious only once it has been proved to be so, and practical undertakings such as this one are unfortunately not as widespread as they should be, perhaps, because—in the modern geography of knowledge—they do not belong to one clearly defined territory.

The conference concluded with a plenary lecture delivered by Emeritus Professor Henry Widdowson entitled ‘Pronouns in Poetry and Fiction’, which provided a fitting conclusion to the day’s activities, not only for its stimulating central theme, but also because it was highly empirical and illustrated with plenty of familiar examples. The lecture, in addition to the choice of texts our contributors refer to, might give the whole volume an impression of conservatism, in the most negative sense of the word. That would be mistaken, I believe, for several reasons. First,
the largely canonical nature of the texts reflects the reality of what we teach; this is the literature that our students will first encounter; whether they extend their interest to other authors and areas is another matter altogether. Second, these texts have all withstood the passage of time, and it is surely licit to argue that any attempt to substitute canonical for non-canonical works could lead, in many cases, to the selection of more familiar but less relevant texts. Third, and finally, if our conclusions, whether in the form of the more statistical evidence or the more discursive chapters, have any significance, it must be because they can be applied both to the familiar, and henceforth to newer, unexplored territory.

Andrew Monnickendam
Introduction

As its title indicates, this collection has a double purpose. On the one hand, it is intended as a contribution to the continuing efforts of teachers and researchers to assess, and thereby improve, the effectiveness of teaching literature in a foreign language at undergraduate level. On the other hand, it brings together a series of reflections on the ways in which a clearer focus on narrative might help students gain a fuller insight into their subject.

Our initiative derives from a two-year teaching project whose initial aim was to address the difficulties faced by undergraduates beginning their study of literature, particularly the lack of preparation for responding effectively to the expectations and requirements of such study. The reasons for this are manifold, and—in all probability—some of these would necessarily lead us to consider how students are taught to read and talk about literature in pre-university education, a line of enquiry that goes well beyond the bounds of this current discussion. Other difficulties, though, often remain characteristic of students’ approach to literature throughout their time as undergraduates, and indeed may even become a consolidated (and, we believe, limiting) feature of their ability to respond to textual appreciation and criticism.

The overriding concern that lay behind our project was to tackle the tendency of students to focus, sometimes almost exclusively, on issues of plot, which thereby prevents or distracts them from developing the sensibility and understanding that would lead to an appreciation of other ambiets of critical assessment. This is no minor issue, since the aim of literature syllabuses, implicitly or explicitly so, is to address topics that are far deeper than the purely plot-based (questions such as sources, style, characterisation, thematic concerns, gender and genre concerns, historical context, etc.) and this discrepancy—between the objectives of specific course programmes and students’ initial understanding of what the study of literature involves—can create considerable confusion and, not infrequently, a sense of disorientation and disillusion.

How best to begin to remedy this? Where, and with what aspect of literary study, should we begin? Given the inevitable tendency to centre attention on plot, it seemed to us that a good starting point would be to take advantage of
this form of reading and to then draw students’ attention to the myriad ways in which aspects of plot are presented, shaped and directed by some sort of narrative presence, for very determined, very specific artistic objectives. Recognition of this, recognition of how narrators manage events and descriptions in order to impact on readers’ potential reactions, is a considerable step towards understanding that the study of a literary text is a complex interplay between that text (as presented, shaped and directed by some form of narrative voice) and the reader. When this has become clearer, students are then in a far stronger position to consider their responses from a variety of critical positions, whether political, cultural, gender-focussed, ecological or whatever other aspect may be of relevance or interest.

This, in a nutshell, was the basic justification, the essential objective, of our project. In effect, it serves to lead students away from a highly limiting dependence on storyline concerns and facilitates their movement towards a deeper critical understanding of how literature works, how readers might respond and, especially, how professional readers can engage in a fuller, more complex way with the text.

The essays in this collection, then, all take as their starting point this basic teaching position, this belief that a focus on narrative empowers students to become better readers and, in doing so, facilitates their access to other means of responding critically to literature. Most of the contributions are descriptive rather than prescriptive and are inspired by the trials and eventual successes in the literature class, and by the resulting views of colleagues in both intra- and interuniversity contexts. Although each essay brings its own specific realm of enquiry and discussion to our attention, the shared premise is that effective teaching can only take place when we help our students shift the boundaries of their own understanding.

Part I, *A Taste for Other Narratives*, stresses the importance of increasing students’ critical awareness of the role of the narrator in fiction by drawing on narratives other than those appearing in the canon. The work contained in this section approaches narration from a wider range of perspectives and carries those perspectives further in terms of their expression in the texts. In the first chapter, Sara Martín introduces the reader to the treatment of the narrator in Friedrich Engels’s non-fiction work, *The Condition of the Working Classes in 1844*, by comparing it with Dickens’s novel *Oliver Twist* (1838). Arguing for the constructedness of literature, Martín confronts the practice of using novels as a straightforward means of accessing reality in the literature class and as an
illustration of the principles at work in literature as a whole. She discusses, in particular, the role of the narrator as a ‘threshold concept’. Adelina Sánchez takes narration further into the realm of intertextuality. Her chapter comes with a slight change of focus, since she concentrates on exploring the ways in which marginal narratives might illuminate the study of late-Victorian fiction. She explores Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891) as a palimpsest that calls for alternative, subversive readings whilst still complying with the stuffy restrictions imposed by prejudiced Grundyist readers. Throughout the chapter Sánchez also investigates the extent to which Hardy’s case applies to other late-Victorian fictionists such as Pater and Wilde. Carme Font concludes this part of the book with a critical analysis of the unconventional, circular narrative of James Hogg’s *The Three Perils of Woman* (1823). She is especially attentive to the study of the two female characters, Gatty Bell and Cherry Elliot, in their roles as heroines and narrative devices, and to the treacherous proximity of the omniscient narrator to them. In this chapter, Font aims to demonstrate how focus on a non-canonical, extracurricular text can contribute to rethinking the key role of the narrator and its status as trusted or non-trusted, and to the subject of character as a function of narrative.

Central to Part II, *Unreliable Narrators*, is the perception, construction and value of reliable and unreliable narrators, and the analysis of the uses of narrative unreliability in different literatures. This section starts from the assumption that the unreliable narrator can be studied not only in terms of textual features but also in terms of the shared strategies by which readers make sense of this. In chapter four, Laura Gimeno explores unreliability as a narrative tool by focusing on Stevens, the first-person narrator in Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* (1989). Her experience with Ishiguro’s novel opens up questions connected with the interpretation of narrative and shifts the focal point from text to student-reader by concentrating on the changes in reader reception of the text. In his analysis of the opening chapter of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), David Owen takes up this interplay between reader and narrative to discuss how student-readers allow themselves to be manipulated, or not, by the narrative. Focusing on the ways in which Austen’s narrator systematically aligns readers’ sympathies with Mr Bennet, Owen charts the students’ shifting assessment of Austen’s narrative conventions—either reliable or unreliable—as part of the progressive development of their critical awareness of narrative strategy. In chapter six, Esther Pujolràs further
strengthens the argument that the relation between the literal understanding of the text and its critical literary interpretation is mediated in the literature class. She introduces Bakhtin’s dialogism to the teaching of Henry James’ *Daisy Miller* (1878) and argues that Bakhtin’s critical work not only helps students understand the textual dialogue between the narrator, the characters, the reader, the author and the environment but also allows for the interpretative appropriation of the novel.

The chapters in Part III, *New Ways of Reading and Seeing*, share an emphasis on the importance of the visual as a means of engaging students with narration and of promoting literariness. The word *visual* should be understood in connection with two distinct categories; first, with the fact that students are strongly image-oriented, and second, with the various forms in which the visual can be encountered in the text. In Chapter seven, Eduard Vilella and Rossend Arqués shed light on the ways that film and photography are invoked to teach narration. Comparative analysis between Verga’s *I Malavoglia* (1881) and Visconti’s film adaption *La Terra Trema* (1948) on the one hand, and between the two editions of Vittorini’s *Conversazioni in Sicilia* (1941, 1953) on the other, shows that the implementation of this type of tasks and activities not only encourages active and collaborative class work but additionally propitiates spontaneous debate around narrative issues. Cristina Pividori illustrates how the visual features of study guides can be used to put narrative theory into play with the teaching of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), a novel in which the relationship between the visual and the textual is a central thematic concern and structuring principle. Through this approach, she encourages students to become more aware of narrative voice—*who speaks*—and focalisation—*who sees*—and provides interesting tools for autonomous interaction with the text.

Part Four, *Recreating Narration*, turns to the processes by which students develop a new relation with the text, crossing over the artistic and generic boundaries of narration and seeking to negotiate and recreate meaning. Here, the emphasis is on *doing*, as the student assumes the authority to re-construct the experience embodied in the text. In chapter nine, John Stone focuses on the guided creative-interpretation task as a means of facilitating students’ engagement with narrative strategies. Suggested activities include a continuation of Haywood’s *Fantomina* (1725), a first-person rewriting of Polidori’s third-person *The Vampyre* (1819), a dramatisation of Austen’s ‘Love and Freindship’ (sic, 1790), an epistolary prequel
to Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740), or a Swiftian model *Proposal* on a contemporary topic. Jordi Coral explores the notion of narrative as a form of knowledge focusing on different practical instances through which students can perceive the cognitive dimension of texts and the supremacy of the particular over the universal. To illustrate this, Coral uses chapter 9 of *Daniel Deronda* (1876), in which Eliot reformulates the opening statement of *Pride and Prejudice*. In Chapter eleven, Andrew Monnickendam resorts to the virtual forum as a platform for the discussion of narrative voice at a higher critical level. He focuses on two classic modernist texts, James Joyce’s *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (1914–15) and Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and uses complementary material and shorter texts, such as manifestos and essays, as well as Auerbach’s essay ‘The Brown Stocking’ (1946) and Johnson’s introduction to Joyce’s novel (2000), to enable students to interact with the novels and to develop their own critical voice from their understanding of both primary and secondary material.

David Owen
Cristina Pividori
The Narrator as Threshold Concept: Comparing Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* and Friedrich Engels’s *The Condition of the English Working Classes in 1844*

1. The constructedness of the narrator as ‘threshold concept’

Higher-education pedagogy has been recently revolutionised by the application of Jan Meyer and Ray Land’s ‘Threshold Theory’, inspired by David Perkins. Perkins himself presents very briefly in his essay ‘The Many Faces of Constructivism’ the notion of ‘troublesome knowledge’, as the kind of knowledge to which a constructivist approach—‘active, social, creative’ (1999: 11)—is best applied. Yet, Meyer and Land make it central to their discussion of ‘threshold concepts’, redefining ‘troublesome knowledge’ as that which is ‘conceptually difficult, counter-intuitive or “alien”’ (2003: 1). Thus, whereas a core concept must be grasped but ‘does not necessarily lead to a qualitatively different view of subject matter’ (2003: 4), as they explain, ‘[a] threshold concept can be considered as akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something’ (2003: 2).

Meyer and Land only mention ‘signification’ (2003: 3) and ‘irony’ (2005: 374) as threshold concepts in Literature. A research report by Gina Wisker offers a longer list (2008: 13):

- The social context and construction of texts and language
- Intertextuality
- The reading process and critical literacy
- Representation and signification
- Ideology
- Enquiry and research; the engaged learner
Sara Martin

In later work co-authored with Gillian Robinson, they specify the problems affecting Literature students who miss the “aha” moments... beyond their comfort zones (2008: 7). Among these difficulties, they highlight students’ belief that ‘art is the copy of the real world’ (2009: 323). Precisely, the work I have been carrying on in the last two years is based on adding to this list of threshold concepts the role of the narrator. My aim is to emphasise the constructedness of all literary texts and, so, dismantle the students’ impression that reality can be apprehended in a straightforward way though Literature, in particular through novels.

In the previous edition (2011–12) of the subject ‘Victorian Literature’ (compulsory, second year in a four-year BA in ‘English Studies’ at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) I asked students to focus, in the first part of the semester, on the role of the narrator in Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1838) and Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). I expected that the contrast between Dickens’s flamboyant omniscient narrator and Brontë’s subtle combination of two first-person narrators (a man and a woman) would generate the desired *aha* moment. Students were nervous and disconcerted at the beginning, as they tend to read for the story and feel unsure about how to comment on concepts for them as elusive as the *narrator*. Happily, their papers showed a marked increase in quality. I still doubt, however, that students can grasp how novels specifically are written without comparing them to other genres, hence the activity I present here.

Gissi Sarig (2001) had done similar work in a course on creative writing, in which she taught students to understand the constructedness of the narrator by comparing a short story with an academic essay. She drew a list, which I borrowed, of six basic ‘defining qualities’ (247) in the author’s voice: sincerity, self-revelation, intensity, creativity and innovation, interactivity and use of poetic devices. I also used the set of questions that Sarig supposes all authors ask themselves before writing a text (239), together with her invitation to locate textual evidence for each of the ‘defining qualities’ in the author’s voice. I chose, however, to compare a novelist and an essayist dealing with the same issue: the English working classes in early-Victorian times. The texts selected were Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* and Friedrich Engels’s *The Condition of the English Working Classes in 1844*. 

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2 Pre-Marxist Readings of the Victorian Era: Dickens and Engels as Pioneers

Neither Dickens nor Engels enjoyed the benefits of a formal university education and both were employed at an early age as clerks, drifting towards journalism before their twenties. London was Dickens’s preferred territory (though he did not always live there), whereas young Engels reached Manchester sent by his father—a German cotton manufacturer—but also already as a correspondent for a journal edited by Karl Marx. Politically, Dickens can be defined as an anti-Benthamite anti-utilitarian, and a follower of Thomas Carlyle (Goldberg 1972)—not truly a socialist but what we might call today a concerned liberal. After his first stay there (1842–44), Engels returned to Manchester in 1849 to continue working for his father, eventually using his own money to finance Marx’s writing of Das Kapital (1867–1894). Engels moved to London in 1870, the same year when Dickens died. I am not aware that the two men ever met, though, surely, Engels must have known about, or read, Dickens.

Dickens’s Hard Times (1854) might be a better comparator than Oliver Twist as it deals far more closely with the working classes. Yet, the segments on the workhouse in Oliver Twist and in Engels’s essay might provide a concrete point of comparison of greater use for students. Oliver Twist (1837–39) is, besides, not only chronologically closer to Engels’s The Condition... but also a sort of transitional work in terms of genre. Its serialisation partly overlapped with The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club (1836–7) and often connects with Dickens’s own journalistic work in Sketches by Boz (1836). Engels’s The Condition... started as a three-part series of reports addressing a socialist middle-class German audience before becoming a book in 1845. The English translation, however, was published much later: first in the USA in 1887 and next in 1892 in England.

Shari Hodges objects—anachronistically—that in Oliver Twist ‘after the introduction of the criminals, the text’s revolutionary, Marxist tendencies begin to fail’ (2010: 255). By the end, as many other critics and readers have complained, ‘the proletarian hero who initially stood forth as a pauper to assert his own basic needs against the interests of the dominant class is transformed into a personification of bourgeois ideals’ (255). The problem is that Dickens drops the thorny question of the workhouse as soon as its child victim, Oliver, runs
away to London, thus providing no answer to the issue of whether this dreadful Victorian institution should be abolished or just reformed.

On his side, Ira Katznelson praises Engels's pre-Marxist work for connecting ‘capitalism understood abstractly as a system of production’ (1993: 142) with ‘the identities, dispositions, and activities of actual working people in specific places at given historical moments’ (141). Yet, when Katznelson claims that Engels’s ‘most important and suggestive contributions’ lie in ‘his accounts of the connections between the social structure of capitalism and the spatial structure of the town’ (1993: 147) we may argue that Dickens is the real pioneer. Oliver Twist in particular is crystal clear about how urban geography and class intertwine, albeit Dickens was not producing primarily an account of the ‘social morphology’ (151) of London, as Engels did for Manchester.

* Oliver Twist, in short, is flawed for not being Marxist enough, whereas The Condition... is often criticised for the opposite reason: ‘Its ideological commitments biased the use of evidence, at times in a heavy-handed way’ (Katznelson 1993: 144). What students were asked to do, specifically, was to consider how this ‘heavy-handedness’ affects Dickens’s and Engels’s construction of their own narrative voices. They had to consider to what extent Dickens’s social agenda conditions his narrative voice but also to what extent the success of Engels’s essay depends on the particular constructedness of his own narrative voice.

As happens in the case of most essayists, the issue of how Engels’s voice is constituted is routinely overlooked by academic analysts, with few exceptions. Grace Kehler, among them, calls Engels’s ultra-realistic style ‘Gothic pedagogy’ (2008: 438), by which she means that this ‘popular fictional genre’ is also ‘a technology or a mode that lends itself to a variety of political-cultural contexts’ (438). In particular, it was used by Victorian reformers like Engels (and indeed Dickens) to transmit an unnerving impression to the middle-class reader of the distressing bodily sensations of the working-class slum dweller. Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, in contrast, omits the ideological agenda habitual in most discussions of Dickens's work to argue that he ‘in fact creates the narrative to tell his own tale, the tale of how he exists as narrator, what it means to be a “narrator”’ (2001: 87), as if Oliver Twist were, above all, a metafictional novel.

It seems, then, quite obvious that students of Literature need to understand the role of the narrator as a crucial threshold concept. How to do teach it, however, is no easy task, as I will show next.
3 Students’ Work on Dickens and Engels: The Problem of How to Teach Threshold Concepts

Sixty percent of continuous assessment in the subject ‘Victorian Literature’ is based on a short paper (1,000–1,500 words) with quotations from at least three secondary sources, including obligatorily one already used in class discussion. Students must submit a paper proposal focusing on the narrator in either Oliver Twist or Brontë’s The Tenant of Wildfell Hall by mid-term. Preparation is based on intensive close reading and debate in class, their own individual research and my own eight-page guide for ‘Writing Academic Papers’. This year (2012–13) I also invited students to compare Dickens and Engels in order to test my hypothesis that students understand better the role of the narrator in fiction by comparing it to the narrative voice in other genres.

Being a very pragmatic teacher, I quickly realised that no student would accept reading a fifth text in the course with no reward whatsoever. As an enticement, I offered a set of exercises to help them prepare their paper, including the three required secondary sources. The set of written exercises introduced, however, an unexpected factor in my experiment. Although I was confident enough that the focus on the narrator has significantly improved my teaching practice, I grew less confident as to which method was best to teach this key threshold concept: the autonomous research I had favoured so far, or the more narrowly guided research I was offering this time.

Out of 57 students following the subject only 10 decided to work on Dickens and Engels. The fact that 35 chose to focus on Brontë suggests that they did prefer her novel; yet, the question is that out of 22 students who selected Dickens, 12 rejected my help. A student who did accept it ventured the opinion that by not choosing the Dickens-Engels option his classmates were showing how unpragmatic they are. He is partly right: while the exercises helped students to prepare about 80% of their paper, those who handed in a proposal independently had completed only around 30% of the necessary preparation, and only in the best cases. Yet, paradoxically, the final papers show no significant differences, with the papers based on the exercises being manifestly less creative.

The set of exercises I offered was preceded by a short theoretical introduction presenting the idea of the ‘threshold concept’. I also gave students the draft of this very article. The set of activities included:
Sara Martin

1. Filling in a table comparing the main biographical data for both authors, followed by a 10-line paragraph considering the main coincidences.
2. Selecting three passages (10 lines maximum) from each book that could be compared and writing a brief comment on them (five-ten lines).
3. Filling in a second table, based on Sarig, in which they answered a set of questions as if they were Dickens or Engels when considering the choices required to write their respective texts.
4. Filling in a third table with quotations from Dickens’s and Engels’s books corresponding to the six qualities that define the author’s voice, according also to Sarig.
5. Selecting three quotations from each of the three secondary sources and briefly commenting on them (five lines for each source).
6. And finally, writing a 350-word essay with their conclusions regarding the construction of the narrator in each text.

This short essay could be used as the basis of the final paper, while the selected passages could be used as the required quotations for both primary and secondary sources.

The quality of the exercises was high indeed, within a B+ to A range. This was not the case at all with the rest of the paper proposals, 60% of which presented serious deficiencies (students were invited to re-submit). Only five out of the remaining 47 paper proposals got an A, 14 got a B+. Thus, while most of the independently developed proposals required revision and intensive further work, none of the students who did the written exercises needed further help. Their feedback regarding these exercises, additionally, has been very positive. I have, thus, tested satisfactorily, I believe, my hypothesis that students learn more (and better) about the role of the narrator in fiction when comparing it with the narrative voice in the essay. I have learned, though, in the process that our students need much more guidance than I assumed to prepare their papers, beginning with the proposals. Also, that they prefer exercises to guides, which, in my view, shows that they are not as autonomous as they should ideally be. The issue I need to address next is, then, what exact role the exercises should have in future versions of the subject.

Clearly, the students who read Engels got a far richer awareness of class issues in Victorian times than those who only read Dickens. However, I cannot
include more than just the workhouse segments from Engels in the reading list, as including the whole essay would create an obvious imbalance (the subject’s focus is fiction). As regards what students did say in the activities, considering that most of our BA students have never read a complete book in English before they register, I believe that statements like the following show remarkable progress in the understanding of the target threshold concept. Here’s a brief sample (in a revised version, with some awkward expressions edited out):

- Engels used a narrator deliberately close to his own voice; clear, true to his experience and transmitting honesty. It inquires, arranges and describes almost without being noticed – except for when it interacts with the reader. Dickens’ narrative voice, by contrast, could not be more different.
- To sum up, Dickens’s novel has been far more widely read than Engels’ essay; therefore more readers have a clear insight of the Victorian era thanks to him. However, from a student’s point of view, it is true that to raise our awareness of the social issues England was living in, Engels’s essay is perhaps more effective because of the detailed information and analysis he offers.
- In conclusion Dickens and Engels dealt with a similar problem, the workers and the life in the workhouse, using different approaches. For Dickens this is only the background of the story whereas for Engels the condition of the working class is the story itself. Both authors use suitable narrators to deliver their stories: Dickens a playful and intrusive one, Engels a reliable, first person voice.

Nonetheless, the exercises resulted in papers, as I have already noted, less creative regarding the originality of the angles from which to approach the narrator. This, I acknowledge, is partly my own fault for offering the bibliography but also partly the students’ for understanding that this was my project and not, first and foremost, their paper. Interestingly, the best papers were the ones on Anne Brontë’s novel, for which the approach to the narrator is necessarily comparative, as Brontë offers a double narrative with Gilbert Markham’s letters framing Helen Graham’s diary. An inevitable conclusion, then, is that the strategy to teach the narrator in comparison, whether this is intratextual or intertextual (Dickens/Brontë or Dickens/Engels), does work indeed. What needs to be solved,
as the exercises show, are the difficulties that students face when preparing their papers on this topic. The second inevitable conclusion, thus, is that I should adapt the Engels-Dickens exercises to facilitate the preparation of the paper proposals. I should also make sure that the exercises do increase student autonomy, rather than bring, as I fear, counterproductive secondary-school methodologies into the Literature university classroom.

