

**MEANS OF MEANING MAKING IN
LITERARY ART**
FOCALIZATION, MODE OF NARRATION, AND
GRANULARITY

by

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Abstract [Heading 1]

Instead of considering key concepts of narratology such as focalization (perspective) or mode of narration (teller vs. reflector, as Franz K. Stanzel has it) simply as criteria for a typology of texts, this paper intends to activate them as ‘symbolic forming tools’ or ‘means of meaning making’ in literary art. The fundamental claim is that an author can activate or apply them in various ways—experimenting with them—in view of obtaining given meaning effect within one and the same text.

Through analysis of examples it is shown how authors’ variations on the focalization, the narrative mode, and the granularity axes produce semiotic effects amenable to systematic characterization.

A recurrent concern in the paper is the representation of consciousness in literary art.

1. Introduction

In previous works I have tried to characterize art genres in Ernst Cassirerean terms of ‘symbolic forms’ (Bundgaard 2002, 2004, 2008). Roughly, this implies that each art genre is defined by the tools it uses to shape its matter in view of obtaining certain meaning effects. In visual art, for example, such tools could be ‘perspective,’ ‘non-generic point of view’ or ‘the Gestalt laws of perception of forms.’ In narrative art, it could be the canonical, cyclic plot structure. Importantly, these means of composing and organizing aesthetic matter—the creative ‘stuff’—are not blindly or mechanically applied. Rather they can themselves be submitted to variations, experimentations, which in turn directly trigger certain meaning effects. The craftsmanship of artists consists in the explicit or tacit mastery over these symbolic forms of meaning making. In visual art, it is easy to show how systematic experimentation with perspective serves the purpose of shaping certain intended meanings (Bundgaard 2008, Stjernfelt 2007, ch. 13); similarly, it is not difficult to pinpoint the effects linked to principled deviations from the prototypical narrative schema (Bundgaard and Østergaard 2007).

The present paper is developed along the same lines as outlined above. Its focus of attention are the meaning effects produced by the author, and the means thanks to which he obtains them. Before coming to grips with the concept of ‘meaning effect’ and the ‘symbolic forming tools’ thanks to which the latter are triggered, a caveat may prove useful. It follows from my primary concern that, here, I will not explicitly address higher order, more

or less ontological issues concerning, say, the existence or non-existence of 3rd person narrators, or the number of relevant levels of narration (author => implied author => narrator => etc.). Rather, my intent is quite local: to develop insight into the way in which we can objectively track down meaning construction in literary art. However, when I frame the issue, as I do it here, in terms of ‘aesthetic stuff,’ on the one hand, and ‘aesthetic tools for meaning making,’ on the other, or when I establish a formal analogy between literary and plastic meaning construction, I obviously resort to, if not a hidden agenda, then at least some default assumptions. The most important of these is that I do consider art—whatever genre of art—as an art of transmission based on the *analytical* distinction between the represented subject matter and the way in which it has been intended or presented. In short, it sometimes does make a difference—it shapes meaning differently—if I tell my story in 1st or 3rd person, and it does make a difference if, within each of these types of narration, I do it authorially or figurally, heterodiegetically or homodiegetically,¹ the Copperfield or the Holden Caulfield way, etc. The type of

¹ These terms have been coined by Gérard Genette, as regards the latter two, and by Franz K. Stanzel as regards the former two. They do belong to the canon of narratological concepts, but should of course be explained, be it as roughly as here: authorial vs. figural designates in Stanzel (1983) narrative situations with, respectively, an overtly narrating instance and a covert, inconspicuous transmitter instance, say: a protagonist through whose consciousness we access the story world (without him assuming any narrator-role). Genette (1980, 1988) defines heterodiegesis as a narrative with a narrator which is not part of the story world, and homodiegesis as a narrative with a narrator who is part of the story world.

narration, the mode of narration, and, occasionally, the narrator are parade examples of what I consider as basic symbolic forming tools in literary art: you apply one of them, it makes a semiotic difference; you apply one of them and submit it to significant deviations, it makes yet another semiotic difference. In a nutshell: if I'm much closer to Franz K. Stanzel than to Käte Hamburger, in assuming some sort of mediacy, this affinity concerns the fact that I consider the mediating level as the one at which you can define those tools thanks to which authors construct their meaning universes. Mediacy—and thus narration—consists in asking “what happens if I tell things this way, and not that way?” (and semiotic analysis of texts consists in asking what is the meaning effect of telling things this and not that way?”). I gather this question could be asked and dealt with as a rough definition of mediacy without me endorsing any expensive ontology as regards the mediated ‘aesthetic stuff.’ It does not follow from the above that the aesthetic stuff pre-exists in some substantial form before its mediation. It only exists counterfactually as, say, the thing Kafka's initial first-person and his final third-person version of *The Castle* have in common and may be considered as different versions of: to assume a “narrative function” (as Hamburger 1957 has it) is to master the counterfactual constructions that the “what happens if I tell it this way”-question gives rise to.

Now a word on ‘meaning effect.’ This simply (and broadly) reads the mental state of the reader correlated to a given textual phenomenon, assessed either with respect

to its form (expression), content (represented event or state of affairs), or mode of narration. A meaning effect is a cognitive response to a textual stimulus: meaning effects therefore cover the whole spectrum going from purely emotional responses to highly elaborate interpretations establishing the meaning of this and that textual element and its relation to these other elements, and ultimately of the text as a whole. Meaning effects are subjective; they occur in the reader and may be influenced by personal history, mental set, sensibility, idiosyncrasies, etc. The concept is therefore psychological—the experience of meaningfulness is for sure something that goes on from the skin and inwards—, but not for that matter ‘psychologistic,’ that is reducible to the reader’s personal and cognitive capacities. Meaning effects are by and large constrained and motivated by objective features—viz. the meaning shaping performed by the author thanks to the symbolic forming tools he has at his disposal. In other terms: the theoretic reading of texts consists in motivating meaning effects by systematically linking them to publicly accessible textual features which can be rationally accounted for in terms of the meaning making operations or symbolic forming tools that have given shape to them.

The following is intended to illustrate the above claim in three different ways with respect to three different parameters of meaning making: 1. Focalization; 2. Type and mode of narration; 3. Granularity. Even though these three elements, of course, do not exhaust the list of literary symbolic forming tools, we shall see that

they are key to the expression of consciousness in literature (or they play a key role in formally sustaining the representation of consciousness in literature): consciousness, not simply in the sense of a local content of a conscious state defined in terms of a single emotion or a series of simple judgment, rather in terms of a general mental set, the overall character of what “it feels