I believe, to sum up, that our next collective challenge as teachers of Literature is to take the theorisation around the threshold concept onto a more pragmatic level. We need to identify these key concepts but, above all, we need to train students to grasp them with study techniques as autonomous as possible while offering more intensive guidance at whatever point this is needed, paradoxical as this may sound.

Works Cited


Reading Between the Lines in Late-Victorian Fiction: The Case of Thomas Hardy

1 Introduction

During the last decade of the nineteenth century the term Decadent became common currency to refer to late Victorians such as Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde and Thomas Hardy, followers of a campaign whose bone of contention was the defence of art above any other considerations, mostly at the expense of established social principles and away from the burden of conventional morality. Heavily attacked for their focusing on experiences previously forbidden in literary discourse, these writers were thought of as leaders of an immoral revolution against straight attitudes. It was, indeed, the fight started by the Aesthetes in the 1870s against literary Grundyism, i.e., the prudish moralising attitude of those who believed the novel should be merely didactic and imposed their view on the rest forcing them, as D. F. Hannigan puts it, to ‘draw a veil over all the unpleasant facts of life’ (Cox 1970: 290–91).

Curiously, the controversy was fed by the new writers themselves, who were making a self-conscious effort to call on deviation from the norms of decorum in order to come across as different and rebellious. Grant Allen, for instance, proudly talked of New Hedonism in 1894 and coined expressions such as the School

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1 Take, for instance, early attacks in the 1870s such as the Oxford and Cambridge Undergraduate’s Journal, where the aesthetes were scorned, as Richard Ellmann recounts, for their ‘Pagan worship of bodily form and beauty’ and their renunciation of ‘all exterior systems of morals or religion’ (1988: 88). Or later criticism in the works by Violeta Paget (Vernon Lee) in Miss Brown (1884) whose corrupt fictional characters are a thin disguise of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Algernon Swinburne and Oscar Wilde. There were also articles and reviews on ‘literary degenerates’ or ‘the fiction of sexuality’ (Jane E. Hogarth, ‘Literary Degenerates’, Fortnightly Review, April 1895, 586–92; James Ashcroft Noble, ‘The Fiction of Sexuality’, Continental Review, April 1895, 490–98), to end up with the most notorious attack against aesthetic and decadent writing in Max Nordau’s Degeneration (1895), where he defends the thesis that modern artists were guided by a pathological need to reflect ugliness and vice in their works, an unnatural urge hidden, according to his view, under the claim that art and ethics are different categories. Some writers, such as Oscar Wilde, he went on to say, were ‘a morbid deviation from the type’ (Stokes 1989: 50).
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of Revolt, a term he used in order to refer not only to his own 1895 controversial novel, significantly called The Woman who Did, but also to other contemporary fiction such as Thomas Hardy’s. Certainly, the writers Allen had in mind when talking about revolt were most insistent in opposing the lack of understanding of Grundyist readers. Seen as a danger to decorum, they were heavily censored and had to edit their works once and again in order to accommodate them to what was just about accepted by readers. Their texts kept, however, certain elements that invited to subvert their most immediate readings and suggested different approaches to their otherness, thus covertly calling for an alternative readership. Thomas Hardy is a case in point.

In common with the above-mentioned Pater and Wilde, Hardy resorts to characters that represent the internal division experienced by the sensitive artist when confronted by an alien milieu. Artistic sensibility, they all tell us, could be dangerous since it conflicts with the inherited values of society. In their works the artist becomes a marginal exiled creature in his antisocial, sinful and subversive opposition to the community. Using Hardy’s seminal Tess of the D’Urbervilles in the context of the evolution of his work, this paper will look at his strategies for the representation of marginality and how these strategies construct a palimpsestic fiction which calls for alternative readings of what he could only say between and beyond the lines whilst still keeping the attention of Grundyist consumers of his texts.

2 Thomas Hardy: the painful road to artistic self-discovery

The love-hate relationship established between Hardy and his readers started with the rejection of his first novel The Poor Man and the Lady by Chapman and Hall in 1869. This was followed by various episodes of outrage after the publications of his novels of the 70s and 80s, an outrage which intensified in the 90s. In the preface to the fifth edition of Tess of the D’Urbervilles, Hardy refers to ‘objectors

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2 The novel was completed by 1868 and then sent to Alexander Macmillan. When Macmillan rejected the manuscript, Hardy offered it to Chapman and Hall who accepted it at first, though later advised Hardy not to publish. It was George Meredith, their reader at the time, who warned Hardy of the possible dangers for his incipient literary career. As The Early Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1891 (1928) puts it: ‘in genteel mid-Victorian 1869 [the novel] would no doubt have incurred, as Meredith judged, severe strictures which might have handicapped a young writer for a long time’ (Millgate 1984: 63).
both to the matter and to the rendering’ of the novel; similarly, in the preface to the Wessex edition of *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy writes that ‘within a day or two of its publication the reviewers pronounced upon it in tones to which the reception of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* bore no comparison’ (33). Hardy’s words in the prefaces do not adequately describe the scandal. It is due to the *Life of Thomas Hardy* that its real magnitude has become better known: the *Quarterly Review* noted that with *Tess* Hardy had told ‘a disagreeable story in an extremely disagreeable manner’; the *Saturday Review* commented on ‘the terrible dreariness of this tale, which, except during a few hours spent with cows, has not a gleam of sunshine anywhere’; the Bishop of Wakefield claimed to have thrown the book into the fire; while, finally, Margaret Oliphant accused Hardy of plotting against marriage and described his novel as one of the most indecent stories in English literature. All of these objections show how, by dealing with such an unorthodox subject as the nature of sexual impulse, Hardy was seen to be breaking the laws of conventional literary decorum. Moreover, he was placing himself and his work in an exclusive circle of outcasts in almost the same way as Wilde was doing at this time.

*Tess of the d’Urbervilles* is Hardy’s first attempt in 1891 to suggest what he would state openly four years later in *Jude the Obscure*. While in the latter the reader receives a direct presentation of the extra-marital relationship between the main characters, the seduction of Tess can only take place off-stage by means of narrative ellipsis and an abundant use of symbols. This formula allowed the author to realise his aims whilst still satisfying the demands of his publishers. As J. T. Laird points out, in *Tess*,

Hardy succeeded in creating a web of symbolic imagery with both emotional and conceptual significance. One of the more important aspects of emotional significance is the atmosphere of eroticism built up through such means, at a time when prudery prohibited direct literary treatment of the sexual side of human relationships. (1975: 53)

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3 In ‘The Anti-Marriage League’ published in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, January 1896. Mrs Oliphant’s article was a perfect illustration of the imposition of the laws of *decorum* in literature implicit in her words: What is now freely discussed as the physical part of the question, and treated as the most important, has hitherto been banished from the lips of decent people, and as much as possible from their thoughts. Accordingly, she referred to *Jude* in disparaging tones like ‘nothing so coarsely indecent as the whole history of Jude . . . has ever been put in English print—that is to say, from the hands of a Master’ and qualified it as ‘the strongest illustration of what Art can come to when given over to the exposition of the unclean’ (Lerner and Holmstrom 1968: 126-27).
Laird goes on to indicate how Hardy’s reliance upon mythological allusions in the novel responded to that very need to suggest what could not be explicitly dealt with. A similar view is adopted by J. B. Bullen, who in an analysis of the visual arts in the novels of Thomas Hardy, approaches Tess as an example of impressionism—an impressionism mostly attained by an extensive use of the symbolical content of mythological allusions (1986: 63).

Indeed, Tess is a palimpsest resulting from the assimilation of mythic narratives. Using an intertextual approach Hardy tries to establish a coded communication with his ideal reader, the one who would understand the second layer of the story, as Hardy would have liked to tell it to a more permissive audience. In order to achieve this goal Hardy uses two literary models: the Metamorphoses, by Ovid, himself an exiled poet and, therefore, representative of the restricted individuality of the artist, and ‘The Gods in Exile’ by Heine who portrayed the alienation suffered by pagan deities when returning to a later Christian age.

Hardy’s reading of the Metamorphoses and his interest in it can be gauged by the following entry taken from his literary notes in which he quotes a passage from a prose translation of the poem (his underlining),

Here and there the unbodied spirit flies
By time, or force, or sickness disposed
And lodges where it lights...
From tenement to tenement is tossed
The soul is still the same, the figure only lost
And, as the softened wax new seals receives,
[the soul] [forsakes that shape]
This face assumes and that impression leaves

Ovid (Free translation)⁴

Hardy cites Ovid on various occasions in his work, as F. B. Pinion’s catalogue of Hardy’s literary borrowings illustrates (1984: 205). This catalogue testifies to the fact that Tess does not contain any direct quotation from the works of Ovid. Yet,

⁴ In Lennart A. Bjork’s edition of Hardy’s literary notes. This one is entry 136 within the “1867” Notebook. It is taken from the translation of Metamorphoses XV, 165–74 in Thoughts from Latin Authors (1864), 11, 251.
the *Metamorphoses* has a strong influence in the novel. As textual scholars have pointed out, one of the last passages to appear in the printed versions of *Tess* was the Chaseborough Dance episode, present in the original manuscript (ff. 81–85), although not included in the work until the Macmillan ‘Wessex’ edition of 1912. However, an abridged account of this episode had already been published twenty years before in the *National Observer* as part of ‘Saturday Night in Arcady’ (Laird 1975: 159). The fact that Hardy did not incorporate these pages into the novel until 1912 and that the version in the *National Observer* had been widely edited, demonstrates Hardy’s recognition of the morally dangerous nature of the passage in question. As the name of the sketch implies, the passage contains a high number of mythological references—which give a further meaning to what is on the surface a commonplace peasant dance. In their dancing movements these peasants are compared to pagan characters in sensual pursuit,

Through this floating, fusty debris of peat and hay, mixed with the perspirations of warmth of the dancers, and forming together a sort of vegeto human pollen, the muted fiddles feebly pushed their notes, in marked contrast to the spirit with which the measure was trodden out. They coughed as they danced, and laughed as they coughed. Of the rushing couples there could barely be discerned more than the high lights the indistinctness shaping them to satyrs clasping nymphs a multiplicity of Pans whirling a multiplicity of Syrinxes; Lotis attempting to elude Priapus and always failing. (Hardy 1975: 96)

The allusions to these mythical figures are obviously from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as is the emphasis on the pursuit of the object of desire. But what is exceptional about this passage is Hardy’s use of it as a proleptic symbol of Tess’s seduction. This can be appreciated in the resemblance between Hardy’s account of the seduction and the Ovidian poem. Hardy tells how, after the dance, Alec leads Tess into the Chase, one of the oldest forests in England. Having lost his way, he makes a bed

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5 In *The Life of Thomas Hardy* (Millgate 1984: 232) we read that Hardy decided not to destroy the chapters bowdlerized from *Tess* but instead ‘to publish them, or much of them, elsewhere, if practicable, as episodic adventures of anonymous personages [which in fact was done, with the omission of a few paragraphs]; till they could be put back in their places at the printing of the whole in volume form. In addition several passages were modified.’ It appears that the passage in question is the same as the paragraphs referred to in the quote.
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of dead leaves for Tess where she is overcome by exhaustion and promptly falls asleep. The narrative implies that she is seduced afterwards, although the fact is never explicitly mentioned. After this episode Tess is referred to as a ‘daughter of nature’. This is comparable to the story of Pan and Syrinx where Ovid describes the fate of a virtuous nymph who ‘as she was returning from Mount Lycaeus’ is beheld by Pan, tries to escape from him by running off ‘through the pathless forest’ and, finally, preserves her virtue by being metamorphosed into a reed (Ovid 1984: 47–48). More remarkable still are the similarities to the story of Callisto, also narrated in the Metamorphoses,

The sun on high had passed its zenith, when she entered a grove whose trees had never felt the axe. Here she took her quiver from her shoulders, unstrung her pliant bow, and lay down on the turf, resting her head on her painted quiver... Jupiter saw her thus, tired and unprotected... So far from complying, she resisted him as far as a woman could had Juno seen her she would have been less cruel but how could a girl overcome a man, and who could defeat Jupiter? He had his way, and returned to the upper air. The nymph was filled with loathing for the groves and woods that had witnessed her fall (Ovid 1984: 61).

Tess's episode also takes place under ‘the primeval yews and oaks of the Chase’ (Hardy 1975: 107); like Callisto, a tired, unprotected Tess falls asleep on the ground and resists Alec. Whether she resists as far as she is able to or as far as she wants to we do not know and perhaps Hardy's point is we should not care. Finally, she is consumed with guilt concerning the consequence of her fall, the child, who – following Hardy’s custom for the allegorical use of names – is called ‘Sorrow’. By its mere association with Ovid’s work, the Chaseborough dance passage becomes a metaphor which deciphers what is left untold: that Tess (in Victorian terms) actually falls.

Thus, the influence of the Metamorphoses in Hardy’s novel does not lie in individual episodes but in his general reading of Ovid’s narrative and the symbolic potential he encountered there. Ovid offered a portrait of the relationship between individuals and nature which suited Hardy perfectly. In Ovid, as in Hardy, nature is no longer benevolent.

As Charles Paul Segal states in his study of landscape in the Metamorphoses, the poem presents a world which is totally removed from a sense of compassionate
sympathy between man and nature (1969: 88). In the presentation of the natural world as an impassive witness of the characters’ fate, the Metamorphoses coincides with Tess. One needs only contrast passages in this novel and in Far from the Madding Crowd (1874) to realise the extent of this coincidence. In Far from the Madding Crowd, Bathsheba overcame her marital crisis due to the amiable and comforting response of the natural world symbolised by the oak which protects her physically in her sleep. In his adoption of the same motif for Tess, Hardy describes how nature follows its normal course, and, although Tess like Bathsheba falls asleep under the primeval oaks of the Chase, there is no help but rather an ignorance of the situation she finds herself in: birds roosting in their last nap and hares and rabbits hopping about.

Most importantly, the universe of Tess, like that of the Metamorphoses, is pervaded by the violence of repressed eroticism. In Ovid’s poem most of the metamorphoses of characters into nature are presented as substitutes for sexual possession. The natural element becomes a symbol of repressed passion. Thus, as Segal points out, the external landscape becomes a reflection of the uncontrollable passions of the beings it accommodates, ‘a realm where normally repressed impulses are made visible and possible’ (1969: 12). The same comments may also be made about the portrait of the natural world in Tess. After the Chaseborough dance, and as the peasants return home, Hardy describes their insertion into the backdrop by translating their ardent desires to the natural world,

They followed the road with a sensation that they were soaring along in a supporting medium, possessed of original and profound thoughts, themselves and surrounding nature forming an organism of which all the parts harmoniously and joyously interpenetrated each other. They were as sublime as the moon and starts above them, and the moon and stars were as ardent as they. (Hardy 1975: 98)

Similarly, from the outset of Tess’s romance with Angel, his music seems to have an aphrodisiac impact upon her, although her sexual urge towards him is repressed and diverted to images of nature. As a result, what commences as being a representation of Tess’s emotions is diffused into a description of nature,

Tess was conscious of neither time nor space. The exaltation which she had described as being producible at will by gazing at a star, came now without any determination of
hers; she undulated upon the thin notes of the second hand harp, and their harmonies passed like breezes through her, bringing tears to her eyes. [The notes] wandered in the still air with a stark quality like that of nudity... The floating pollen seemed to be his notes made visible and the dampness of the garden the weeping of the garden’s sensibility. (Hardy 1975: 162)

However, here the animism of nature does not evoke a primitive world but is only there to subserve the symbolic expression of that repressed desire. Hardy’s lexical choice in the passage allows the attentive reader to understand its metaphorical content. ‘Nudity’, ‘pollen’, ‘weeping’ and the breezes passing through Tess illustrate, graphically enough, Tess’s abandonment to the realm of the senses. Hence, the transportation of desire into the natural world emphasises its lack of fulfilment. This repression applies not only to the characters but also to the narrative itself whereby an accumulation of symbols may be seen as a necessary outlet of the eroticism of its inner layer. Nature is a symbol of repressed passion, of what Hardy really wanted to express.

By using Ovid’s pattern Hardy presents characters who are divided by ‘an immeasurable social chasm’ (1975: 108) and alienated by conventional morality. In this sense his ambiguous characters are a parallel to those in the mythic fiction of Pater and Wilde. Similarity is reinforced by Hardy’s adoption of another mythological narrative pattern, Heinrich Heine’s ‘Gods in Exile’ (1837), a pattern which was also illuminating those writers’ short fiction at the time.⁶

‘Gods in Exile’ is a collection of imaginary stories about gods reappearing in the medieval age and the nineteenth century. They are organised around the assumption that pagan deities did not disappear with the advent of Christianity but were, ‘obliged to retire to under-earthly secrecy, where they in company with other elementary spirits carry on their daemonic housekeeping... compelled to take to ignominious flight [and hide] in all disguises among us here on earth’ (Heine 1892: 315 and 339). Heine’s conception places an emphasis on the demonization of divinities when returning in a later age and their humiliating repression of difference. As such it was used in Pater’s ‘Imaginary Portraits’ of ‘Denys L’Auxerrois’ (1887) and ‘Apollo in Picardy’ (1893) and Wilde’s ‘The Fisherman and his Soul’ (published the same year as Tess). The theme of conversion to the receiving

culture experienced by Heine’s returning deities, is also present in Hardy in several ways. The episode in *Tess* which most obviously relates to Heine’s work is the conversion of Alec into a preacher, described by Hardy with an emphasis on the striking transformation of pagan sensuality into Christian fanaticism,

It was less a reform than a transfiguration. The former curves of sensuousness were now modulated to lines of devotional passion. The lip-shapes that had meant seductiveness were now made to express supplication; the glow on the cheek that yesterday could be translated as riotousness was evangelized to-day into the splendour of pious rhetoric; animalism had become fanaticism; Paganism Paulinism; the bold rolling eye that had flashed upon her form in the old time with such mastery now beamed with the rude theolatry that was almost ferocious. (Hardy 1975: 353)

Heine imagined his divinities in disguise, in order to show the lack of congruity of their return to an alien age and to single them out as misfits. The habit was tantamount to the repression of difference. They became dangerous instruments of the new culture precisely because of their eagerness to convert to that very culture. Hardy’s Angel Clare is also an ambiguous hybrid of paganism and ‘theolatry’. His love of paganism is reflected in his attraction towards nature and in *Tess* herself, now described as ‘a fresh and virginal daughter of Nature’ (Hardy 1975: 113). However, he finally betrays his liberalism by returning to the canons of Victorian puritanism. Charlotte Bonica defines him as a victim of what Hardy called ‘the ache of modernism’ (1982: 849). This ‘ache’ is, ultimately, an internal struggle between desire and self-restraint, since Hardy states that: ‘With all his attempted independence of judgement this advanced and well meaning young man was yet the slave to custom and conventionality’ (Hardy 1975: 309).

Furthermore, like Heine’s, Pater’s and Wilde’s Apollonian figures, Angel is also a malignant spirit, a devil. His is a dangerous combination: he has been brought up in the very bosom of the Church, yet he believes that ‘it might have resulted far better for mankind if Greece had been the source of the religion of

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7 Hardy’s reading of Heine is well documented: Pinion maintains that he owned at least two volumes of Heine’s verse in translation (1984: 207), and, indeed, Heine is quoted in Hardy’s ‘Apology’ to ‘Late Lyrics and Earlier’: ‘Heine observed almost a hundred years ago that the soul has her eternal rights; that she will not be darkened by statutes, nor lullabied by the music of bells’ (Orel 1990: 52). He is also favourably appraised in the writer’s literary notes (entries 1173 and 1174).
modern civilization and not Palestine’ (Hardy 1975: 199) and this combination plays an important role in Tess’s destruction. The imagery used by Hardy in the passage where Tess discloses her past to Angel, singles him out not as the guardian angel Hardy implored during Tess’s seduction (Hardy 1975: 107), but rather as a fallen angel, the fire in the grate looking ‘impish’ and ‘demoniacally funny, as if it did not care in the least about her strait’ (270). The imagery of the passage is supported elsewhere in the novel by a Biblical language which emphasises guilt and repression: ‘THY, DAMNATION, SLUMBERETH, NOT’ (114), etc. As Charlotte Thompson indicates, ‘the power that this old language holds over the minds of the characters is directly proportional to its degeneracy. It has a biblical word for every occasion, but especially the occasion of guilt, which it can label efficiently, if not accurately’ (1983:741).

Angel’s obscure side victimises Tess in very much the same way as Wilde’s Sybil Vane and Pater’s Hyacinth would be victimised by Dorian and Apollyon in, respectively, The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890) and ‘Apollo in Picardy’(1893). The Hyperborean paradise of Pater’s portrait also recalls Talbothays. Hardy’s Angel is also a casual farmer whose music, like Apollyon’s, has the power to seduce. Furthermore, he is presented as the player of the harp, the classical attribute of Apollo. Finally, both Apollyon and Angel go away unpunished.8

The striking coincidences demonstrate their common approach to Heine’s portrait of exiled divinities. Hardy, like Pater and Wilde, analyses his own age and applies the sensuality of mythological characters to a definition of the artistic spirit. Heine’s and Ovid’s patterns parallel the conflict between the claims of the individual and the restrictions of conventional society as suffered by the late nineteenth-century artist. Ultimately, Hardy’s decadent emphasis on the dark side of the self is intended as a historical parable of artistic sensibility in his own age. This topic would be taken to the extreme in Jude, a naturalistic approach of the alienation of the sensitive individual destroyed by the repressive elitism of a philistine society and The Well-Beloved, the final recapitulation of his own career as a novelist and his farewell to fiction.

8 J. B. Bullen highlights these coincidences and offers an interesting theory in explanation: that Pater had probably discussed with Hardy what, by 1891, may have been a project to write ‘Apollo in Picardy.’ As Bullen points out there are also similarities in the diction of both works since Pater refers to ‘music made visible’ while Hardy describes the floating pollen as Angel’s notes ‘made visible’ (1986: 214–15).
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Impromptu Readings: Learning to Identify Narrators in Extracurricular Texts

Identifying a narrator can be a challenge for a first-year student of English literature if their approach to reading is plot-oriented. Contributions in this volume show that even advanced students of literature may have a hard time distinguishing between a reliable and an unreliable narrator with its changing attributions of sympathy. In many of those cases, the authors of the works studied in the undergraduate curriculum of English literature were canonical. Some students may have read them outside a classroom environment or are at least familiar with the plot. But, are students less capable of identifying a narrator if the work studied is completely alien to them? How much does previous knowledge of a work of fiction condition our pre-conceptions about narration? In order to approach these questions, and by way of an experiment, first-year students were given three passages of James Hogg’s novel *The Three Perils of Woman* to read in class.

1 Where is the Heroine?

When James Hogg’s novel *The Three Perils of Woman* was first published in 1823 it was well received by a reduced and appreciative audience, despite the fact that it soon fell into oblivion due to its difficult narrative and thought-provoking themes. It did not see the light again into a single edition until 2002, when Antony Hasler published the full original text for Edinburgh University Press. Thanks to his edition and introduction, now readers appreciate Hogg’s daring narrative technique and the novel’s juxtaposition of the comic and the horrific as he explored the relationship between fictional life and the realities of nineteenth-century Scotland.

The purpose of the exercise in the preliminary session of the first-year survey literature course was to identify the two main female characters of the novel, Gatty Bell and Cherry Elliot in both their roles as Romantic heroines and anti-heroines and as thematic and narrative literary devices. Why were they so
compelling and repelling to early Victorian audiences? Can we trace back, in our modern reading of The Three Perils of Woman, Hogg’s attitude to women as free individuals?

*The Three Perils of Woman* embraces three independent but related stories which advance not in chapters, but in circles due to Hogg’s delight in ‘always going round and round my hero, in the same way as the moon keeps moving round the sun’ (Hogg 1995:25) to focus on the light and the shadows of each character. In the first story, the two young heroines Gatty and Cherry are both in love with a Highlander named McIon. Gatty is the daughter of a well-to-do border farmer, Daniel, and Hogg begins the novel introducing her while speaking in a direct and sententious manner:

“I fear I am in love” said Gatty Bell, as she first awakened in her solitary bed in the garret room of her father’s farm-house. “And what a business I am like to have of it!” (Hogg 1995:1)

These first three lines reveal one of the most ambiguous aspects of Hogg’s text: a vagueness about his ironical or moralistic tone and intent. Is he presenting a ‘domestic Scottish tale’—as he mentions in the cover subtitle,—with a picture of genteel life and manners, or a parody of popular fiction? In 1834 Hogg claimed that ‘most contemporary novels for women were apt to poison the mind of readers by encouraging a false test which would deny the reality of life’ (Hogg 1997:47). And, in fact, if we are to read *The Three Perils of Woman* in an exclusively sober and domestic key, we become disappointed at the highly inconsistent turns of plot, digressions and inexplicable phenomena scattered around the narration. It makes much more literary sense, taking into consideration Hogg’s opinions on contemporary works for women, not to read *The Three Perils of Woman* in the expectation of finding a straightforward account of respectable heroines and heroes in an equally moral society, as so many reviewers of 1823 seemed to assume. David Groves argues that

Hogg wished us to look for complexities and ironies, and to discover the path which would lead us away from the glittering superficial “vanity” of a “transient and false view of human life” to a truer understanding of ourselves. Hogg’s notion of authentic self-understanding required a non-idealistic knowledge of modern society, together with
a profound sense of the meaning and pervasiveness of death. The ultimate purpose of *The Three Perils of Women* is to communicate to appreciative readers Hogg’s abiding notion of a deeper moral realism which was extremely unlike the superficial moralism of most respectable critics of his day. (Groves 1995:423)

Essentially, this ironic effect whose purpose is to dig into moral realism builds on characterisation, parallelisms, contrasts, and intertextuality. When Gatty, already in the first line of the novel, speaks of love and marriage in such an innocent and straightforward way, she seems to echo *Pride and Prejudice* famous beginning: ‘It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife’. Austen and Hogg’s ironies, respectively, are both subtle in their own particular ways. Hogg’s is nearly iconoclastic and comical, especially when we come to the girl’s exclamation: ‘What a business I am like to have of it?’ which she repeats at the end of the chapter. Austen criticises the conventions of marriage, and Hogg the ludicrously harmful effects of love, but the word ‘business’ attached to ‘marriage’ makes the reader smile and sets the text in the ironical mode. Many of Hogg’s contemporaries could not miss the Austen connection. All the more so when Gatty, through ‘a prey to the most romantic and uncontrollable love’, vows to honour the ‘sacred bounds of virgin decorum’ (Hogg 1995: 76). Her cousin Cherry, on the contrary, has been listening to Jane Austen’s Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, whom he echoes too in exclaiming: ‘I will always think as I feel, and express what I think… and if I should love McIon ever so well, and die for him too, what has any body to say’ (102). We could even argue that Hogg foreshadows Catherine Earnshaws’ motto ‘I am Heathcliff’, since the intensity, although not the slant, is the same as Emily’s Brontë’s character—taking into account that the Brontë sisters loved Hogg’s *Confessions*.

The first lines of *The Three Perils of Woman* are also ironic in their parallelism with a key moment of the story: Gatty’s magical awakening towards the end of the *Love* peril. At the very beginning of the book, the girl ‘awakens’ one morning with a revelation ‘in her solitary bed’ (87). Further in the story, she awakens a second time from a deep comatose state. This recurrence and dealings with death and the unconscious is a wink at sentimentalised stories for women that Hogg seems to mock. Characters seem to receive their wisdom out of sleeping lapses, although in broad daylight they may—occasionally—show signs of rationalism.
and even heroism; but the insistence on the irrational supernatural element, and the fact that most characters do not fret about it, made the magic more ludicrous to Hogg's contemporary readers. This might be a reason why *The Three Perils* offers a blurred image of a narrator: at times, it seemed too absurd to be serious; or at others too serious to be ironical.

## 2 Narrative Wonders

Whatever its iconoclastic attitude towards the totems of late eighteenth-century romantic novels (love, impetuousness, revelation, death, the unconscious), Hogg is concerned with a psychological analysis of his main female characters. A technique often found in novels by women in the nineteenth-century is the presentation of contrasting temperaments in two sisters or female relatives. Walter Scott's *Heart of Midlothian*; Susan Ferrier's *Marriage*, and Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* all conform to this model of balancing a good heroine against a bad-natured or misguided one. The story of Gatty and Cherry adapts this fictional convention, bending to Hogg's idea of two paths uniting to form a unity. Gatty tries the ascending path of spirituality with her proper attitudes, while Cherry, more impetuous and improper, chooses the lower path that leads down to the physical aspect of life. But in *The Three Perils of Woman*, Hogg begins to dismantle his dualistic notion of human nature to show that these two pathways are intertwined. They are first introduced through a dream of Cherry. Falling asleep in Gatty’s arms, she dreams that her cousin has

> Gone to a lovely place far above me, and I could not reach you, and neither would you return to me. And then I thought I saw hangings of gold and velvet, and a thousand chandeliers … And then you called out: Dear cousin Cherry, you shall never get here by that path. Do you not see that tremendous precipice before you? –“Yes, I do”, said I; “but that is a delightful flowery bank, and the path is sweet to the senses. –Nay, but when you come to that steep, the path is of glass, and you slide and fall down into an immeasurable void”. (Hogg 1995:57)

In the typical metaphoric style of women romances, Gatty is warning Cherry that love is a dangerous force: a peril. But if we read further this dream episode in the context of Hogg’s symbolism of the two journeys, we see a more subtle
Impromptu Readings: Learning to Identify Narrators in Extracurricular Texts

irony: the ‘higher’ path, the allegedly good and respectable way, will have in the end the same human meaning and destination as the lower one. As David Groves argues, ‘Gatty’s apparent superiority is an illusion, a temporary stage in a process which will bring her down to the same level as Cherry’ (Groves 1988:106), since both girls are to perish physical consequences for their expression of love. Everything that happens between the two cousins challenges the conventional notions of good and evil. Gatty tries to resist the temptation of wooing McIon, who promises to Cherry instead. Then he learns that he is heir to a Highland estate, and Gatty renews her interest in him. But it is actually an external force—the machinations of Gatty’s ambitious mother—what induces Cherry’s surrender of McIon to Gatty. The mother could be described as ‘a successful satiric picture of a hypocritical, domineering targe, snobbish and positively wicked in her dealings with Cherry, as she causes the death of her own niece to advance her snobbish designs’ (Gifford 1976:131). After the wedding, Cherry lives with Gatty and her husband, and we read that ‘McIon devotes those attentions to the maid that should be paid to the married wife’ (Hogg 1995: 92). Cherry decides to abandon the house, but she falls ill with a mysterious disease, predicts her own death and dies accordingly. Gatty has always wanted to be a good girl, to follow the dictates of morality and tradition, but she gets the prize without taking any risks. Is this, on the part of Hogg, a reward for Gatty’s model behaviour, or an irony implying that, whether you are wicked or otherwise, life will provide with love and health at random? In truth, Gatty becomes ill, too, and typically, McIon predicts that she is following her cousin to the grave. But instead of dying Gatty falls into a coma, or a ‘state of mere idiotism’ (Hogg 1995:78). According to Groves:

These events underscore the affinity between the “good” cousin and the “bad” one, with both women descending into the unconscious through their dreams, visions, fainting-fits, trances, terminal illness, or coma. By enduring this nightmarish realm, the heroines also confront the relativity of the self, of social conventions, and of morality. (Groves 1988:107)

After a three-year coma, Gatty awakens and suddenly sits on her bed when her husband enters the bedroom. ‘And at the moment McIon entered the room, so mighty was that undefined power of sympathy between his frame and the body of the deceased, that the latter started with a muscular notion so violent that it
seemed like one attempting to rise’ (Hogg 1995:199). Yet Gatty not only awakens safe and sound, but she also realises she has given birth to a baby. Obviously, critics have thought out a number of possible implications and explanations to Gatty’s magical awakening, which is loosely reproduced in the other two tales, *Leasing* and *Jealousy*, in the persons of Sally the maiden and her two suitors, although their fate is less happy. For them, death or the imminence of death is a more definitive and transcendental event, and serves to show the fragility and absurdity of life. But Gatty seems to return from the otherworld with a renewed spirit: she asserts the hard-earned lesson of human unity so that ‘to all her friends she becomes the joy, the life and the bond of unity’ (Hogg 1995: 237). Through her descent into the unconscious, Gatty learns to abandon any trace of rivalry. What were then the reasons for this journey into the unconscious, and therefore, the trigger of the girl's wisdom? Richard Jackson presents a number of exciting possibilities: demonic possession (since Gatty is awakened violently), venereal disease (since she tells Daniel that she ‘feels a disease preying on her vitals’ (Hogg 1995: 218) or galvanism, influenced by the late seventeenth-century fascination with magnetism and electronic impulses, as seen in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. McIon, Gatty’s husband and Prince Charming figure, triggers an undefined power of sympathy when he enters the room where his wife lies, and bends himself down to kiss her. Whether Hogg was hinting simultaneously at the Cinderella myth, at science, superstition or a bit of everything, the pattern remains: he strives to be ironic and serious at the same time, and to let the reader draw her own conclusions.

3 Narrative Perils

Through the analysis of the two main characters of *The Three Perils of Woman* and its main plot with its sense of horror lurking at the edges of middle-class life, readers can conclude that in some respects it is a typical woman's romance for its time. But it is also a daring experiment in the use of fictional genres, a work that begins by flattering its original audience with a happy-middle class romance but then cuts though the less idealising genres of comedy and tragedy. Even when first-year students are oblivious to the nuances of Victorian fiction, they demonstrated an ability to describe the personalities of the main female characters of *The Three Perils of Women* and to distinguish them from an
Impromptu Readings: Learning to Identify Narrators in Extracurricular Texts

omniscient narrator who was so close to a heroine that it often seemed to speak through those women. After the exercise, almost 70% of the students in class considered that ‘the study of narration was more abstract than studying the plot’, and found it ‘more difficult’ even though ‘it motivated the reading of the fiction work’. It was also a ‘strenuous’ exercise that allowed them to pay more attention to reading and, perhaps, left them wondering: are the perils of love, lying and jealously really more dangerous than those of narration?

Works Cited

The Unreliable Narrator as a First-Year Challenge: Teaching *The Remains of the Day* to a Freshmen Course

1 Introduction

This paper aims at describing and analysing the experience of teaching Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* (1989) to a group of first-year undergraduates at the Department of English and German Studies, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. This text is a required reading in a compulsory course—twentieth-century English Literature—which is an introduction to the study of different genres, and aims at stimulating students to discuss relevant twentieth-century literary works written and published in Britain.

Teaching literature to university students is a demanding endeavour, and even more so if the texts are written in a foreign language. But even leaving aside the language barrier—it is necessary to remember that our students’ levels of English can be very heterogeneous when they start the degree—there are other aspects such as cultural differences, knowledge of historical background, and the recognition and understanding of complex textual aspects that are a real challenge for both students and teacher. Ishiguro’s masterpiece confronts us not only with these contextualisation difficulties (the narrator’s age/nationality/period of time) but above all with a complex narrative voice—that of an unreliable narrator—that forces readers to ‘infer what really happened [in the story] by disentangling his [Stevens’s] evasive account’ (Davies 1998: 272).

Many of our students have deeply rooted beliefs and attitudes regarding the study of literature when they arrive at university—what Davies (1998) calls ‘black and white certainties’—that can be described/summarised into two main problems; firstly, that most of them read for the plot (or at least that is what they have been taught studying literature is about), and secondly, that they tend to identify the narrator with the actual author of the text.

Because many of us were concerned about this matter and saw how this affected the quality of our undergraduates’ literary analysis, reading and
understanding, a group of literature teachers from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona decided to apply for an MQD project—Catalan acronym for a ‘teaching innovation project’—entitled ‘Reading Between the Lines: Comprehensive Reading of Literary Texts in a Foreign Language’ that would focus on improving our students’ understanding of the function and crucial role of the narrator in the study of literature.

What follows is the description of how this was applied to the teaching of *The Remains of the Day* based on (a) the in-class activities, (b) the students’ responses to them—both in the classroom and by means of two online surveys—and (c) their essays in the final exam, which tested their ability to demonstrate why Stevens is an unreliable narrator by having them choose and comment on a passage from the book that had not been previously discussed in our sessions. This experience enabled students to benefit from group discussions that enhanced their critical skills and their ability to focus on more complex textual aspects.

### 2 Challenge and Procedure

In order for this research to be successful I thought students should be aware of their crucial role in making this MQD project work. First of all, I told them that from the moment they walked into the literature classroom, they were no longer ‘readers for the plot’ but ‘literary critics’. Secondly, I told them overtly that we were concerned about making the most of our students’ learning experience and that since this was the driving force behind our MQD we would need them to give us feedback and actively collaborate with us so that we could improve our teaching strategies and understand their learning processes better. Besides turning our students into active participants in the literature class, I wanted them to feel comfortable and confident enough to express their opinions and doubts in the classroom, as most of them have been used to attending master classes at school where the teacher *knows it all and is always right* and where student participation is often not encouraged. The fact that students realised that these series of activities were aimed both at improving their learning and our teaching, seemed to motivate them to participate more actively.
2.1 Task One: Initial Online Questionnaire

In order to proceed with this students-teacher cooperation, the first task for students was to answer an online questionnaire designed by three members of our MQD Project. The link to the questionnaire was e-mailed to them via virtual campus. The aim of this survey was to provide a general view of our students’ ideas regarding narrative and above all, the role of the narrator before starting the actual analysis of the novel.¹ This questionnaire was created using the ‘Survey Monkey’ online platform and had to be answered within a given period of time (around three-four weeks).² Here we can see two of the questions they had to answer in relation to their previous knowledge of the figure of the narrator:

Example 1: To the question ‘For you, the narrator is… (a) just another character, (b) another character but different from the rest, (c) not a character at all, or (d) something else’, most students responded that it was ‘another character’ (31.8%) and ‘something else’ (40.9%). When asked to explain this ‘something else’ category students attempted to define the figure of the narrator by saying that e.g.³ ‘s/he is in charge of the story and gives his/her point of view’ and ‘the type of narrator of a story is relevant especially because it represents the author’s point of view, somehow’.

Example 2: To the question ‘Is an omniscient narrator plausible to you?’ 31.8% answered either ‘no’ or ‘not sure’ whereas 36.4% answered ‘yes’. Those who clicked on ‘yes’ attempted to explain why they believed in an omniscient narrator and their answers were very revealing: ‘Yes, because s/he knows everything so we can see what is happening and believe it’, ‘Yes, because the author knows exactly what has happened and s/he gives the narrator his/her voice’, ‘Yes it is. Why not? I mean, if the writer wants to show us all the details of the story, he needs the omniscient narrator because its main characteristic is to know it all’.

The answers to this first questionnaire revealed one of the most usual misunderstandings among some first-year students: that the author speaks through the narrator and that narrators never lie. The challenge was, therefore,
to modify their perception of the narrator and its reliability by working with a book that is precisely concerned with the unreliability of memory and the narrative act itself.

2.2 Task Two: In-class Discussion and Close Reading: Stevens as an Unreliable Narrator

When it came to the study of the actual text, we started by looking at the leading thread of the story, which is Stevens's journey across the South-West of England. We engaged in a fruitful discussion as to whether Stevens's trip was merely a geographical matter or whether there was more to it. As most students said that the physical journey was a metaphor for something else, we made a list of its possible meanings. This list included a journey into one's past life and the journey as a tool to discuss the history of the UK and its involvement in the Second World War.

Once they had identified the two main metaphorical journeys, we started analysing the way in which Stevens narrates both of them. To do so, I emphasised their role as ‘literary critics’ and that they had look not into the plot itself (what happens)—as they had been trained to do at school—but into what the narrator does with the text and how he does it. Here we encountered some difficulties because many of them had to look at the text from an entirely different perspective from the one they were used to at school. In fact, John S. O’Connor, in his article ‘Seeking Truth in Fiction: Teaching Unreliable Narrators’, explains his bewilderment when he realises that ‘students can decipher the meaning of unreliable narrators in their everyday lives yet feel frustrated when confronted with similar narrators in literature’ (1994: 48). In order to facilitate this exercise (i.e. to start reading critically, to question the narrator, and to make them aware that narrators might very often not be reliable at all) I used an everyday experience and linked it to the issue we were analysing. I told them that each one of us is an unreliable narrator in our own way, and that, for example, when the class finished, they would all have their own perception and opinion of what had been going on in the classroom from 08:30 until 10:00. Some might tell their friends that the session was very boring, others that it was pretty interesting, and others that the first half was too slow for their taste. I emphasised the idea that all these opinions come from one’s own previous experiences, expectations, biases, likes/dislikes,
and that they have an impact on how we interpret and read a given situation in our ordinary lives. In other words, I wanted them to see that we all ‘talk ourselves into believing the stories that we want to believe’ (Parkes 2001: 19).

Having reached this point, I got my students involved into drawing a psychological portrait of Stevens—encouraging them to become what O’Connor describes as ‘the reader-as-psychologist’—so as to try and find clues in Stevens’s words and actions that revealed this mismatch between speaking and doing and his lack of reliability. I also asked them to take into account how different the story would have been if the first person narrative had been that of Miss Kenton, Lord Darlington or any other character. I also made it clear that Stevens’s emotional manipulation of events and memories extended not only to his private life but also to the narration of England’s past and more specifically, Lord Darlington’s sympathies for the Nazis. I wished them to understand how Stevens’s narrative is merely ‘a construction(s) of the past’ (Lang 1998: 211).

We used many different passages from the book (I selected two particular examples for this paper; see below) in order to discover how Stevens elaborates a self-interested narrative on emotional, professional and political levels. Very often, the process of exposing the narrator’s unreliability was done by pairing passages where Stevens showed contradictory views as the following examples demonstrate.

In example 1a we focused our attention on the apparent neutrality with which Stevens receives the news of Miss Kenton’s engagement, as opposed to the later acknowledgment of his feelings in 1b, once Miss Kenton tells him she had been deeply in love with him:

1a) “…I accepted my acquaintance’s proposal”
“I beg your pardon, Miss Kenton?”
“His proposal of marriage”
“Ah, is that so, Miss Kenton? Then may I offer you my congratulations … Now if you will excuse me, I must return upstairs”. (Ishiguro 1993: 218)

4 I also made students note that Stevens hardly ever addresses Miss Kenton by her married name (Mrs Benn).
Laura Gimeno

1b) I do not think I responded immediately, for it took me a moment or two to fully digest these words of Miss Kenton. Moreover, as you might appreciate, their implications were such as to provoke a certain degree of sorrow within me. Indeed – why should I not admit it? – at that moment, my heart was breaking. Before long, however, I turned to her and said with a smile:

“You’re very correct, Mrs Benn. As you say, it is too late to turn back the clock”. (Ishiguro 1993: 239)

The same pattern applies to examples 2a and 2b. Throughout the novel Stevens is very concerned with the idea of dignity and one of the ways in which he shows his dignity as a butler is by remaining faithful to his first boss. However, in other scenes Stevens denies having met him at all, since Lord Darlington had a reputation for being a Nazi sympathiser.

2a) “Lord Darlington wasn’t a bad man. He wasn’t a bad man at all . . . his lordship was a courageous man. He chose a certain path in life, it proved to be a misguided one, but there, he chose it, he can say that at least” (Ishiguro 1993: 243).

2b) “You mean you actually used to work for that Lord Darlington?” He was eyeing me carefully again.

“Oh no, I am employed by Mr John Farraday, the American gentleman who bought the house from the Darlington family” (Ishiguro 1993: 120, my emphasis).

2.3 Task 3: Reading Critical Reviews

Having discussed several passages of the text, I gave students two short articles—one written by Salman Rushdie and published in his Imaginary Homelands (1992) and the other from David Lodge’s The Art of Fiction (1992). I divided the class into two groups whose members had to read one of the two articles which had been posted on their virtual classroom. In the following session, students shared the main ideas presented in these articles and chose the passages that best explained the techniques used by Ishiguro in the novel or that they considered were more helpful to understand the concept of the unreliable narrator. The sentences that students quoted more often were:
The Unreliable Narrator as a First-Year Challenge

‘The point of using an unreliable narrator is indeed to reveal in an interesting way the gap between appearance and reality, and to show how human beings distort or conceal the latter’ (Lodge 1992: 155).

‘His narrative is a kind of confession, but it is riddled with devious self-justification’ (Lodge 155).

‘The real story here is that of a man destroyed by the ideas upon which he has built his life’ (Rushdie 1992: 245).

‘... he long ago drove Miss Kenton away, into the arms of another man. ‘Why, why, why do you always have to pretend’? She asked in despair. His greatness is revealed as a mask, a cowardice, a lie’ (Rushdie 245)

The quotations they chose matched the elements described in class and strengthened their view that Stevens's voice was misleading and manipulative. At the same time, using these articles by Lodge and Rushdie helped students in two other ways: firstly, it enabled them to read about formal elements of narration and discuss them in class, and secondly, it acquainted them with secondary sources and critical reviews, i.e. professional writing about writing.

2.4 Task Four: Writing the Exam

In their final exam, students were asked (1) to choose a passage from the book that had not been previously discussed in class, and (2) to answer the question: ‘How does this passage demonstrate that Stevens is an unreliable narrator?’ Results were positive (45 students passed the test and 15 failed) and as some of their answers revealed (see examples below) many were able to explain in their own words what an unreliable narrator was. Besides, they could identify and choose particular fragments from the novel where this formal characteristic was especially remarkable:

Example 1: ‘Stevens filters his words in order to disguise and repress his ideas and justify Lord Darlington's actions (and also his) both to the readers and himself (...) He qualifies Lord Darlington's ideas using words such as “odd”, “misguided”, “foolish”, “unattractive”, which disguise his real opinion about him. As a matter of fact, we know that the butler was aware of his employer's bad reputation, as the fact that he denied having worked for him shows’ (my emphasis)
Laura Gimeno

Example 2: ‘Stevens is not only hiding the “truth” to his readers but also to himself. This is important to understand the novel. As we see in his travels, the butler remembers all these past days as glorious days, but in an implicit way he also seems to regret his attitude towards the events of his life’.

Example 3: ‘Although he might seem trustworthy to me, we cannot know if that happened exactly as he explains it; maybe the scene with both of them side by side, with the light of the sunset illuminating them, and the bedroom window from which they were looking at his father is a little romanticised’.

Example 4: ‘The narrator tries to hide his feelings the first time he says her name: he uses her maiden name, not her married name. It is a clever way to show us that he, unconsciously, does not want her to be married’ (my emphasis).

Among those students who did not pass the exam, the major problems were either related to their level of English or to difficulties in distinguishing narrator from author, which seems to suggest that we should continue insisting on the importance of teaching undergraduates how to identify different types of narrative voices. It also shows that the MQD’s focus on the narrator had been identified correctly, that is to say, that most of our students really need(ed) to understand the concept of unreliability in narration.

2.5 Task Five: Last Online Questionnaire

After the exam, I requested students to answer a final questionnaire on the ‘Survey Monkey’ platform. The questions were not aimed at having our students define concepts but rather at assessing their understanding of unreliability in narration. Again I selected and provided two examples with the explanations that some of them gave:

Example 1: LQ2. When the class focus was on aspects concerning narration, did you find this issue to be less relevant than other concerns (such as plot or character?)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘No, because you can find relations with facts of our environment and it’s more interesting. Furthermore you have to look beyond plot and characters, this is the real reason behind narratives. The plot doesn’t say anything by itself if you don’t build relations’.

‘Because of the novel we read (The Remains of the Day), we must focus more on narration than other concerns’.

‘In fact, the purpose of this particular novel has to do with the role of the narrator (according to what we talked about in class), so it was absolutely necessary to focus on this’.

Example 2: LQ5. Was the study of the text more interesting to you through focussing on narrative issues?

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<td>Yes</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
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‘Focusing on the narrator definitely requires more effort than, for example, focusing on the plot, the historical context, etc (probably because it was a new thing to me)’

‘I really liked the way we analysed the book’

‘After the first reading of the novel I did not see much of what we analysed in class, so it was good to focus on the narrator (which is the main element in the novel)’

‘The study of the text and narrative issues were the two very interesting but I’d like to spend more time in narrative than we do’.

3 Final Remarks

Students responded well to this student-teacher cooperation project. My main objectives had been to encourage them to reflect (1) on their learning processes, (2) on the complexity of narrative voice, and (3) to leave aside old ways or secondary school ways to approaching literature. From their questionnaires, exams and in-class discussions it seems the experience was very positive on the whole. In that sense, my aim is to continue with this sort of activities not only in first-year courses but also in other more advanced courses in order to improve our
students' critical thinking, literary awareness, and to help them confront texts with more confidence.

Works Cited


Appendix A
Initial Questionnaire

1. Beyond language comprehension, what is the first aspect of a work that you generally concern yourself with?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plot</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characterisation</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Stylistics</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources and influences</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (please specify)</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Have you previously confused the distinction between author and narrator?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>86.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
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3. For you the narrator is:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Just another character</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another character but different from the rest</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a character at all</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something else (please specify)</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4. Is an omniscient narrator plausible to you?

<table>
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<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
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</table>

5. Do you feel that you can “trust” a third-person narrator more than a first-person narrator?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
6. What do you understand by the expression “unreliable narrator”?

   A narrator who never directly identifies him/herself to the reader 36.4%
   A narrator who insists on speaking directly to the reader 9.1%
   A narrator who is actually part of the story 31.8%
   Something else (please specify) 27.3%

7. Has a focus on the narrator/narrative voice made your study of the text(s) more engaging?

   Yes 63.6%
   No 4.5%
   Not sure 31.8%

8. Does your awareness of the often complex nature and function of the narrator make you think more about other aspects of the text(s) you are studying?

   Yes 77.3%
   No 13.6%
   Not sure 9.1%

9. Would you say that, for you, a focus on the narrator/narrative voice has been an innovative way of approaching the texts?

   Yes 59.1%
   No 22.7%
   Not sure 18.2%
Appendix B
Final Questionnaire

1. When the class focus was on aspects concerning narration, did you find this issue difficult?
   - Yes 18.8%
   - No 81.3%
   - Not sure 0.0%

2. When the class focus was on aspects concerning narration, did this motivate your study of the text?
   - Yes 68.8%
   - No 0.0%
   - Not sure 31.3%

3. When the class focus was on aspects concerning narration, did you find this issue to be less relevant than other concerns (such as plot or character)?
   - Yes 0.0%
   - No 68.8%
   - Not sure 31.3%

4. Do you think that a focus on narrative issues is more abstract than the study of other aspects of a text such as social, political or gender-related concerns?
   - Yes 31.3%
   - No 37.5%
   - Not sure 31.3%

5. Was the study of the text more interesting to you through focusing on narrative issues?
   - Yes 87.5%
   - No 6.3%
   - Not sure 6.3%
‘Design! Nonsense, how can you talk so!’
A Practical Approach to Teaching Austen’s
*Pride and Prejudice*

Understanding the ways in which *Pride and Prejudice* constructs an intricate web of narrative traps into which the reader unwittingly tumbles time and again and, above all, perceiving how Austen’s narrator systematically aligns readers’ sympathies with Elizabeth, and with her pride and prejudices (which become our own), is a useful and instructive approach to teaching this work. It remits us, necessarily, to the novel’s very first paragraphs—where this web of confusion begins—as a means of helping students to see that apparently incidental information is, in fact, absolutely central to the narrator’s ulterior motives.

This discussion considers how a literary text is used in class, referring particularly to the teacher’s practical strategies in exploiting the text and to the ways that this helps elicit a deeper response and fuller understanding of the text’s engagement with its readers. Specifically, the discussion focuses on means of aiding degree-level literature students (most especially those in the first and second year of their studies) to perceive and appreciate the manner in which a literary narrator has a fundamental, instrumental role in adjudicating reader response. The broader objective in perceiving this is that it improves the purposefulness of students’ reading, allowing them to develop more perceptive appreciation of a given text—and, by extension, of texts in general—and of its particular literary effect. By focussing their attention on narrative strategy, students gain a deeper awareness of a fundamental means through which texts *create* certain responses, and are encouraged to consider the consequences of such responses on the reader and on the reader’s reaction to the work as a whole. This in turn provides students with an additional perspective for assessing literature, helps in countering the common over-dependency on discussing plot that often characterises undergraduate response to literature and facilitates their function as *professional readers*, capable of participating far more effectively in the advanced assessment and appreciation of literature than their degree study is calling for.
The underlying premise of this discussion—already alluded to—is that many students at this early point in their degrees are not adequately equipped to read or discuss literature at anything other than the purely superficial level of plot development, and this inadequacy, consequently, may then be passed on to the reading and study of literary texts by more advanced students at a later stage. Indeed, when students are first asked to consider the idea of a deeper narrative strategy or *design* in a text, their reaction is not infrequently one of suspicion or incredulity, a response that mirrors Mrs Bennet’s outburst against her husband in the opening chapter of *Pride and Prejudice*: ‘Design! Nonsense, how can you talk so!’, they appear to be thinking (if their faces are anything to go by), as if any narrative was ever a straightforward and transparent recounting of events, essentially unmodified by the teller, largely free of all wish to paint things darker or lighter, as the case may be.

As teachers of literature, it is essential that we help our students—at as early a stage in their study as possible—to learn alternative means of approaching and discussing texts that reveal a far fuller, far more complex picture. This picture is one that not only allows for but actually actively requires the reader’s direct, critical and inquisitive engagement. Obviously, such alternative means are fundamental for the students’ particular ambit of study in that they facilitate access to the deeper critical discussion of writing that they will encounter and need to comprehend in critical bibliography; but they are also significant in forming part of the broader aims of an education in the humanities, providing in effect a sort of *scaffolding* with which other aspects of the students’ education can be constructed. This may appear to be a ‘flippant and hackneyed idea’ (Sell 2012: 32), yet if we believe that better reading serves a deeper social purpose, if we give credence to the notion that a healthy society—one that is less susceptible to the manipulations of contemporary propaganda in all its forms and that is able to face its problems in open and intelligent debate—then providing students with the means of becoming better readers is undoubtedly of considerable value. But first, back to the classroom...

In this discussion, I will basically provide a commented description of how I use a literary text (the opening chapter of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*) to consider the various ways in which a narrator orchestrates the likely reactions of the reader, for what purposes and with what consequences.
In general, this is a text that I teach with second-year undergraduates taking a course in Nineteenth Century Literary Genres or The Literature of British Romanticism. Within the organisation of our degree, students take a survey course of major twentieth-century literary works in their first year. Although this survey course has a fairly ambitious range of objectives, it is perhaps inevitable that its primary role is to accustom students to reading literary texts in a language other than their own. The upshot of this, of course, is a heavy emphasis on understanding plot. In their second year, however, students begin to work more comprehensibly on ways of reading and responding to texts that are based far less on the simple reaction to how a story develops. Notwithstanding this, class discussion of *Pride and Prejudice* still tends—in my experience of students at this level—to revolve almost wholly around story-line issues. This may be a consequence of the novel itself, which has become something of a cultural icon, the *love interest* of which is the object of intense debate on countless blogs and forums. In this sense, it is almost inevitable that some recounting of what Lizzy Bennet goes through should form the basis of an initial response to the work. Indeed, since it is so frequently the case that students appear to have an almost visceral connection with certain aspects of the text, it seems to me perverse not to make fullest use of this in class. So I begin by ensuring that students have (re-)read the novel before the first session on the text, and then—taking advantage of students' usual enthusiasm for the story—spend this session reviewing its various aspects, enquiring into their views on questions such as Lydia's flightiness, Lady Catherine's appalling snobbery, the gratingly cheesy Mr Collins and whether Charlotte Lucas can be saved at all from the heinous crime of being passionless and calculating. This helps to bring in a number of students who may, up to this point, have shown some reticence to participate in class discussion, and it is a useful enough opportunity to cement the structure of the plot in everyone's mind. But it is also an *Austenesque* approach in the sense that it tricks participants into a false sense of security: what may appear to be a rather lightweight discussion of the novel's story is actually a means both of determining and encouraging the nature of students' *first impressions*;¹ for it is with these initial ideas that Austen's narrator will play. In all events, it is essential to the broader purpose of this particular teaching approach that students have an acceptable knowledge

¹ This was the title that Austen gave to her first working draft of the novel as early as 1797.
of the overall framework of the novel, and have been given an opportunity to review and discuss their responses to it.

Following this, the class then carries out a close reading of Chapter 1. By which I mean that—as a group—we review the entire text of this chapter. (It is sobering to recall that this extraordinary piece of writing can be read aloud in little more than a couple of minutes and that, textually speaking, it consists of fewer than 1,000 words.) Students' reaction to the first chapter confirms a fairly immediate positive connection with Mr Bennet, an equally immediate but negative connection with Mrs Bennet and less defined but essentially rather positive feelings about Lizzy.

For instance, the insistent harrying by Mrs. Bennet of her husband is something that inevitably provokes a sense of irritation in readers, for the harrying in itself (which strongly suggests a nagging, irritable personality) and for the shamelessly acquisitive character of its apparent intent:

‘Is he married or single?’ [enquires Mr. Bennet of the new neighbour] ‘Oh! single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!’ ‘How so? how can it affect them?’ ‘My dear Mr. Bennet’, replied his wife, ‘how can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them.’ ‘Is that his design in settling here?’ ‘Design! nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that he may fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him as soon as he comes’ (Austen 2003: 5–6).

This sense of reader irritation is counterposed (and therefore increased) by the approbation felt for Mr Bennet, who parries his wife's insistent verbal sniping through a series of sanguine and witty responses that at once establish him in our eyes as anything but the petty money minder that his wife would appear to be and, additionally, possessed of an agreeable—if slightly wicked—sense of humour that we warm to and, crucially, identify with:

‘Mr. Bennet [asks the exasperated Mrs. B.], how can you abuse your own children in such a way? You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves.’ ‘You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least’ (Austen 2003: 7).
In short, we find very swiftly in our brief acquaintance with this family group that Mrs Bennet is someone we do not much take to (and underlying indications of her own vanity such as ‘I certainly have had my share of beauty’ (Austen 2003: 6) do little to change this), whereas her husband elicits far more favourable feelings from us. Indeed, these feelings extend somewhat to Lizzy, although she plays no direct part in the chapter other than—again, crucially—being the object of her father’s well-humoured review of his daughters’ qualities. ‘I must throw in a good word for my little Lizzy’, he says, teasing his wife with the promise of a letter to the much-desired new neighbour, adding that: ‘They have none of them much to recommend them; they are all silly and ignorant like other girls; but Lizzy has something more of quickness than her sisters’ (Austen 2003: 6–7).

And so, at this earliest of points in the story and within the space of a couple of pages, we have some fairly clear ideas about these people. We might even say that, in feeling markedly indisposed towards Mrs Bennet, we have a pleasing sense of our own superiority to her small-mindedness; in enjoying the wit and suavity of our new companion, Mr Bennet, we have an equally pleasing sense of having aligned ourselves with his taste and insight, and are—perhaps if only unconsciously—well-disposed towards the chosen daughter, about whom the rest of this novel may or may not be concerned.

The question, though, is where this alignment comes from. Why exactly have such responses been brought about and, more critically still, how? These are the issues that I now ask my students to consider more fully. In doing so, in very short shrift, we discover that we are mere creatures, mere puppets so to speak, in the highly competent hands of Austen’s overseeing narrator.

By taking a step back from our visceral involvement in the text as ‘plot-only’ readers, we begin to perceive—(quid miraculum)—that the narrator arranges her (or his) material in a stylistically calculated manner. Of course we feel uncomfortable with Mrs Bennet’s unending tirade, money-minded, insistent and distasteful as it is. And of course we identify ourselves more closely with any voice that opposes such a provincial approach to life’s Big Questions, more especially if such a voice is that of the congenial Mr Bennet, whose fine sense of irony points not only to a more sophisticated understanding of things but also to his rather long-suffering experience of his wife’s immensely inferior view on the ways of the world. Naturally, if we feel so well-disposed towards this man, surely it goes without saying that his own personal preferences will be given a
privileged hearing by us, the readers. And so it is. It is enough that he should nominate Lizzy as his favourite for us to take her to our hearts as such. What is more, Mrs Bennet's instant dissension with her husband's preference cements our approval of Lizzy, without her having to utter even a single syllable in her own defence: 'Lizzy is not a bit better than the others; and I am sure she is not half so handsome as Jane, nor half so good humoured as Lydia' (Austen 2003: 6). Jane and Lydia may indeed have causes that recommend them to our judgement (and these will be issues that the novel considers in great detail), but our initial vote goes most emphatically to Mr Bennet's choice: how else could it possibly be?

How else indeed, for a first-time reader? Except that the students taking this course are not first-time readers. Not only have they read the novel at least once, but they have also been directly and explicitly engaged in discussing their initial reactions to the novel, precisely as first-time readers (a category to which they have thus now ceased to pertain), and, most recently, have been involved in specific responses to the novel's opening chapter. Their current position as professional readers is therefore notably distinct, and brings in its wake a series of consequences.

The first of these is to recognise that the narrator is very definitely playing a game with us. To begin with, our positive responses to Mr Bennet have been created at the expense of our decidedly negative responses to his wife. And those responses could hardly have been anything other than negative, given the specific nature of their content and the abrasive, pushy character of their delivery. A form of delivery that, incidentally, quite diverts us from the wholly defensible concerns of its content. Conversely, of course, our positive reactions to the seemingly benign and urbane Mr Bennet have been configured directly in light of our response to his wife. Indeed, how could it have been otherwise? Not only this; since we feel indisposed towards Mrs B. yet more than generously incline towards her husband, how could we possibly feel negative towards Lizzy, since Mr Bennet so obviously favours her and this favouring is so obviously anathema to his wife?

So far so good, but how exactly have we arrived at this point? Not by intuition, nor even by insinuation. We reach this point exclusively as a consequence of the narrator's manipulation of our reactions. It is Austen's narrator who has ill-disposed us towards Mrs Bennet; it is the same narrator who has elicited our kindly feelings towards her husband. And since we like him, whatever he likes
'Design! Nonsense, how can you talk so!'

(read: Lizzy, who we like even more when we see that this paternal preference irks Mrs B.) must ipso facto be agreeable to us, and whatever appears to oppose his sense of discretion and taste must, by extension, be disagreeable to us, his new admirers.

Now, a first-time reader can be forgiven for all of this. But not a reader who has been through the story before. For when we read the first chapter after having read (and, one hopes, re-read) the novel, when we know what happens and why, we are in a substantially different condition in our relationship with the text. This condition, as knowledgeable readers, brings us into direct contact with the difficult but unavoidable fact that we have got things terribly, unpardonably wrong. At this point, asking students to reflect on their understanding of this condition of knowledge obliges them to see that they are now, in effect, interacting with the text and responding to its narrative strategy in a manner that is far more critically aware; that is, they are not simply functioning as plot-only readers but now also perceive the deeper narrative currents that shape this plot, and are therefore in a position to (begin to) critically appreciate some of the ways in which the novel constructs its central trap of misunderstanding and prejudgement.

It is true that Mrs Bennet’s unremitting rapacity—for so it seems—is irksome to us all; yet she was quite right, was being quite rational and was acting in a most responsible way, if indecorously, in concerning herself so unceasingly with her daughters’ financial outcomes. The ice on which these women are skating—the very real chance of a long and uncertain future without the economic input provided by Mr Bennet—is dangerously thin indeed. And yes of course: who would not prefer the conversational diversions that the ever-amusing Mr B. provides if we compare these to the verbal inanities of his mono-thematic spouse? But what about his paternal obligations? His ripostes and sallies amuse us all, but they also symbolise and quite literally embody his systematic evasion of all action aimed at securing some sort of acceptable financial stability for his family, probably all of whom will outlive him. In such event, no longer the rightful tenants of their home, and now living only on the small annual income provided for each of them, their prospects would be miserable indeed.

To say nothing of the obvious fact that Mrs Bennet’s ambitions for her daughters do to no small extent actually come true, and very emphatically so.
Lizzy, half way through the story and forced to look more closely at her first impressions of Darcy and Wickham, coming to the momentous realisation that she had misunderstood everything, had misread all the signs and had misinterpreted all the indications she had been receiving, utters the—for her—life-changing reflection: ‘Till this moment, I never knew myself’ (Austen 2013: 202) and the entire narrative machinery of the novel then revolves upon itself, setting in motion a new chain of events that will eventually lead to the happy denouement. In much the same way, students who have reviewed the opening chapter through the prism of greater narrative awareness are also forced to come to the realisation that they too have misunderstood, misread and misinterpreted. We have thought ourselves above the vulgar materialism of Mrs Bennet, we have congratulated ourselves on preferring the fine irony of her affable husband and we have readily allowed ourselves to be well-disposed towards his favourite. In all of this, we have—as readers—confidently felt ourselves to be in the know, aware of the broader issues being presented in the story and certain that our position with respect to them was flawless. But we were wrong. In every case, the narrator has tricked us into opinions (of ourselves and others) that have been detrimental to a deeper, more informed understanding of how things really are. We were led into being complacent with our discernment; we were led into erroneous first impressions. We have, in short, been guilty of pride and prejudice.

It is common to hear that the opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* encapsulates the concerns (money and marriage), the tone (irony) and the genre (romantic comedy) of the rest of the work; this is so, but it is also true that the first chapter develops this previsionary approach by not only telling us what the novel will be about, but also by actually making us experience at first hand its two presiding substantives. For (re-)readers of the novel, this is a useful lesson; but for students, it is indispensable. Greater awareness of narrative manipulation—this game played between the text and the reader—means understanding exactly what narrators are really up to. It shows us that, under the surface of the storyline, events and characters are arranged in highly specific ways for highly specific purposes, all of which have consequences on our appreciation of the work.

By taking students through this opening chapter and by taking a close look at what is happening under that storyline surface, we can give them practical guidance in how to approach the study of literature at a more critically informed
level, how to consider the aesthetic means by which writers attempt to create some of their stylistic effects and how to enter into the discussion of literary appreciation in a more textually sensitive manner. If, at the outset of such a discussion, our students may have thought that narrative design was nonsense, we hope that classroom approaches such as this will empower them to believe in their ability to engage more productively with the works they are studying, so that they can say, satisfied with their new-found understanding of how fiction works, that ‘till this moment, they never knew themselves’.

Works Cited

The Dialogic Narrative: A Teaching Strategy to Appropriate James’ *Daisy Miller* in the Non-Native American Literature Classroom

One of the dilemmas facing teachers of literatures in English who have to instruct in a non-native environment is to find a balance between reading strategies and stylistic analysis (Short and Candlin 1986), whereby the literal understanding of the text fuses with a critical literary interpretation. This necessity to delineate this interpretive balance is further enhanced when the text under study belongs specifically to a course on American literature, in which one of the stated objectives is to transmit to students the unique American flavour that moulds the works that configure the syllabus.

It is in view of this combination of literalness and literariness that I approach the teaching of Henry James’ *Daisy Miller*, one of the core texts in the subject *Literatura nordamericana moderna*. Taking into account that, on the one hand, my students—third-year students of English—are already familiar with basic critical text analysis methodology and, on the other, are acquainted with nineteenth-century American literature, I attempt to provide a teaching strategy which will allow me to introduce Bakhtin’s dialogism to the analysis of *Daisy Miller*. It is my argument that Bakhtin’s critical work offers a fruitful ground where the narrative game and its variegated relational forms—the set of relationships that textually bound narrator, characters, reader, author and environment—open up possibilities for students to appropriate a seemingly foreign text and turn it into accessible interpretive material.

1 Bakhtin’s Theory of Novelistic Discourse and the Literature Classroom

Bakhtin’s theory of novelistic discourse stems from his inveterate belief in the social character of language (Bakhtin 1981). In clear opposition to the structuralist tendency that viewed language as eminently an abstract entity that stood above the nuances of social reality, Bakhtin, whose work developed mainly in the decade...
Esther Pujolràs

following the Russian revolution of 1917 and the thirties, deprives language of its abstractness and impregnates it with an actuality that allows him to coin the now emblematic terms ‘heteroglossia’ and ‘dialogism’. Heteroglossia captures the diversity of socially specific discourses that range from ‘social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups’ (Bakhtin 1981: 262) to ‘tendentious languages, the languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour’ (Bakhtin 1981: 262) for, according to Bakhtin ‘each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases’ (263). These multivariate linguistic utterances are dialogised, that is to say, they are orchestrated in the textual space that constitutes the novel by the author whose voice—not his consciousness—is ideally lost amid this linguistic miasma. Temporal boundaries are blurred within the specificity of a novelistic text since utterances are as much synchronic as diachronic. In Bakhtin’s own words:

[I]anguage is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. These “languages” of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying “languages.” All languages . . . whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values. [A]s such they encounter one another and co-exist in the consciousness of people who write novels. (Bakhtin 1981: 291–92)

Permeating Bakhtin’s genealogic treatise on novelistic discourse, there is yet another term, ‘chronotope’, which encompasses the indissoluble unity of space

1 The work of Mikhail Bakhtin was almost lost amid the social upheavals of Stalinist Russia. It is thanks to the conscientious compiling task of Michael Holquist that Bakhtin has emerged as one of the leading thinkers of the twentieth century. The references to Bakhtin’s theoretical work used in this article are all from Holquist’s 1981 edition which bears the title, The Dialogic Imagination and which comprises four essays: ‘Epic and Novel’, ‘From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse’, ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel’, ‘Discourse in the Novel’.

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and time and which, as he demonstrates, emerges as the crucial component in the construction of the narrative, infusing the text with meaning. Not only does the chronotope wield space and time into a single unity, but it also determines the artistic unity of the literary work in its relationship with reality. This chronotopic value—this spatial/temporal cohesion—grants artistic thought its emotional uniqueness, hence distancing it from abstract thought.

In literature and art itself, temporal and spatial determinations are inseparable from one another, and always colored by emotions and values. Abstract thought can, of course, think time and space as separate entities and conceive them as things apart from the emotions and values that attach to them. But living artistic perception (which also of course involves thought, but not abstract thought) makes no such divisions and permits no such segmentation. (Bakhtin 1981: 243)

If we translate Bakhtinian thought into the idiosyncrasies of our specific literature classroom (Literatura nordamericana moderna), we are left with the following picture: third-year non-American students of English ranging from 20 to 26 years of age who are expected to comprehend the intricacies of the world depicted in *Daisy Miller*, which temporally takes them back to the end of the nineteenth century—*Daisy Miller* was published in 1878—and spatially to an *Americanised* Europe, inhabited by upper-class characters whose experiences differ profoundly from their mostly middle-class and working-class background. If, as Bakhtin states ‘the word in language is half someone else's and it only becomes ‘one's own’ when ‘the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent’, in other words, when the speaker ‘appropriates’ it, ‘adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention’, the question that follows is how our students can appropriate Henry James’ *Daisy Miller*. This is contingent upon the capacity of our students to liberate themselves from the constraining beliefs that (1) the narrator’s voice is the ultimate authority and (2) that the narrator’s voice blends with that of the author. This is the moment when *Daisy Miller* becomes a narrative and pedagogical challenge.

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2 According to Bakhtin, it is the chronotope, the union of space and time that makes it possible for the epoch depicted in the novel to become ‘not only graphically visible [space], but narratively visible [time].’ (Bakhtin 1981: 247).
2 *Daisy Miller* as a Narrative and Pedagogical Challenge

In ‘The Art of Fiction’ James states that ‘the only reason for the existence of the novel is that it does attempt to represent life’ and, as a consequence, the quintessential Jamesian narrator is *primordially* an observer who, instead of informing the reader about the thoughts of the characters, remains somewhat distant by *merely* relating events in the story inasmuch as his observant qualities permit him to do so. Naturally, this Jamesian murder of omniscience, that is to say, the recognition of the narrator’s inability to be everywhere does not erase the fact that characters have thoughts and that these thoughts must be transmitted to the reader. In short, what changes is the narrative device and, in our specific case, this limiting of the powers of the narrator results in a narrative voice, an ‘I’ that relinquishes its alleged omniscience by having the heroine, Daisy, described entirely through the eyes of one of the characters, the male protagonist, Mr. Winterbourne. The ‘I’ does not abandon the narrative, but rather, its function is—through mediated observance—to fill up the gaps of Mr. Winterbourne’s restraining representation of life. Curiously enough, the full title of the novella is *Daisy Miller: A Study in Two Parts*, which leaves the reader wondering whose study it is—Daisy’s? Winterbourne’s? This—to acknowledge these different narrative layers—I contend, is essential to move from the initial responses of students to the novel and its characters to a more professional interpretation of the novel.

The students’ first reactions to the reading almost unanimously point out a condemnation of Daisy, labelling her as ‘frivolous, stupid, stubborn, weak, a flirt’ which complements the almost unanimous praise of Mr. Winterbourne who they picture in their minds as ‘the perfect gentleman’, nice and handsome, who tries desperately to help Daisy, by giving her good advice but, unfortunately, Daisy, stupid girl, does not listen to him and, instead, roams the streets in the company of unreliable foreign—Italian—men. When confronted with Daisy's...
untimely death, students' reactions range from those who feel pity for her and are enraged with this unhappy ending to those more righteous ones who believe that, in a way, she deserves it. I must confess here that Daisy's condemnation together with Mr. Winterbourne's salvation deeply annoyed me and that this irritation was only appeased by comments from other students' whose attitude was more favourable towards Daisy allotting to her adjectives like 'modern', 'independent', 'rebellious', and even 'ambiguous'. The source of my vexation was also that I sensed that my students' responses were the outcome of a somehow conservative, traditional perspective nurtured by a deeply rooted patriarchal discourse that tends to condemn women too easily and praise men too lightly. And henceforth, the challenge was served.

My challenge then consisted in the following: (1) to disclose the 'unknowability' (Weisbuch 1993: 759) surrounding Daisy and to debunk the equation that links innocence with stupidity; (2) to prove the failed heroism of Mr. Winterbourne; (3) to sensitise students towards the new American elite, namely, the Americans that travelled to Europe to cultivate themselves. This new elite gave rise to a new breed of Americans, the self-exiled, that is to say, the ones who decide to stay in Europe. Winterbourne falls into this category and so does the author himself, Henry James, for that matter. My claim is that focusing on the narrator’s role and hence revealing how Daisy is basically constructed through Winterbourne's eyes will unfold the three previously stated objectives. Winterbourne is ironically deprived of a narrative voice, but his vision prevails throughout the text. Daisy's demise is none other than the clash of class—her Americanness does not match that of the European-cultivated new American breed; she is plainly considered a nouveau riche—and gender—she inhabits spaces so far forbidden to women—, in other words, she is different and the failure to grasp and understand this difference is due to Winterbourne's limited range of vision.

3 The Teaching Procedure

I knew what I wanted to do, but I needed to devise how to do it. I refrained myself from immediately plunging into a Bakhtinian approach to the analysis of Daisy Miller. I felt some kind of middle way was necessary and this middle way I found in a short story by Edith Wharton entitled 'Roman Fever'. Therefore, 'Roman Fever' provided me with the textual ground where Bakhtin's narrative
The reason I chose to introduce *Daisy Miller* via Edith Wharton’s short story, ‘Roman Fever’ is twofold: on the one hand, I wanted to sensitise students towards the world depicted in *Daisy Miller* before actually analysing James’ novella and Wharton’s story works splendidly in this respect; and, on the other, I was determined to introduce students to Bakhtinian theory and this short story, as I pointed out, bends easily to a chronotopic analysis and, in a very similar manner to that conceived by James, Wharton confines the omniscience of the narrator to the eyes of the two ladies. Besides ‘Roman Fever’ is the fatal illness that assails Daisy and results in her death. The story of these two elderly American ladies whose accidental meeting at the Colosseum triggers off a confession of love and betrayal blends the present with the past, with the Colosseum at the background as sole witness to a battle whose gladiators are none other than the two ladies, the outspoken Mrs. Slade and the demure Mrs. Ansley, who throws the last blow when revealing her encounter with Mrs. Slade’s husband at the Colosseum back to the time when they were young girls. Thus, this story introduces the Colosseum as the place where young lovers meet at night and where young girls—and young girls only—run the risk of contracting Roman Fever. ‘Roman Fever’ was literally the illness known as malaria. It was believed that something in the air was responsible for contracting the illness and that it was specifically contracted at night, so venturing out at night was considered extremely dangerous. Interestingly enough, as seen in ‘Roman Fever’, this illness was curiously contracted by young females only, therefore instilling the illness with a gender-bounded character. Also, and taking into account who and what these two American ladies represent, it makes one think about the singular Europeanness of the illness—apparently, this was an illness contracted by American young girls in Europe, and more specifically—in Rome at the Colosseum. The literary meaning dutifully unfolded, I could grant that Edith Wharton’s ‘Roman Fever’ prepared my students for their encounter with *Daisy Miller: A Study in Two Parts*.

Students were now theoretically equipped with Bakhtinian thought and presumably acquainted with the world of *Daisy Miller* and I wanted to check

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6 ‘Roman Fever’ was first published in 1934 in the literary magazine, *Liberty*. Later on it became part of the collection of short stories which, under the title *The World Over*, was published in 1936.
whether in their readings they already applied the critical strategy utilised in the analysis of Wharton’s ‘Roman Fever’, and so they were given a questionnaire which I called ‘Reading Response Journal’ and whose objective was simply to know how they reacted to a first reading of the novella (annex 1). None of the analytical aspects that came up in our class session on Wharton’s ‘Roman Fever’ appeared. Theirs was still, on the whole, a very unfledged approach to the story which evinced their naïve perspective on the narrative game and the role of the narrator. I cannot say that their responses came as a surprise. I have realised that there is a tendency among students to ascribe critical frameworks which are valid for various texts, to certain texts only, those dealt with in class. What this means in this case is that students thought, at this stage, that Bakhtinian theory was valid for ‘Roman Fever’ and no other text. The two class sessions were devised so as to prove the contrary. The objectives of the first session were thus established: *Introduction to main characters and identification of chronotopes; the omniscient narrator*. Once the Bakhtinian chronotope was recovered by the teacher, students were able to identify it in the cities of Vevey (Part I) and Rome (Part II), and to limit the omniscience of the narrator to the eyes of Winterbourne. The path was carved to set the objective of the following session, namely to prove how the failure of romance was actually a failure of manhood, how Winterbourne cannot—and ends up not wanting to—understand this other new American breed to which people like Daisy belong: nouveau riche. Actually, these American nouveau riche happen to be not so new since they constantly remind the others—the cultivated Americans—that they once had also been nouveau riche. Henceforth, after this second session, Winterbourne tumbled down from his gentlemanly pedestal and Daisy’s ‘unknowability’ and her felt ‘cleverness’ was acknowledged. Daisy’s thoughts are denied to readers, who she is remains a mystery since the one in charge to reveal it—Winterbourne—fails to do so. Students started to appropriate the text, to discern the classist and gender-

7 One of the scenes that most powerfully captures the powerlessness of Daisy before Winterbourne takes place at the end of Part II. Daisy is at the Colosseum in the company of the Italian, Mr. Giovanelli, and upon perceiving Winterbourne’s presence and knowing that Winterbourne was within earshot, she launches the following words ‘Well, he looks at us as one of the old lions or tigers may have looked at the Christian martyrs!’ (Daisy Miller 277). Winterbourne cannot be labeled as the sole perpetrator of Daisy’s final demise—her death because of the contraction of Roman Fever presumably that night at the Colosseum—but his attitude, which in the end is accommodated to the attitude of the people of his social class, surely spurs Daisy’s vulnerability.
biased position exuded by the society formed by those self-exiled Americans, to perceive the limits of the narrative voice whose omniscience deliberately yields to the eyes of Winterbourne. A second questionnaire which I called ‘Reading Response Journal 2’ (Annex 2), confirmed my theory:

‘I didn’t realise how clever Daisy Miller was in reality’

‘my views on Daisy and Winterbourne have changed after having understood who the narrative voice in the novella is’

‘At first I thought Daisy was a fool and Mr. Winterbourne was the hero who came to rescue her from her foolishness. But with the in-depth analysis I realised that Mr. Winterbourne is not the brave hero we all picture in our minds when talking about heroes in literature, and now I also see that Daisy had reasons for behaving the way she did, she was not crazy or stupid at all’

At this phase of the analysis of the text, I wanted to instil in them an ‘intertextuality’ instinct which would enable them to detect similarities among this text and other texts they had read in previous literature courses. To establish a textual network, that is to say, to ascertain traces of other texts in the one being read is an essential element to complete the process of appropriation whereby a text becomes one’s own. This was the focus of our last session, ‘Intertextuality and Appropriation. The Contemporary Reviews’. They saw traces of Lady Catherine de Bourgh in Mrs. Costello, so establishing a Daisy Miller–Pride and Prejudice connection, also similarities with The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, differences in the omniscience of the narrative voice in Daisy Miller and Oliver Twist and, as expected, a clear alliance with ‘Roman Fever’ was drawn. Nevertheless, to complicate things further and thanks to a compilation of contemporary reviews on Henry James’ work, I decided to confront students with some of these reviews. Daisy Miller, unlike other novels by James—Washington Square, for example—was acclaimed by critics as a worthy

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8 I am using the Kristevan approach to intertextuality, which is actually drawn from Bakhtin’s theoretical ground. Other useful sources which complement Kristeva’s theory on intertextuality are to be found in the works of Graham Allen and Heinrich F. Plett.

9 A clarification is required: according to the literature programmes of the English Department at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, third-year students are acquainted with the abovementioned novels: Pride and Prejudice (Romanticism—second-year), Oliver Twist and The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (Victorian Literature—second-year).
The Dialogic Narrative

piece of work. However, the reading provided in the reviews focuses entirely on the naiveté and vulgarity of Daisy—she dresses elegantly, has ‘the tournure of a princess’, and is yet irredeemably vulgar in her talk and her conduct’ (Hayes 68)—, and on the expertise of James as an American writer who ‘shows that he is possessed of a sincere patriotism, since he consecrates his talents to the enlightening of his countrywomen in the view which cynical Europe takes of the performances of American girls abroad’ (Hayes 69). I was prompted to use these contemporary reviews because they stand as an illustration of, quoting Bakhtin, ‘socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past’ (Bakhtin 1981: 291) proving how one text can be appropriated differently depending on the spatial and temporal position of the reader, and also authenticating the socio-historical element in novelistic discourse.

Just to finish, and by way of conclusion, I would like to emphasise that my intention when introducing Bakhtinian theory to the analysis of *Daisy Miller* was to somehow settle this critical framework as the means to study the rest of the texts that shape the syllabus. The conscientious application of this critical framework whose narrative game prioritises the role of the narrator has helped students to see beyond and to understand, for example, that the key for *The Great Gatsby*’s uniqueness is its choice of narrator, Nick Carraway, that the adult gaze conflates with that of the child in Faulkner’s ‘Barn Burning’, and that the narrative voice does indeed exist also in poetry and can melt into various narrators whose identity can only be apprehended if an intense exercise on intertextuality is enacted. I am referring to T.S. Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land’. Since this paper is the recollection of a pedagogical experience, I believe that my students’ voices should be the last to be heard. These last two quotes refer specifically to how the critical framework used in class helped them to perceive aspects and deepen their understanding of the text (extracted from the last question in ‘Reading Response Journal 2’, Annex 2).

‘I enjoyed talking about intertextuality, because I was not used to thinking about this when reading a novel and from now on, I am always going to try and see what other texts surface from my readings’

‘Basically it helped me to see different texts in just one. I knew what intertextuality was but usually when I read a book, novella or short story for the first time, I only
focus on that particular piece of work, not several others at the same time. And with the criticism brought up in class now I can see that a book is not only a book, but it seems a spider web, where many characters, themes or even ways of approaching a theme can be interrelated’

In my experience as a teacher of literature I have very often felt that literary criticism is unfairly treated, that is to say, it is generally viewed as some extraneous manifestation that blurs rather than clarifies literary analysis. Because I am persistent in my belief that literary criticism is indeed useful and that it helps to furnish analytical skills, I did not hesitate to stir students’ consciousnesses into thinking critically, in this particular case, in the Bakhtinian fashion.

Works Cited

Annex 1
Reading Response Journal 1 – Daisy Miller

26/09/2012

Name: ............................................................................................................................................

1. General reactions to the novella – Did you like it? (or not) Why? What as there in the novel that you found appealing? The story being told? The main characters?

2. Concentrate on the following aspects and put forward your ideas/thoughts about them.

   Daisy Miller:
   Frederick Winterbourne:

3. Any secondary character you remember and think worthy of being remembered?
Annex 2

Reading Response Journal 2 – Daisy Miller

08/09/2012

Name: ……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

1. Have your first reactions to the novella somewhat changed after the in-depth analysis carried out during the class sessions?

2. Have your views on Daisy and Winterbourne changed in any way? Do you see them now differently to the way you saw them before the engagement with literary analysis?

3. Is there any secondary character that you would like to recover for its significance within the text? (a secondary character to whom you paid scant attention – if none – in a first reading)

4. How did the critical framework utilised for the analysis of Daisy Miller help you to perceive aspects and deepen your understanding / interpretation of the text? (Bakhtin – dialogism and chronotope; Kristeva – Intertextuality) Please, try to be as specific as possible.
The Multimedia Perspective as a Teaching Strategy for Narrative Analysis

1 The Methodology of Foreign-Language Teaching as a Model

Visual elements have an undeniable potential in teaching literature. Among their many applications in a classroom environment is their use for analysing the figure of the narrator. This article considers two practical cases that illustrate the role of the visual in the study of the narrator and provide methodologies for teaching narration at undergraduate level. We have put together different strategies that result from our own hands-on experience in the classroom and that aim at improving the teaching of literature. However, we must first look briefly at some particular issues that, though now commonplace at many universities, affect our teaching. First, we teach literature in a foreign language (Italian literature to students at a Catalan/Spanish university). Second, the subject is not compulsory. Third, students are not expected to have any previous knowledge of the subject; and finally, there is no pre-selection on the basis of language ability. This means that we have to find the most appropriate ways to get closer to our students’ interests, something that other faculty subjects can take for granted for various reasons, e.g. the importance given to these subjects in the syllabus, linguistic immediacy and so on.

We will consider some generic reflections, followed by two types of examples of how we have applied the same basic philosophy in two specific groups and in two distinct subjects with a similar literary content: namely, Italian Film and Literature and Italian Literature and Art (both in the fourth year of the undergraduate course in our faculty).

As a starting point, it seems appropriate to use certain basic teaching approaches by Paolo Balboni (1998, 2006). We consider it a particularly fruitful idea to connect the practice of teaching literature with the practice of foreign-language teaching. By which, we do not mean a direct transposing of one ambit to another but, rather, a structural fusion of their respective teaching perspectives. In other words: everything that has led to the renewal of language teaching in
recent decades can arguably, indeed should, be put to use in teaching literature. Broadly speaking, this means assuming student-centred approaches that consider active learning autonomy as the centre of the learning process and a necessary progression through different levels and types of ability (the obvious reference here would be the phased progression implicitly found in the structure of any foreign-language teaching unit).

Along with formal lectures and group discussion, which can be more or less participatory, it is essential to consider practical activities involving the active participation of students, either in groups or individually. Such an approach should start with first contact activities that focus on detail and then move on to generalisation, theoretical reasoning and systematising (that is to say the common itinerary in any linguistic acquisition process, which goes from observation and analysis and culminates in synthesis) (Balboni 2006: 21). Moreover, our intention is to achieve such an active and cooperative student involvement (an objective often stated in teaching theory) that students feel called to participate.

Among the possible tasks to be considered within the guidelines described, those involving the relationship between the literary text and audiovisual media work particularly well, (most often, those related to film adaptation and/or to the literary text in terms of its visual-ekphrastic potential). There are different reasons, including cognitive ones, which may be adduced for this approach. For the sake of clarity, we will limit to just two ideas: first, the immediacy of audiovisuals in the daily lives of students, which have the enormous advantage of familiarity, attractiveness and functionality, and, second, the wide range of activities that can be addressed in a practical way in class, and that refer to processes/contents that maybe the object of later theoretical synthesis.¹

Film is the kind of audiovisual format that is most familiar to students (in fact, the space it occupies in contemporary culture and especially that of the students,

¹ Balboni (2006: 9–11) highlights the key points that contribute to learning in any proposed activity: attractive and novel activities, functionality (activities should be connected to the students’ own needs), solvability (undue difficulty acts as a block) and personal security, which should not be compromised in the process. The whole should also be guided by the overall principles of involving will and intuition, the rational and the emotional.
The Multimedia Perspective as a Teaching Strategy for Narrative Analysis

has taken over from literature in the hierarchical pre-eminence of forms of narrative expression). The positive traits of cinema as a functional instrument for the teaching of literature have been repeatedly pointed out. This first familiar approach, at the same time as facilitating literary analysis, leads inevitably to discussing the complexity of cinematic production. Both complementary areas then emerge as content of the learning process. Feedback skills can be expected, therefore, as a concomitant effect to the proposed activities, a global learning experience in both directions (Cerkvenik 2011: 32).

By mentioning the complexity of cinema as a vehicle, we touch upon an essential angle of the question, an aspect to be handled carefully if the narrative analysis of film is to be undertaken. This question requires further precision: our approach seeks to make evident aspects of the literary text and is not intended to take the place of filmographic analysis (this is course material in other subjects). Our interest in film focuses on comparative and cultural values, hence the restriction to literary adaptations (which should not be interpreted as a desire to return to the old and outdated primacy of the literary). However, some acknowledgement of its complexity should obviously be included. Specifically, some degree of previous work on the language of cinema needs to be carried out, and even a small understanding of conceptual issues can adequately increase students’ awareness in this area. Keeping this in mind, even at this elementary level, should lead to the students’ greater consciousness of what determines the distance in film between histoire and récit, and, of course, of the effective implications of the narrative instances deriving from it. The considerations of François Jost, a Genettian semiotic film scholar, can be useful at this point.

The purpose of our approach to film adaptations is to highlight and raise awareness of the mechanisms that can be identified by analogy in the literary text. In other words, to put into the same perspective the complex and heterogeneous mechanisms that determine the film’s récit and those of the literary text. The comparison between the many facets in the construction of meaning leads, as a corollary, to the contrast between narrative instances and the perception of their nature and importance in literary text. The shift may seem banal and yet,

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4 See Jost (1988) and Genette (1972) and from the perspective of practical teaching, see Rollet (1996).
as noted, the familiarity with film can make the transmission of complex ideas more transparent, provided that a task-based approach is established. We believe that such an approach will result in increased awareness of, and distance from, the narrator.

The following case example develops in the context of these benchmarks. Previously, the class carries out work tending to reflect on the complexity of film. Students need to have enough background knowledge to be able to identify the level of cinematic intervention. The reference here is traditional modalities of film narrative, in which mimetic impression tends to erase the traces of discourse and create a false transparency that seems to hide the distance between histoire and récit.

The assigned task is a comparative analysis between chapter 3 of Verga’s *I Malavoglia* (1881) and the corresponding sequence (67’30”–72’00”) in the film adaptation by Visconti, *La terra trema* (1948). Students will need to have previously read the chapter by themselves and to have watched the significant parts of the film in previous classes. The development of the session will cover three stages.

1. Initially, the sequence will be projected in the classroom, once or more according to the dynamics of the group. Students will be asked to do a teacher-guided comparison. The technical analysis of these cinematic shots will accomplish their attentive focus on the narrative of the episode. After that, students will be asked to examine and list, from a personal perspective, the most significant transformations in the film compared to the literary version. Finally, they will be asked to assess the possible reasons behind the film’s choices, or rather, the effects they have on the viewer. Students usually approach this part without any difficulty in execution or motivation: it is essentially a practical activity that should not take longer than twenty minutes. Once done, the class participates in a quick feedback.⁶

2. Without changing the division of the class into groups, we will move to a second stage where we will ask similar questions about the literary text, specifically calling attention to the figure of the narrator who tries

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⁵ See Verga (1991) and Visconti (1948).
⁶ Relevant to this are the practical suggestions by Golden (2007) and Balboni (1998: 183–4), who points to the stimulating and feasible nature (piacevole) of such activities.
to achieve the effects in the same way as the director of the film. All this can be done using simple questions aimed at identifying the speaker, determining who transmits information or what information is revealed, or discovering what language/resources are used.

Sharing the phenomena listed by the students allows for a concluding synthesis by the teacher (how this is done depends on the dynamics of the group: individual presentation, guided debate, proposing guidelines for a conceptual map and so on). Indeed, from the reflections emerging as the discussion progresses, the session will end with some theorisation and systematisation activities which reveal the series of relationships outlined in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Realist narrative</th>
<th>Documentary tone (the historical phenomena: neorealist cinema)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of Language in literary standard variant.</td>
<td>Multilingualism, sociology and ideology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for indirect imitations of dialectal reality.</td>
<td>Direct diastatic distribution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable linguistic registers.</td>
<td>Dialect language versus standard language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different discourse typologies.</td>
<td>Strategies for strong visualisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconstant presence of the narrative voice: direct style, indirect, indirect free</td>
<td>Dramatic, expressionist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of narrative instance in its multiple facets.</td>
<td>Visconti’s film style</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At this point, the issues arising from the analysis of the film adaptation may prove useful as an aid to literary explanation. In fact, experience shows that,

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7 A key contribution to avoiding misunderstanding in this approach is the analogy between artistic media discussed in Gimferrer (2012: 67).
with the support of technical reflection on cinematic adaptation, students are more likely to identify and grasp the abstract concepts developed in the final synthesis thanks to the practical typology and potential emotional involvement in the type of tasks proposed.

3

The second case example offers, if possible, less difficulty, yet becomes less familiar because, even if we are used to seeing works of art (paintings, photographs, etc.), we are not used to establishing a relationship between visual art and literature. The field, however, is vast, going from ekphrastic paintings or sculptures to the interaction between photographs and stories and passing through a wide variety of intermediate possibilities, such as novels whose protagonist is an artist, to poetry dedicated to painters.

However, the interpretation of literature in its relationship to art helps, no doubt, to focus on some formal and/or thematic core issues that, in many cases, can be central to the understanding of the literary text. Of the many issues that can be discussed, it should be emphasised that a work of literature provides a thorough visual summary of a theme or motif. This explains the importance of ekphrasis. We have many examples of this phenomenon in Dante’s *Commedia*, not only in *Cantos del Purgatorio* x–xii, but also in many other lines of the great poem.

Undoubtedly, one of the difficulties of this type of approach to literary analysis lies in the knowledge and hermeneutic strategies that both teacher and students should have. Clearly, we need to have a basic working knowledge of the rudiments of history and art criticism. However, there are certain hindrances. This is not a general course in the history of the artistic world nor is it meant to train experts in a particular artist or artistic period. The field of knowledge and learning is limited to the perspective from which it is observed, namely the function of a particular work of art in the literary text in question and not in the general field of artistic disciplines, to which, however, we must submit.^[8] As an example

[^8]: An interesting example, taken from the core of the study of the history of art, is the wonderful book by Venturi (1964). Even though it follows a historical pattern, it shows how important the impressions and concepts expressed by thinkers and artists of every age are in regard to figurative art. The reflections of Woodford (2011) and, in general, the leading studies on iconology, beginning with Panofsky (1939) and Saxl (1957) are also helpful.
of what we have said, there is much to consider in the work—and we could say, the life—of Caravaggio as expressed through certain major novels and a range of aesthetic considerations developed in Italy in the second half of the twentieth century. In Gadda’s *Quer Pasticciaccio di via Merulana*, and Pasolini’s *Ragazzi di vita*, the aesthetics of the great baroque painter has an importance that goes beyond ekphrasis, as it inspires style, subject matter, choice of actors, scenic layout of some chapters, focus, the allegorical value of the other and so on. The relationship between Caravaggio and the literature of those years can also lead to the introduction of the studies of Pasolini and Bassani at the University of Bologna and of the work of Longhi, who was the first to rediscover the centrality of the figure of the Milanese painter. To these we can add the interest in baroque culture by Gadda and the dialogue established between him, the critic Longhi and Contini.⁹

However, the class exercise proposed here is a comparative analysis of two editions of Vittorini’s *Conversazioni in Sicilia*. The author was in charge of the two versions. The first was published in 1941 whilst Italy was under fascism.¹⁰ The second was published in 1953 and contains photographs by Crocenzi along with some other anonymous photographers.¹¹ The author had also planned to publish other editions with art by Guttuso, but they never saw the light of day.

Students need to have read the text by Vittorini by themselves and seen and analysed some of the pages of the 1953 edition. They also need to have read some of the brief annotations by Vittorini himself regarding the value of the images in the book, whose purpose was simply to overcome the reticence that fascist censorship had imposed.¹²

We begin by analysing the novel from a narrative point of view, first in class, presenting a number of questions that must be answered in groups of four students, and then students share the conclusions they have reached with the whole group. In a second stage, the entire 1953 edition is projected, so that students can have an accurate idea of the layout of the work and its form and place on the page, stopping at each of the images. Finally we analyse some of

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¹⁰ Vittorini (1941).
¹¹ Vittorini (1953). For the literary work see Cintoli (1954), Pautasso (1986) and Corti (1974); and for the photographic work see Falqui (1954), Bertelli (1979) and Giusa (2003).
¹² Vittorini (1954).
the most significant chapters and the relation between these new images and the content, trying to figure out what the author could not explain at the time. We also look at the position of the narrator between words and images, since in this new text, very experimental in nature, the photographs have come to play a narrative role, leaving to one side the illustrative role that images normally have.

Through discussions, shared feedback and partial and final synthesis, some of the theoretical conclusions that have been reached are highlighted below:

- The profound change in the semantics of the novel by the incorporation of these images.
- Narrative experimentalism, which will open up in time for novels as significant as those of Sebald.
- Parallel and coincident readings from the text, narration by images and photographs.
- The role of anticipation and auto-exegesis in photos, which specify the original images of the narrative, the archetypal figures and we introduce the symbolic lyrical universe of storytelling, so evident especially at the end of the novel.
- The weight of memory on the journey of the protagonist, which focuses attention on the purpose and the reason for the trip.
- Photomontage seen in its narrative-filmic dimension.

Comparing the 1941 and 1953 editions, we retrieve a significant amount of data in relation to the position of the narrator in both editions. In the 1941 edition, the narrator is characterised as auto/homodiegetic, allusive and using allegorical language to describe the reality of travelling like a descent into personal myth that is, in turn, part of the mythical anthropological structure of oppressed and anguished humanity and at the same time, a song of hope of liberation. In the 1953 edition, photography adds another aspect to this vision. Photography is not in any secondary or illustrative role. Photography and text move in two different and complementary ways, maintaining a continuous dialogue with each other. The photomontage assembly (in montage, there is the need to speak more about isolated pictures) proposes a new narrative path. On the one hand, it follows the symbolism of a verbal text and, on the other; it refers to a concrete reality. But it is not a document; it displays the images of the narrator's memory.
Hence, photography and photomontage underline and continue the essential activity of the verbal narrator, i.e. the search for the lost image, which coincides with the loss of humanity, and possible regeneration.

4

The flexible implementation of these two comparative examples can be useful in obtaining an adequate outline of the figure of the narrator. Additional investment in literary knowledge is minimal and no specialised technical skills are required from students. Instead, the proposed activities rely on certain minimum complementary skills that now tend to be considered part of general knowledge. Comparison, as we have set it out here, emerges as a great source for practical activities and students’ autonomous initiative. This can be a positive tool not only in developing reading skills, cultural enrichment and the acquisition of a comparative perspective, but also in increasing awareness of the literary strategies and mechanisms of enactment employed by the narrator.

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Cristina Pividori

From Guided Reading to Autonomy: Using Study Guides to Teach Narration and Focalisation in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*

1 Introduction

In recent years, the teaching of foreign literatures at university level has been significantly challenged by the growing pedagogical interest in autonomous learning. Traditional teacher-centred approaches, in which teaching was seen as performance and the literary text as a finished product, are being progressively replaced by student-centred strategies. These trends seek to turn the teacher-lecturer into a facilitator who encourages student participation and propitiates the development of both communicational and critical skills. For this to have real meaning in the literature class, it is necessary to bring into play what Freire calls a ‘dialogical, problem-posing education’ (2000: 40), so that teacher and students can become actively involved in the reading and interpretation of the text. It is also essential that students be given the necessary tools to be able to confront the text and recreate meaning in the articulation of their individual reactions to it. Among those tools, some training in critical theory as a necessary part of the study of literature is required to move beyond content-oriented learning and assess what authors do in their texts and how they do it.

Bearing in mind all these factors now shaping foreign literature syllabuses, this paper focuses on the ways study guides have helped initiate a group of non-native second-year students of English into the use of narrative theory in the reading of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*. There are, however, three preliminary issues that are worth highlighting before moving on to textual analysis: first, the effectiveness of study guides in the English literature class; second, the choice of *Wuthering Heights* as a model text and, third, the use of narratology as a method of literary analysis.

In order to get the most out of each literature session, students are required to read the assigned material at home and come to class prepared to discuss it. However, many feel overwhelmed by the amount of reading they are expected
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to do and look for ways to avoid it. The incorporation of study guides into the English literature class has been set up as an attempt to prevent students from relying on the well-known online study sheets such as CliffsNotes or SparkNotes in place of the original texts. Study guides take many forms. Some consist of written questions; others provide activities created to highlight critical information throughout the text. But they always put forward an appealing, structured and organized way of approaching the text, sometimes even including suggestions for the best ways to work with it.

In addition to this, it is necessary to point out that most of the students who come to the study of English literature are already visually educated by means of film and television. Yet, although they are able to follow relatively complex visual flashback and montage techniques, they rarely show similar skills when they analyse written texts in English. In other words, they are used to experience rendered visually, but not to experience rendered in writing. Study guides constitute an interesting visual aid to written experience, as, together with the verbal sequential steps aimed at facilitating reading, they provide visual clues (conceptual maps, film clips, paintings and photographs) that help relate what students already know to new material.

The choice of the novel *Wuthering Heights* has also been connected to this visual-learning dimension. The relationship between what is told and what is seen, between the visual and the textual are central thematic concerns and structuring principles of Brontë's novel. Students are encouraged to see this relationship and to pose questions such as who speaks and who sees, which inevitably bring narrative theory into the scene.

In fact there are certain elements of narratology—specifically Genette’s (1980, 1988) categories of ‘voice,’ ‘homo’ and ‘heterodiegetic narrators’ and ‘focalisation’, Bal’s (1985) reformulation of the term ‘focaliser’ and Rimmon-Kenan’s (1983) distinction between first, second and third-degree narratives—which allow students to establish an almost immediate connection between the visual and the textual, between seeing and reading the text. I have particularly focused on the distinction between heterodiegetic frame narration (Lockwood’s diary entries), unreliable homodiegetic narration (Nelly’s story) and the many embeddings within Nelly’s narrative (the incorporated narratives of Heathcliff, Isabella and Zillah). The categories of ‘external’ and ‘internal’ focalisation and the distinction
between the ‘perceptual, psychological and ideological facets of focalisation’ have also been used effectively in relation to the novel.

Narrative theory has also provided the means to negotiate individual interpretations with students, stressing the importance of analysing the writer’s intent rather than repeating the plot. Bal argues for the beneficial complementarity of developing theoretical tools to deal with the text: ‘the use of a method of analysis that every participant in a discussion can master helps students overcome the feeling of intimidation that a brilliant but unexpectedly structured interpretation by a teacher often entails’ (2009: ix). Students’ responses to literature are subjective but they are given respectability by being provided with a theoretical framework.

To illustrate how I have worked with narration in *Wuthering Heights*, I use examples taken from the study guides prepared for the discussion of the novel. In order to give a broad overall structure to the study guides, I will follow the three-fold sequence suggested by Harper for introductory courses: pre-literary or pre-interpretation activities, interpretative phase, and synthesis or summative activities (1988: 403). Such approach involves a communicative, dialectic process through which students are persuaded to move beyond explanation and understanding towards the appropriation of the text (Ricoeur 1976: 74).

2 Pre-literary or pre-interpretation activities

Before approaching the study of the narrators in *Wuthering Heights*, my purpose is to bring narrative theory closer to students by focusing on a common background of essential information on the figure of the narrator. The most effective way to introduce narration in relation to fiction is by connecting aspects of the narrative to the teaching process. As Showalter claims: ‘We are not only the authors but also the classroom narrators of our courses’ (2003: 94).

The role of the teacher-narrator is to act as a mediator between the text and the student-reader, explaining and facilitating their access to the story. In the students’ minds, the teacher is supposed to be the reliable narrator, to have all the authoritative interpretations, to speak for the author and to share the author’s omniscience. Although I am not omniscient, I can, like Nelly Dean or Lockwood in *Wuthering Heights*, stress or destabilise my reliability by arguing against myself or raising questions and refusing to answer them. This strategy closely mirrors the ways narratives work. Every time I refuse to take a reassuring
position in the class, students are encouraged to reach their own conclusions and accept their uncertainties as a possible source of interpretation.

After stressing my role as teacher-narrator, I focus on what Showalter calls the ‘skin of the novel’ (2003: 88). I start with the title, centring particularly on the word ‘Heights’. Taking advantage of the students' visual-perceptual skills, I resort to John Martin's *The Bard* (1817) and to Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818) to help them see the ways narrators and narrative techniques are represented in art. We compare the point of view of the bard and the wanderer at the cliff top with the narrators in the novel, particularly with Lockwood, ‘the stranger’ who, in Woodring's words, ‘shares the reader’s wonder at the characters and events’ (1957: 299). The Romantic representation of the author/singer/narrator as a solitary man contemplating the tumultuous landscape from above allows for the connection between *point of view* and *visual perspective*.

Like Lockwood, the men in the paintings share a similar ‘spatial position and angle of vision from which [the] scene is presented' (Montgomery 2007: 261). Such visual perspective enables both viewer and reader to see the world through the narrators’ eyes and share their personal experience. Narrators are at once the means through which the reader/viewer enters their representation of the world and also responsible for their point of view and for the perception of the world as determined by it.

### 3 Interpretation

This is the phase in which the class engages in dialogical activity: in this, I am guide and facilitator, whilst the students are active participants in the discussion. According to Harper's three-fold sequence, the interpretative phase ‘consists of guided activities for interpretation that actively involve the students and take into account their personal encounters with the text' (1988: 403). Questions and activities are thus designed so that students can articulate, defend and negotiate their ideas, countering the interpretations provided by me and their peers. Since my main focus is narration and focalisation and the embedded narratives in the

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1 Students are also encouraged to see that the word ‘Heights’ is mainly used to describe what Stoneman labels as ‘the extreme states of mind we encounter in the novel’ (1995: xii).
novel, my initial concern is to foster distinction between those concepts. Unlike the teacher-narrator, who is a flesh-and-blood person, the textual narrator is not so easily identifiable. To make the narrator’s voice manifest in the text, I draw the students’ attention to the beginning of the novel.

By asking who speaks the class focuses on Lockwood’s narrative voice, which is projected from his first diary entry as the voice of a young, wealthy and educated man. Though Lockwood is a character in the novel as well, he mainly functions as a framing device and may be regarded as a heterodiegetic narrator. Obviously, the more information students have on him, the clearer is their sense of his unreliability and limited point of view. Lockwood compares himself to Heathcliff calling himself a ‘misanthropist’ (Brontë 1998: 1), which is ironical as he seems to be the opposite of the Byronic hero. In fact, knowing that Heathcliff cannot make a suitable host, Lockwood seeks the conversation of Nelly, the housekeeper.

It is from this tête-à-tête that the story comes to us. Lockwood and Nelly Dean’s voices merge to account for events. The point of view shifts several times in the course of the narrative, where ‘I’ means Nelly Dean and her stance and assessments are Lockwood’s filter. I ask students to find where the point of view is shifted and what the reasons for it are. The following is the passage surrounding the first major shift in narrative voice:

“Well, Mrs. Dean, it will be a charitable deed to tell me something of my neighbours – I feel I shall not rest, if I go to bed; so be good enough to sit and chat an hour”.

“Oh, certainly, sir! I’ll just fetch a little sewing, and then I’ll sit as long as you please. But you’ve caught cold: I saw you shivering, and you must have some gruel to drive it out”.

The worthy woman bustled off, and I crouched nearer the fire; my head felt hot, and the rest of me chill: moreover I was excited, almost to a pitch of foolishness, through my nerves and brain. This caused me to feel, not uncomfortable, but rather fearful (as I am still) of serious effects from the incidents of to-day and yesterday. She returned presently, bringing a smoking basin and a basket of work; and, having placed the former on the hob, drew in her seat, evidently pleased to find me so companionable. Before I came to live here, she commenced, waiting no further invitations to her story, I was almost always at Wuthering Heights... (Brontë 1998: 30)

From this moment onwards, most of the novel is told to Lockwood, while he is laid up with a cold, by Nelly Dean. She functions as a homodiegetic narrator, one
who speaks as a character within the story, and who is thus positioned as more or less knowledgeable and empowered in relation to the other characters. The first-person narrative continues to predominate throughout the text though, probably with the purpose of making the story more vivid and realistic. Further on, the speaking voice shifts back to Lockwood, yet he never calls into question what Nelly says; on the contrary, he makes clear that the story is told ‘in [Nelly’s] own words, only a little condensed’ (Brontë 1998: 137).

In order to discuss the purpose of double narration in the novel, students are asked several questions about excerpts from critical articles read in class (Woodring 1957; Shunami 1973; Sedgwick 1980, Gilbert and Gubar 1979; Macovski 1987 and Newman 1990). Some of the conclusions drawn from the discussion are: firstly, the dual perspective may be regarded as ‘a Romantic storytelling method that emphasises the ironic disjunctions between different perspectives on the same events’ (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 249). The effectiveness of double narration lies on its unreliability; which contributes to the complexity of the story and increases reader engagement. Secondly, unreliability is probably intended to encourage readers to trust the characters and the story rather than the narrators. As Sedgwick suggests, ‘it is narration that introduces the shifty interplay of interpretation and misinterpretation, and that it is in the characters, as opposed to the structure that the quality of directness inheres’ (1986: 100). Finally, students feel that they are forced to take interpretation into their own hands because of what they regard as ‘naive’ and ‘simplistic’ perspectives on the part of the narrators. The reading of the novel in itself becomes what Macovski calls ‘an act of interpretation’ (1987: 364).

As to narrative levels, Wuthering Heights may be read as a series of embedded first-person narratives (Lockwood’s, Nelly’s, Cathy’s). Students are encouraged to illustrate them using Genette’s naive drawings—made with stick-figure narrators and speech-bubble narratives (Genette 1988: 85). Lockwood’s would be a ‘first-degree narrative’ and Nelly Dean’s would be a ‘second-degree narrative’ as it is embedded in Lockwood’s. Within Nelly’s story, there are other embedded points of view or ‘third-degree narratives’. For example, the first part of Nelly’s narrative is told to her by Heathcliff when he is a boy. There are several pages of Heathcliff’s direct speech, describing how he and Catherine ‘escaped from the wash-house to have a ramble at liberty’ and how they ‘ran from the top of the Heights to the park, without stopping—Catherine completely beaten in the
race, because she was barefoot’ (Brontë 1998: 41). Nelly retells Heathcliff’s story literally to Lockwood. Further on, she reads the contents of a letter Isabella writes to her, describing her hideous experiences at Wuthering Heights (Brontë 1998: 120). Moreover, Isabella’s letter also contains large stretches of direct speech from other characters like Joseph.

The last embedded voice in Nelly Dean’s story is that of the servant Zillah, who becomes Nelly’s only source of information about Cathy when she moves with Heathcliff and Hareton. At the end of Zillah’s account, Lockwood’s voice returns as he asserts: ‘Thus ended Mrs. Dean’s story’ (Brontë 1998: 264). The first-person narration suddenly changes to the third and it is the reference to ‘Mrs. Dean’ that decides the shift to Lockwood as framing narrator once again. Later on, Lockwood returns to Wuthering Heights, and Nelly Dean brings the story to a close:

And afterwards she furnished me with the sequel of Heathcliff’s history. He had a “queer” end, as she expressed it.
I was summoned to Wuthering Heights, within a fortnight of your leaving us, she said; and I obeyed joyfully, for Catherine’s sake. (Brontë 275)

Interestingly, Nelly’s reference to Heathcliff’s end as ‘queer’ is placed between inverted commas and embedded in Lockwood’s narrative. Her voice returns, this time without inverted commas and with a reporting clause, ‘she said’ to indicate the shift in point of view. The narrative goes back to Lockwood on the last page, for him to give Nelly ‘a remembrance’ for being kind to him and telling the story, and visit the churchyard where he discovers ‘the three head-stones’ of Edgar, Catherine, and Heathcliff (Brontë 1998: 300).

Focalisation also serves a useful purpose in the analysis of the novel. Bal (reworking Genette) claims that the focaliser is ‘the one who sees’ and gives the perspective from which the story is seen. In her view, the types of focalisation are related to the position of the narrator within the story. Lockwood, the heterodiagetic narrator then, would be the external focaliser (EF) because he ‘says less than the character knows’ (Bal 2009: 189). The thoughts and feelings of the characters are not revealed to him; they are presented from the outside. In the case of Nelly Dean, the homodiegetic narrator, focalisation would be internal. As a character narrator, she would be the character focaliser, which Bal refers to
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as CF. The character focaliser says ‘what a given character knows’ or ‘more than any of the characters know’ (Bal 2009: 189) depending on the degree of presence. The distinction between the narrator and the focaliser is of relevance because the novel integrates narration and gazing, suggesting an essential connection between the two. Students are given excerpts from the novel to trace who sees, who speaks, where focal shifts occur and what the effect is.

As said above, Lockwood plays the role of the externally focalised narrator presenting events as he sees them. The reader is thus brought closer to the action, seeing it through Lockwood’s eyes. However, Lockwood’s misguided assumptions about Heathcliff— the label ‘capital fellow!’ sits uneasily with Heathcliff’s ‘suspicious’ and ‘jealous resolution’ (Brontë 1998: 1)—and later on his short-sighted characterisations of Hareton and Cathy, turn him into an outsider with no chance of ever fitting into the story’s main events.

This peripheral position is reflected in Lockwood’s own phrase, ‘the situation of the looker-on’ (Brontë 1998: 55), which suggests that his gaze, as Newman asserts, ‘is never a locus of complete control—that the gaze even opens a space of resisting that control’ (Newman 1990: 1036). When Lockwood enters Heathcliff’s sitting room and finds young Catherine seated beside a fire, the situation of the looker-on is signalled most particularly through the weakening of his gaze:

…now, I had a distinct view of her whole figure and countenance. She was slender, and apparently scarcely past girlhood: an admirable form, and the most exquisite little face that I have ever had the pleasure of beholding: small features, very fair; flaxen ringlets, or rather golden, hanging loose on her delicate neck; and eyes—had they been agreeable in expression, they would have been irresistible. (Brontë 1998: 7–8)

The control of the visual perspective gets shifted when Catherine looks back and assumes the role of the spectator defying Lockwood’s gaze. Yet Lockwood re-appropriates his object of desire and somehow fulfils his longing to gaze at her by acting as Nelly’s interlocutor. Hearing becomes a substitute for seeing. Moreover, the writing of Cathy’s story turns Lockwood into what Newman regards as the ‘voyeur defending himself against the threat of the feminine by objectifying the woman’ and making the story his own (1990: 1034).

However, Lockwood is not the only one who sees. The situation of the looker-on is doubled in the narration of Nelly. Although the focus of the narration switches
characters (Nelly, Heathcliff, Catherine and Cathy take turns in narrating different parts of the story), Nelly’s value as internal focaliser is clearly distinguished throughout the novel. She is deeply engaged in the action and sees the world of the successive generations of Earnshaws and Lintons through her own eyes: ‘Nelly keeps one eye always at the keyhole; her main task, quite literally, is to supervise’ (Newman 1990: 1035).

Yet Nelly’s habit of seeing and telling causes several problems: ‘She narrates, informs on and advices all at once’ (Newman 1990: 1035) and this has a disruptive influence over the characters’ lives. She is not always honest: ‘I invented and reiterated at intervals throughout the way’ (Brontë 1998: 181). In fact by concealing the fact that Heathcliff listens in to Catherine’s confession, she causes the tragic separation of the two lovers (Brontë 1998: 71). She is also directly involved in the violent scene that destroys Cathy’s health and her marriage (Brontë 1998: 100). She incites Edgar to confront Heathcliff and this violence provokes the fit from whose effects Cathy never fully recovers. However, her moral authority and influence seems to remain almost intact with readers. That is why her own admission of guilt, after having allowed the relationship between Cathy and Linton Heathcliff to develop, contrary to Edgar Linton’s wishes, produces a break in the narrative and also destabilises her role as looker and teller:

I seated myself in a chair, and rocked, to and fro, passing harsh judgment on my many derelictions of duty; from which, it struck me then, all the misfortunes of all my employers sprang. It was not the case, in reality, I am aware; but it was, in my imagination, that dismal night, and I thought Heathcliff himself less guilty than I. (Brontë 1998: 244)

This is strategically placed at the end of Nelly’s story. Nelly exposes her subjectivity arguing that perhaps it was not in ‘reality’ but merely in her ‘imagination’. Although she acts as the character focaliser throughout the text, here there is a focal shift and her own feelings, her particular take on the events become the focal point. From the indications often appearing in the novel, such as ‘I thought’, ‘It seemed to me’, or ‘I felt’, I ask students both to trace other instances in which Nelly’s feelings become focalised and to reflect on what Nelly aims at by revealing herself as a fallible human being. Exploring this in class is particularly interesting and becomes clearer in the following section.
4 Synthesis

This phase ‘transcends the classroom,’ as Harper says, ‘and may manifest itself in ongoing appreciation and assimilation of literature that may include expanded wisdom and a new way of looking at oneself and things outside the classroom’ (1988: 407). At this stage, students are supposed to reunite the parts, as the previous phases involved a fragmentation of the text. That is why activities—written assignments, judging statements based on the texts, written comments on literary criticism and viewing and discussing narration on stage or on film adaptations—are directed towards viewing the work as a whole.

The visual aspects of focalisation may be transcended at this stage so that students can go beyond the purely visual and focus on other facets that are also relevant. Following Uspensky (1973), Rimmon-Kennan distinguishes between the perceptual, the psychological and the ideological facets. The perceptual has to do with the focaliser’s ‘perception (sight, hearing, smell, etc.)’ and ‘is determined by two main coordinates: space and time’ (1983: 77); the psychological ‘concerns [the focaliser’s] mind and emotions’ and ‘the determining components are again two: the cognitive and the emotive orientation of the focaliser towards the focalised’ (1983: 79) and the ideological refers to a way of viewing the world conceptually.

The novel’s narrative complexity allows for the distinction of the three facets. The perceptual is present at all levels and tends to be identified with the sensory dimension and, therefore, to be more easily distinguished from those of the mind and emotions. Spatially, it moves from Lockwood’s bird’s-eye view to Nelly’s more limited vision. The time coordinate, on the other hand, is revealed through a double temporal order: firstly the narrative of Lockwood’s diary, which begins in 1801 and ends in 1802, and secondly, in the narrated matter which covers the period 1757–1802. Both Nelly Dean and Lockwood have access to all the temporal dimensions of the story and take full advantage of the novel’s temporal doubleness. Their conversations reveal this peculiar approach to time, as when Nelly decides to hop ahead in her story to the summer of 1778, twenty-three years before Lockwood’s arrival at the Grange (Brontë 1998: 55). Unlike Lockwood, however, Nelly has the benefit of retrospection as she focalises her own past, although she tends to filter through her imagination.

Indeed, perception becomes more complex when the question who sees is expanded to who thinks or who feels, that is to say, when psychological activity and
subjectivity come into play. As suggested in the previous section, the psychological facet stresses the focaliser’s mind and emotions and becomes more powerful within Nelly’s story. As internal focaliser, Nelly’s narration is mostly restricted to the emotive component of focalisation. Whatever guarantees that Nelly’s moral evaluation of Frances, Hindley’s new wife, is correct seems to be restricted to the subjective: ‘... she felt so afraid of dying! I imagined her as little likely to die as myself’ (Brontë 1998: 39). A similar illustration of subjectivity is reflected in her portrayal of Catherine when she tells her about Edgar’s marriage proposal: ‘The expression of her face seemed disturbed and anxious... Is she sorry for her shameful conduct? I asked myself... No, she felt small trouble regarding any subject, save her own concerns’ (Brontë 1998: 68). The other important instance of emotive revelation on the part of Nelly occurs in relation to Heathcliff. She wonders, ‘is he a ghooul, or a vampire?’ (Brontë 1998: 293). Nelly’s emotional attachment to Catherine and Heathcliff does much to explain why students often have trouble with interpreting the two characters. They have only Nelly’s lens of them, which is neither objective nor detached.

Within the cognitive component, Lockwood gives what seems to be an outside, objective view of the characters in the novel. His perception of the focalised from without restricts his observation to external manifestations, leaving emotions aside, so much so that it is easy to forget that the novel is his journal. However, at certain points in his narrative, the notion of a purely external-objective point of view becomes more problematic and the lines between cognitive and emotive aspects are blurred, particularly when he meets young Catherine and claims: Cathy ‘does not seem so amiable ... as Mrs. Dean would persuade me to believe’ (Brontë 1998: 265).

The ideological component consists of ‘a general system of viewing the world conceptually,’ according to which the world described in the novel is evaluated (Uspensky 1973: 8). Wuthering Heights resists a single ideological reading. On the one hand there are the motifs of British imperialism: Heathcliff’s characterisation reflects all the stereotypical features of the other: ‘It’s as dark as if it came from the devil’ or ‘... a dirty, ragged, black-haired child [...] it only stared round and round and repeated over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand’ (Brontë 1998: 31). On the other hand, the double narration stands for, as Pykett claims, ‘the separate masculine and feminine spheres of Victorian ideology’; yet ‘the inner feminine narrative of Nelly Dean has to be approached
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through, and is mediated by, the outer, masculine narrative of Lockwood’ (1989: 109). The ideological focalisation of the novel is thus focalised from Lockwood's perspective, from Nelly's stance, or it is divided between the two. As the reader's representative, Lockwood stands for the Victorian bourgeoisie, the ‘dominant meanings of middle-class domesticity upon both the house and landscape’ (Shachar 2012: 18). His point of view thus belongs to the sociable and civilised world away from Wuthering Heights; the other ideologies in the text, for instance Nelly Dean's proclivity to the non-rational (myth, superstition, spirit visions and the gothic), are thus evaluated from this privileged position.

5 Conclusions

This teaching approach to the novel has aimed at both integrating study guides to Harper's three-fold sequence and at encouraging students to develop the necessary skills to move from the visual to the discursive in a continuum: reading-visualising-interpreting. These literacies have been built one on the other and have played a major role in the growth of a true interaction with the text, encouraging involvement by students that is at once significant and progressive. The results of the experience were reflected in a final-course survey. About 80% of the students agreed that the opportunity to act autonomously in the reading and understanding of texts increased as a result of the implementation of these resources. Despite the complexities of Wuthering Heights as a model text, my approximation to narration and focalisation has attempted to assimilate narrative theory into the process of assisting students to become critical readers and thinkers who interrogate the text, rather than simply accepting it at face value. Given the particularities of the novel and the success of this approach, it would be interesting to see if other aspects of narration could be used in its teaching.

Works Cited

This paper grows out of an attempt to adapt the assessment and course assignments in a second-year British literature survey course to both the students’ skills and the variables of a new, partly digital learning environment. First designed in the 2009–2010 academic year and taught at a large, public Catalan university, the course combines a wide range of short texts and extracts dated from 1660 to 1900 with a decidedly historicist approach. Texts have included opera and engravings, collections of letters and topical journalism, satires of policies and of sentimental fiction, autobiography, early and Victorian gothic fiction, detective stories and children’s books. As such, the course partakes in the tendency to arrange canonical, conventionally literary texts with others which had long been left on the margins of academic study; it likewise departs from a preceding course design which reduced coverage of four centuries of literary history to four, five, or six authors.

A word or two more about the classroom environment: enrollment is high, regularly between 70 and 80 students per group or section, and does not entail the luxury of teaching assistants; ill-designed and acoustically challenging classrooms often featuring furniture bolted to the floor make small group work difficult, as students cannot easily face one another; and the underfunded institutional environment is resource-poor. An informal survey of officemates confirmed my suspicion that we and our students have access to something between 10 and 20% of the books and articles included in the sort of preliminary bibliographies compiled when first preparing a scholarly paper.† As for the ancillary work of an

† Swingeing cuts to funding are keenly felt in this area: in recent years, the yearly library allowance per staff member—earmarked for course bibliography rather than research—has fallen to roughly 100 euros. By way of illustration, readers are invited to compare the number of hits in both the Universitat de Barcelona and Universitetet i Bergen, Norway, libraries for on-line catalogue searches using authors’ names as subject terms: Samuel Pepys (Barcelona, 12; Bergen, 42); Mary Wortley Montagu (Barcelona, 5; Bergen, 13); Samuel Johnson (Barcelona, 46; Bergen, 253); Laurence Sterne (Barcelona, 18; Bergen, 114); Jane Austen (Barcelona, 72; Bergen, 400); Christina Rossetti (Barcelona, 7; Bergen, 37); and Robert Louis Stevenson (Barcelona, 20; Bergen, 114). This disparity may reflect
English department—student productions of plays, complete with historically informed, student-fashioned costumes; poetry and public other readings; or low-cost publication of literary work by students—I have seen only one such venture in 18 years of teaching. Early experiences with such assessment tasks as a short, guided critical essay and an annotated bibliography merely underscored the students' weak English skills, their trouble adapting to the field-specific rhetorical and discursive conventions of academic English, their very elementary familiarity with the critical essay as a form, and widespread plagiarism of online sources. Could students be led to approach texts critically in another medium? Might engagement that consigned discursive writing and the scholarly critical idiom to ancillary roles prove more engaging, and productive of more consistently honest work?

As I have since discovered, creative response is not new to the literature classroom (Baruth 2000, Blythe and Sweet 2001a and 2001b; Brown 2010, Burroway 2002, Green 2003, Greene 1995, Hancox and Muller 2011, Harper 2008, Mills 2008, Severn 2008, Unger 2008). Writing in 1995, Brenda Greene described an exercise designed to bring the subaltern to the fore: through the use of dialogue writing prompts, Greene had students 'rewrite certain incidents in the text from the perspective of an underprivileged character' (quoted in Mills 2008: 155). Drawing on Greene, Dan Mills has discussed the use of what he termed backstory writing prompts in a Shakespeare course, with particular reference to Othello. Characters know one another before the action of the piece begins, as Mills observes: their actions are coloured by, and their words allude to, the Desdemona-Othello courtship, Cassio's role as a go-between, or the changing tenor of Iago's relationship with his wife, Emilia. To flesh out any of these implied scenes is to inquire into Shakespeare's characterisation, and aspects of higher education policy and funding (e.g. Universitat de Barcelona staff and students enjoy access to resources at three other public universities in the metropolitan area) as well as cataloguers' criteria, but by some measures the humanities holdings of the whole of the Catalan university system (as reflected in the union catalogue) are objectively poorer than those of a single Scandinavian institution. A case in point: quantitatively, both the Oxford Companion and the more consistently scholarly Cambridge Companion series are better represented at Universitetet i Bergen than in the libraries of the ten public research institutions making up the Consorci de Biblioteques Universitàries de Catalunya (CBUC) taken together. The figures, based on a title searches restricted to books to the exclusion of e-books, are 133 titles in Catalonia and 196 in Bergen for the Oxford Companion series, and 345 Cambridge Companion titles in Catalonia and 487 in Bergen.
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more particularly into motives, by furthering it, but also—Mills argues—to heighten one’s awareness of reader response as the backstory in any narrative is assembled, whether mono-or polyvocally (2008, 155–58).

Of course, such manipulation of our set texts is present, and present as interpretation, in much of the mass culture that students consume. The Donmar Warehouse in London recently staged *Julius Caesar* with an all-female cast, the setting changed to a women’s prison, and the period to a something like the present.²

Film and television versions of Austen, Dickens, and Brontë novels roll past at a regular pace; *Pride and Prejudice* is intercut with zombies, or continued as detective fiction.³ The whole notion of the franchise in mass media, from *Star Trek* to *Toy Story*, entails work within the constraints of what a subset of viewers already knows about characters, their fictive world, their interactions. Contingency and causality are as much the province of screenwriters as of historians, making the field of virtual or counterfactual history a valuable analogue for the sort of work I elicit from my students. To pick up a counterfactual ball and run with it, as Ferguson does with the UK’s sitting out the First World War in his *Virtual History* (1997) is, as an exercise in reasoning, similar in kind to guessing at the protagonist’s stratagems in *Fantomina*, had her mother been in London throughout the course of the narrative.

The guided creative interpretation task which has replaced the critical essay on the course syllabus is meant to take up this potential and address these problems—initially, and in particular, that of plagiarism. It should also serve to facilitate students’ engagement with such elements of literary-critical analysis as point of view, the reliability of narrators, backstory, and genre. Just as a playgoer with tickets to the Donmar Julius Caesar will expect a programme, a discursive appendix to creative work, framed by the creators; and visitors to art galleries and contemporary art museums often find artists’ statements posted beside or behind their works, I require that students submit a report on their creative work, detailing goals and scope and identifying the critical issues with which they engage. That is, they are expected to describe the premises, drawn from the point-of-departure text, from historiographical sources, and from secondary,

² The production, directed by Phyllida Lloyd, ran from 30 November 2012 to 9 February 2013.
³ I suspect that *Tropic Thunder* is a very densely veiled version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, but that is another paper.
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literary critical literature, which ground their conclusions that a narrative might develop in a certain way after the given closure, that a character might see events in a distinct way, or—more adventurously—that the intertextuality of texts that clearly exploit and play with the conventions of genre might be manifest through an invocation and manipulation of a different genre, should the point-of-departure text’s programme be carried, in the imagination, to another time, and another place.

While the choice of creative approach and point-of-departure text is open, suggested tasks are provided in the course syllabus specific to each text, such as a continuation of Haywood’s Fantomina, a first-person rewriting of Polidori’s third-person The Vampyre, a dramatisation of Austen’s ‘Love and Freindship’, an epistolary prequel to Richardson’s Pamela, or a Swiftian modest proposal on a contemporary topic. Alternatives to these tasks are subject to negotiation with the students who propose them. As the term progresses I cite and share with students examples of creative appropriations of texts under consideration in the classroom: engravings of scenes from Pamela, a graphic novel version of Tristram Shandy (as well as the Michael Winterbottom film), and even the history of illustrated editions of works never published with illustrations in the author’s lifetime, such as Robert Louis Stevenson’s Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde or Samuel Johnson’s Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia. (The latter ends with a translation into Arabic published in the 1950s in Cairo, whose line drawings, lacking in Orientalism, clearly portray sub-Saharan Africans.)

Much of the work submitted took up the suggested approaches from the course syllabus, meant as models but not excluded from consideration. By far the most common point-of-departure text was Eliza Heywood’s Fantomina, in which narrative closure is achieved by rather abruptly sending the nameless protagonist to a convent in France. No amount of classroom work on social and legal control of sexuality or on the changing status of women across social classes can, it seems, prevent students from reading Fantomina in a conventional romantic fashion: I mainly received continuations, and those nearly consistently contrived a happy ending.⁴

⁴ Haywood’s Fantomina remained the most popular point-of-departure text in the 2012–2013 academic year: of 145 students enrolled in two groups or sections, 85 chose to submit creative assignments, of whom 21 chose Haywood, 16 Swift, and 12 Christina Rossetti’s Goblin Market. Student choices favoured the first half of the course reading list disproportionately.
That said, some assignments were surprising and impressive in their engagement with elements other than plotting. A stage version of ‘Love and Freindship’ featured visual cues borrowed from *Thelma & Louise*, props from India, and an impressively dizzying tempo, managing such turns in the plot as the overturned phaeton and the heroine’s rifling of the amiable McKenzie’s desk in search of ready cash in burlesque rather than specifically satirical fashion. (An all-female cast may have determined some of these decisions rather than the students’ perspective of the text, but the keen understanding of Austen’s humour could not be missed.) Among the Swiftian pieces, the most interesting, and the most intertextual, was a mock flyer for a company arranging coups d’état, selective assassinations, and rigged elections. In true Swiftian fashion, the flyer mimics what it mocks, beginning its imitation of the language of corporate annual reports and promotional websites with bland references to inspiration and change, rationalisation and stability, before enumerating the situations to be dealt with and cheerfully specifying the political dirty tricks on offer. Some students concerned themselves with the formal constraints of a distinct literary medium: one student rewrote *Fantomina* as a broadside ballad, complete with illustrations, while another used such cinematic techniques as jump cutting and flashbacks to illustrate the decaying psychological state of the Aubrey, the young hero of Polidori’s *The Vampyre*. The fleshing out of flattish characters also made for engagement with issues of contingency and probability, as (to provide one example) a retelling of *Fantomina* which clearly foregrounds Beauplaisir (in Haywood’s original, the protagonist’s fickle but repeatedly deceived lover) as the point-of-view character.

Assessment presented a challenge. These assignments counted for one quarter of the final course mark: students could pass and do well on the strength of their performance on a final, essay-style exam, as well as a series of participation tasks. The discursive report could be marked as one would an essay, and this counted for one quarter of one quarter, but I felt ill-equipped to assess the creativity of a creative assignment. Accordingly, I marked students on their English, their engagement with the point-of-departure text, and their effort, as well as the report.

Can this be tweaked, developed? Of course, but one wonders if group numbers and the students’ work load make the introduction of, say, an element of peer interaction to the production of these texts difficult to manage and irksome. In-class presentation or uploading of works in progress would make for wider
input and remove me from the centre of the process as the font of all assessment, but go against the grain of a survey course calendar, encouraging students to choose early over later texts in order to accommodate a collaborative process. (The chances that students will tackle December’s readings in October are nil.)

Still, these tasks do what they were meant to do: they are designed to preclude plagiarism and have proven less intimidating than academic text types. More significantly, they encourage the development of analytical skills based on the testing of counterfactual hypotheses for consistency with what is known of a work’s setting, narrative technique, characters (and their scope of action), and intended readership. The fact that they are taken up with great relish by many students, far more than the number who would strut their analytical stuff in a researched critical essay, has had the unintended but beneficial effect of making me wonder whether the teaching of narrative in my department should not be chronological, but rather approached developmentally, in a coordinated fashion, in ways that compliment and integrate each course’s approach and build on who the students are, culturally, at the age of 18 or 19.

Works Cited


Creative Writing as Interpretation in the L2 Literature Survey Classroom


Narrative as a Form of Knowledge: The Opening Statement of *Pride and Prejudice*

This article focuses on an aspect of fiction that recent developments in narratology have emphasised as fundamental to this literary genre. I refer to the recognition that narrative constitutes a fundamental form of knowledge. The cognitive dimension of the text tends, however, to be neglected in class. The reasons are not difficult to understand for this seems to be too abstract, not to say abstruse, a question to be analysed with reference to any specific passage one may discuss with undergraduate students. Alternatively, the claim that fiction and knowledge are intimately related can be regarded as a truism, if understood in the all too obvious sense that one can learn by reading a novel. Nevertheless, I think it would be productive to try to teach a text from this perspective, if only to close the increasingly wide gap that exists between our activities as researchers and teachers.

When I first thought about this, *Pride and Prejudice*—a novel that I teach to a class of second-year students—seemed to me to be the obvious choice to make. As Tony Tanner demonstrates in what remains the best introduction to the book, Austen is profoundly interested in the processes of knowledge creation. As the story of ‘a struggle towards true vision’, it can be seen as a ‘drama of recognition’ that reflects the interests and preoccupations of eighteenth-century British philosophy (1985: 8–9). We can look on its central conflict as a variation on Plato’s problem. Noam Chomsky famously defined it as the need to explain ‘how we can know so much given that we have such limited evidence’. The problem of Elizabeth Bennet is quite the reverse: ‘how can we know so little given that we have so much evidence?’ (1986: xxv). This aspect of the novel is indeed fascinating in itself and poses a considerable challenge to teachers and students alike but I soon discovered that it does not provide the most helpful example of what we mean when we say that narrative is a vital source of knowledge for even those stories which have nothing to do with epistemology do instantiate a unique mode of apprehending reality. For this reason, it could prove confusing to concentrate on this author. How, then, could I draw attention to this function of narrative
without giving up on Austen and thus depriving my students of one of the rites of passage of our degree?

The answer is to be found in the very first sentence of the text, which is quite unlike what we get in the rest of her novels, all of which begin with a direct reference to the protagonists of the story. It seems to me that the opening statement constitutes a wonderfully subtle device through which the novelist announces herself as such. It is no accident that she chooses to start her story about the complex processes of sense-making by presenting her credentials as a writer of fiction. I am of course aware that this is probably the most famous line in English fiction and has accordingly been subjected to every conceivable kind of critical analysis. It is also true that it does serve to establish from the outset the cognitive concerns of the book, narrowly understood. It highlights, that is, the idea of prejudice as the key to the plot and in so doing introduces the much-celebrated stylistic device that is the hallmark of the novel, namely, irony. But, in my view, there is more to it for the familiarity that in real life breeds contempt has a much worse effect in criticism in rendering far too many nuances of the text imperceptible. The collision between the introductory sentence and the following domestic scene is thus frequently downplayed. By contrast, what I find most striking about this initial moment is the abrupt manner in which the characters’ dialogue is presented to us. First we get a sweeping generalisation about the ‘universal truth’ of the archetypal ‘single man’ of good fortune in desperate need of a wife; then we are plunged right in the midst of a vividly particularised exchange between Mr and Mrs Bennet of Longbourn. The absence of any kind of contextualising remark or description opens a gulf between the eternal order of truth and the historically-determined household in the south of England. This radical shift of perspective from a universal to a particular point of view underscores the qualitative difference existing between theoretical abstractions and the contingent nature of, as it were, life in progress, here represented by a rather idiosyncratic married couple.

Whereas the moralist is forced to universalise his judgements, the novelist, we are made to feel, takes his cue from what is irreducibly personal. For this reason, when Tolstoy, employing a similar strategy, opens Anna Karenina by reminding us that ‘All unhappy families resemble one another, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way’, we know that the specific story that follows will necessarily concern an unhappy family, not because all novels must be
gloomy but, rather, because none is interested in experiences which ‘resemble one another’. This is immediately confirmed by the narrator:

All was upset in the Oblonskys’ house. The wife had discovered an intrigue between her husband and their former French governess, and declared that she would not continue to live under the same roof with him. This state of things had now lasted for three days, and not only the husband and wife but the rest of his family and the whole household suffered for it. (Tolstoy 2008: 3)

In Austen as in Tolstoy, the brilliance of the initial passage, it seems to me, owes much to the unobtrusive way in which it asserts the primacy of the particular over the general, thereby supplying the reader with the relevant interpretative clues right from the beginning. Life is dynamic and any theory which measures itself against it must perforce appear unnaturally static. To be sure, the epigrammatic quality of these opening statements ensures that they are best remembered. But only the drastic narrowing of focus that comes after leaves us in no doubt that we are entering the realm of fiction and not that of moral, sociological or philosophical speculation. Therein lies the key to the distinctive kind of knowledge that fiction provides.

I am of course not alone in regarding fictional stories as the sphere of the particular. To my knowledge, the most perceptive treatment of this attribute of narrative remains John Crowe Ransom’s classic study The World’s Body, in which the American essayist and poet – one of the most influential critics of his generation – argues that the peculiar nature of artistic representations can be best appreciated in comparison with what he holds to be the alternative, and now dominant, mode of formal cognition, namely, science. Ransom begins with the Aristotelian notion of art as mimesis, that is, the imitation of nature. Both art and science are a form of knowledge of nature but why are they essentially different? According to him, whereas science is primarily involved with the classification of universals, art deals with the imitation of particulars alone. Scientists look on particulars only as a step towards the establishment of what is ‘general, standard, ideal’. Conversely, the artistic representation of nature is obsessed with individuals and, to use his phrase, their ‘infinite degree of particularity’, for to be particular is to be infinitely full of detail (1968: 208). Hence, to continue with the example he gives, when a book of physics describes the trajectory of a bullet fired from
a gun through the air we ask no questions about the condition of the sky or the shape of the landscape, let alone the personality of the victim. These questions would be absurd because here all setting is irrelevant: the description does not intend to recreate nature in its inexhaustible richness. By contrast, the novelist will succeed to the extent that he or she can manage to grasp what is distinctive and singular. His object of knowledge cannot be subsumed under a class concept without losing an essential part of its meaning. One recalls, for example, Forster’s distinction between flat and round characters or the extreme case of Nabokov, whose lectures on European literature centre on things so minuscule that only a fanatic of entomology like him could invest with significance. His mania for the tiniest aspects of such great novels as Anna Karenina or Bleak House stems from his radical preference for the particular. Javier Marías’s portrait of the artist provides some examples of his critical minimalism:

One of his many obsessions was the so-called literature of ideas, as well as allegory, which is why his lectures of Joyce’s Ulysses, Kafka’s Metamorphosis, Anna Karenina or Jekyll and Hyde dealt mainly with the exact plan of the city of Dublin, the exact type of insect into which Gregor Samsa was transformed, the exact arrangement of a railway carriage on the night train from Moscow to St Peterburg in 1870, and the exact appearance of the façade of Dr Jekyll’s house. According to this particular teacher, the only way of getting any pleasure out of reading these novels was to have a very clear idea of such things. (2006: 72–73)

This being so, to return to Austen, we understand why readers, despite the narrator’s apparent invitation to universalise, do safely conclude, to the immense relief of married couples all over the world, that they are not being asked to take Mr Bennet as ‘the husband’ and Mrs Bennet as ‘the wife’.

Having defined the dialectic between art and science, Ramson goes on to put it in historical perspective. For him, this dualism widens continually by reason of the aggression of science. As science more and more completely reduces the world to its types and forms, art, replying, must invest it again with body... [Mimesis] aims at a kind of cognition which is unknown to pure science and which grows increasingly difficult for us in practical life. It wants to recover its
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individuals, abandoned in science, in business, in affairs. It has a right to them since they are there. (1968: 206)

Assuming that it is not too late for us, teachers and students of the twenty-first century, my purpose is to bring home to my class that in fiction, as in art generally, the individual is ultimate. The matter is fascinating in itself but, on reaching this point, one may begin to wonder whether to inflict this reflection on a group of second-year students may not prove an effective means of immunizing them against literature for the rest of their lives.

My hope is that this is not necessarily the case because the principle can be taught in a practical way. The theoretical component of the analysis can be reduced to a minimum by having a preliminary discussion about the contribution of narrative to our understanding of the world. For example, a useful and very simple exercise is to look at those disciplines that have nothing to do with literature but take, in some of their forms, the epithet ‘narrative’. How does the discipline change when it becomes narrative? This effect can be illustrated with reference to, say, theology, to mention a subject in which second-year students take a natural interest. This is how the author of a recent monograph on narrative theology justifies the novelty of his approach:

What do we mean by the words “narrative theology”? A narrative theology is one that starts not with abstract first principles, but with a particular story; it is deductive rather than inductive. The story it examines is ‘embodied’ in a community’s tradition, and is usually taken to sum up or encapsulate the community’s beliefs about itself, the world and God. This is in contrast to the approach that begins with abstract first principles that are assumed to hold good for all times and places. Such first principles . . . will tend towards universal truths and exceptionless norms; however, narrative theology, anchored in a particular community . . . may be more modest in scope and may imply that universalism is a mirage. (Lucie-Smith 2007: 1)

Narrative theology may well be an acquired taste but its existence confirms that to transmit knowledge by means of telling a story is to test the truth of received verities against the ever-changing, unstable nature of the historical community, which is at once unified and multiple. It is the privilege of the novelist to reflect this fact in all its complexity.
Jordi Coral

Beyond introductory remarks of this kind, my teaching strategy is to try to illuminate Austen's passage through an analysis of the lesson about the supremacy of the individual in fiction that another major novelist learnt from it. It is sometimes the case that the most revealing interpretation of a literary piece is to be found not in criticism but in the creative work of a different author. To my mind, the most penetrating insight into the meaning of Austen's dictum is offered by George Eliot's allusion to it in chapter 9 of *Daniel Deronda*. I would like the students to discover for themselves this narrative principle by using Eliot's text. Needless to say, it would be pointless to envisage the exercise as a school-like comparison. Nor should it be approached as an illustration of the otherwise very useful notion of intertextuality. Rather, for the exercise to succeed, it must demonstrate to the students that it takes a first-rate novelist like Eliot fully to appreciate the narratological import of the opening line. Indeed, the Victorian author is uniquely suited to the task of rendering explicit the axiom so subtly implied by Austen's famous line, herself being at once a keen admirer of her predecessor, a truly great novelist, and an extremely powerful thinker.

The connection between the two passages is not difficult to perceive. In the first paragraph, Eliot's narrator describes the reaction of the parishioners of Wancester to the spread of a rumour about the arrival of a new tenant for Diplow Hall (2000: 97). Like Austen's 'surrounding families', they immediately rejoice in the great expectations generated by the event. As one would anticipate from a Victorian novelist, Eliot gives us a fuller representation of the community with its class distinctions. But whether high-or low-ranking, all the characters exhibit a tendency to believe that events will take the course that suits them best, automatically identifying the new tenant, Mr Grandcourt, as the 'single man of good fortune in want of a wife'. This they do on instinct, following the dictates of a genetic endowment inherited from their ancestors in *Pride and Prejudice*.

That the rumour is one 'which was to be rejoiced in on abstract grounds' (Eliot 2000: 97) confirms that, at least since Cervantes, it is the thankless task of the realist writer to adjust his characters' illusions to the prosaic side of life; and, what is more, that in this case it is Austen who reminds Eliot about this perennial duty of novelists. Crucially, however, the principal tribute to *Pride and Prejudice* is paid only after the perspective has been allowed to broaden beyond the particular. The narrator, it would seem, begins to universalise, embedding the episode into a knowledge frame defined by the age-old debate on nature
versus culture. Philosophers who make a case for natural gender inequality on the grounds that male birds are better endowed, we are told, shall not be heeded: ‘It is the uneven allotment of nature that the male bird alone has the tuft, but we have not yet followed the advice of hasty philosophers who would have us copy nature entirely in these matters’ (Eliot 2000: 98) This amounts to stressing the cultural, and therefore conventional, essence of the social roles we play, especially those of husband and wife. That George Eliot had great difficulty in adjusting to the role of conventional wife is a well-known fact. Towards the end of her life, after the death of George Henry Lewes, she married John Walker Cross, a banker who was 20 years younger. This was a legal, and hence respectable, union. But she was not born to be a respectable married woman. During their honeymoon in Venice, Cross became depressed and was observed to make a sudden leap from the balcony of their hotel into the Grand Canal. His real motives remain unknown but Eliot’s biographers speculate about ‘the age gap and the intelligence gap between husband and wife’ (Ashton 2004: 742). Be that as it may, after the narrator has drawn our attention to such abstract matters, we are ready for the explicit formulation of Austen’s principle. Some readers of this story, the narrator goes on, may deny the plausibility of the reactions here represented on the basis that this is not how they would behave under similar circumstances:

[They] will doubtless regard it as incredible that people should construct matrimonial prospects on the mere report that a bachelor of good fortune and possibilities was coming within reach, and will reject the statement as a mere outflow of gall: they will aver that neither they nor their first cousins have minds so unbridled; and that in fact this is not human nature, which would know that such speculations might turn out to be fallacious, and would therefore not entertain them. (Eliot 2000: 98)

Let them be warned that ‘nothing is here narrated of human nature generally: the history in its present stage concerns only a few people in a corner of Wessex’ (2000: 98). The narrative principle stands thus revealed. Like Austen’s opening line, Eliot’s disclaimer invokes the universal only to assert the ascendancy of the particular over it. According to Ransom’s regressive history of the intellect, science threatens art with extinction. We have the precedent of Greek philosophy, whose rationalism put an end to mythological discourses. That this tribute to Austen is
paid by the scientific novelist par excellence suggests that this time storytelling may survive. Let us hope we can persuade students that it deserves to do.

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Debating the Narrative Voice in Modernist Fiction

This paper examines how students perceive the narrative voice in a course on modernism that they take in their final or final-but-one year. The students who regularly attended class, and therefore participated online class forums, averaged about 25; 10 came from the newest syllabus structure, for whom the subject is voluntary, and 15 from an older structure, for whom the subject is obligatory. The course focuses on two classic modernist texts, James Joyce’s *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* and Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*. Complementary material is used to introduce the former; the latter is preceded by a reading of shorter texts, such as manifestos and essays, on a considerable number of subjects by authors such as André Breton, Wyndham Lewis or T.S. Eliot, to name but a few. In this way, students are exposed to a wide range of material enabling them to identify modernism as—at least—a European movement rather than as merely part of English literature.

The course begins with a detailed and patient reading of Woolf’s ‘Modern Fiction’ and ‘Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’. Emphasis is placed on three topics: first, her rejection of ‘materialism’, the realism of the great nineteenth-century novel, which she argues is not appropriate for the modern age with its greater, more scientific knowledge of psychology; second, the account of the mind receiving ‘a myriad impressions […] from all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms’ (Woolf 2005: 898). Subsequently, in a convention-free work of fiction, ‘there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style’ (899). The straightforward language of that pronouncement is necessarily a challenge to students unfamiliar with modernism, as it not only challenges their basic convictions of how and why they read fiction, but also they are accustomed to think, study and write about the narrator and literature in precisely the terms Woolf refutes. ‘The accepted style’ is a useful indication that modernism, despite introducing new contemporary

1 ‘Prosa anglesa’ & ‘Prosa anglesa del segle xx’.
Andrew Monnickendam

cconcerns and events—machines, speed and mass warfare, for example—is best approached if seen as an attempt to change one’s perception of the world through estrangement, hence, a continuous marker throughout the course is Ezra Pound’s war-cry ‘make it new!’

Woolf’s emphasis that we look inwards, that we inspect the dark places of the human mind, entails a reassessment of the very texture of fiction, and, more concretely, the role and function of the narrative voice. The fact that innumerable atoms descend alters the narrative voice: it no longer can be an active, experience-moulding force, but one which is itself moulded; in short, it tends increasingly to what is received, to what appears to be passivity. This is made apparent in those most widely-studied opening, moocow lines of Joyce’s novel. How can the narrative voice be identified? Particularly helpful is the analysis provided by Jeri Johnson in the introduction to the OUP edition:

[Joyce] moved the narrative centre of consciousness from a wholly independent third-person narrator to one which exists between Stephen and third-person narrator... Events and characters of Portrait take their significance from Stephen. While there is still a third-person narrator, that narrator presents Stephen’s perceptions: the attitudes towards others and events are his; they are ‘seen’ by or ‘focalized’ by him. And because they are viewed by him, they reflect something about him. All go to the ends of characterizing the young artist-in-the-making. (2000: xiii)

While this is a relatively simple idea in purely abstract forms: the distinction between the first and third-person narrator is blurred so that Stephen's perceptions become the end rather than means of narrative construction, its application to the text is a much harder enterprise. At many points during the course, it was clear that this concept is temporarily put out of sight and mind, as the more tangible, handier, traditional omniscient and first-person authors reappear as the organisational forces. This is partly due, it has to be said, to online study guides which read modernist texts as if they were not modernist at all, as if they were built on character, love interest and so on.

In order to maintain the Johnson formula present in their mind, I posted a forum. Students are required to participate in six out of 16 forums in the course; they are free to decide which. In this particular case, the forum summarised the Johnson formula and simply asked students to identify passages where they found
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	his in-between narrative voice to be both evident and significant. There were 18 postings of between 90 and several hundred words. All respondents correctly identified the nature of the narrative voice, it was a subject we had also worked on in class, and applied their ideas with a greater or lesser degree of success.

Nine respondents identified the opening chapter, and particularly the opening lines, as the clearest illustration of Joyce's technique, right down to the opening words ‘once upon a time’. The baby-talk and the bedwetting episode were identified by several respondents as particularly clarifying moments; they also felt that the episode when Stephen is teased about whether he kisses his mother and the Christmas dinner scene were also good examples. One especially interesting comment considered the pandybat beating as an outstanding example. It stated that the incident is narrated by the third person, but that its intensity is so great that its account of suffering 'could only be Stephen talking'. Although this sounds very much like an intelligent but nevertheless subjective observation, the respondent backs it up by insisting that the literariness of the scene, replete with rhetorical devices, shows that the childish consciousness is that of an artist, 'able to describe something painful in a way that is beautiful'.

In a manner that was not projected, several respondents identified passages that dealt with the novel's controversial portrayal of women—itself a topic of discussion both in class and in forums—whether real, his mother, Eileen or the prostitute, or more imaginary, the girl in the beach epiphany or Mercedes from *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Although one student successfully linked three, and others two, none was able to articulate an argument about this coincidence, neither was it the point of the exercise nor necessary to do so, but it is curious that the mystical, mysterious, and brief appearances by females should all be identified as places where the narrative voices most clearly intermingle. For, if the text swings between hate and veneration for women, and if ambivalence towards sexuality is the least controversial of interpretative conclusions, then either on purpose or by accident, this question has revealed how crucial formal questions are to our understanding of the novel.

Of the other commentaries, I would like to highlight two of the most observant. Two students pointed out that the switch is most obvious—in terms of length—in

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2 The forum is an intranet service, so although students are identified to other users, their anonymity to non-users has been respected.
the fire sermon, but beyond some very cautious statements about interiorisation, analysis was restricted to what had already been discussed in class at some length. On a more positive note, three students showed awareness of how much the novel is a portrait of a young male who will become an artist rather than of a young artist. In particular one observed in the introductory passage which precedes the prostitute episode—beginning ‘[t]he veiled evenings’ (Joyce 2000: 85)—that there is an air of nostalgia, that ‘positively-connoted adjectives abound’, but added that ‘maybe these [rhetorical] devices are too obvious (for example, almost every word in the passage quoted is alliterative’. In short, the narrative voice, while using the third person, illustrates that however much the text focuses on Stephen’s sensitivity, it is still markedly immature.

*To the Lighthouse* presents similar but more complex questions about the narrative voice. The major one is that while in *Portrait* the blurring never obscures the fact that the stream of consciousness is irrefutably Stephen’s and only Stephen’s, the second novel relies heavily on what Eric Auerbach calls ‘multipersonal representation of consciousness’ (Auerbach 1973: 536). One class was dedicated solely to Auerbach’s essay, ‘The Brown Stocking’, which remains a useful guide to the novel’s style despite the fact that its many literary allusions and its secondary function as the concluding chapter of *Mimesis* make its second half rather inaccessible. Students have to be aware that the first section of the novel looks similar to the *Portrait*, in that it focuses on one person, Mrs. Ramsay, but at many moments her thoughts are unapproachable, and the novel strives to allow its characters to partially reveal what remains a mystery, as ‘[e]xternal events have actually lost their hegemony’ (538). In addition, as stated above, there are several streams; they merge into one another, and, as Auerbach argues, passages flow into each other whether the minds to which they belong are those of characters who are either materially present or physically absent. All-in-all, such analysis indicates a much more radical approach—time/sequence is virtually abolished—than the former text, presenting a considerable challenge to the student reader.

The forum for this particular question did not elicit as many responses as other forums of a more immediately attractive sort, such as on the figure of Mrs Ramsay, on Lily’s picture, or on the breakdown of the love-plot (Paul and Minta in section three). This might seem rather disappointing, but perhaps it is more significant to note that the other forums were designed so as to require an understanding
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of Auerbach’s hypothesis. In other words, his ideas might not have received much direct attention, but they were definitely applied in the other debates on the novel. The Auerbach forum had two separate but interlinked questions: one required students to identify stylistic similarities and dissimilarities between the two novels, and the second—a purposefully challenging question—required students to see if they could identify any holes in Auerbach’s account.

In this forum, due to the high level of understanding of both primary and secondary material needed for a coherent answer, it is not surprising that only the top 10% of the class attempted to tackle this question; that said, the answers were extremely satisfactory, demonstrating an extremely sophisticated level of comprehension, bearing in mind that the students are studying English as a second language. One amusing contrast set on one side the prostitute from chapter two of the Portrait seen exclusively from Stephen’s view, ‘whereas if we had the prostitute’s version, I think she’d probably be sick and tired of tearful virgin boys’, in marked contrast to the Ramsays in the boat in section three, where, in addition to the father, ‘the thoughts of James and Cam are made one’. Another student juxtaposed Lily and Bankes’ thoughts as they stroll together with Stephen’s seaside epiphany, where the vision and rapture are only his. A third compared the two meals: Stephen’s view of the Christmas dinner and Mrs. Ramsay’s ‘triumphal’ one. The student was not only able to identify the childish vision of the former with the multivocality of the latter, but did so without losing sight of the fact that both fall within the category of social meals and ritual. Another interesting result of this forum was that several respondents used, as primary evidence of Joyce’s univocality, the fire sermon, which, as I have previously remarked, was an episode that had received little developed commentary in the Joyce forums. In this particular instance, the students had come to a clearer realisation of stylistic techniques by reassessing one text through the lens of a second, so they were able to both understand modernist techniques as a whole and variations within the movement and its different authors. The fact that no respondent was willing to see anything debatable in Auerbach’s essay might seem disappointing, in fact in previous years, there had been greater participation in a similar forum, but I believe it is more important to underline the high level of the existent replies than the number of participants.

I would draw the following conclusions. First, both forums successfully permitted discussion at a high level, due in part to students’ dedication, and to
some careful preparation by the instructor. This is not meant as a self-fulfilling, self-congratulatory statement, but rather an attempt to wean away students from the belief that literature is necessarily mimetic, in the traditional sense of reflecting a society, a phenomenon or an event. This deeply implanted view that literature necessarily has to represent something material is part of the deeply ingrained culture of political correctness that, in my belief, makes students believe all literature follows the same rules, in whatever century and in whatever genre. Second, that complex ideas, like Johnson’s and Auerbach’s can be dealt with and understood by students if the challenge—of which the forum is the concrete result—is both simultaneously demanding and feasible. These conditions can only be set up with adequate groundwork. Third, and as consequence of the former, this course and these forums sadly represent one of the few opportunities given to students to inquire, consider and study questions of form. Fourth, these forums, in most cases, were built up sometimes by direct reference to the instructor’s initial proposal, but, and more fruitfully, by replying to other students’ answer in a non-confrontational, mature and intellectually stimulating manner. Fifth, and finally, if Johnson’s hypothesis is that the narrative voice lies between the first and third persons, the students’ contribution to the forum shows that their personal opinions lie at the intersection of their own understanding of both primary and secondary material, in other words, by being asked direct questions about the literary texts and the narrative voice, they have used their own intelligence in a way that reliance on internet sources, particularly those aimed at students reading canonical texts, inevitably stifles.

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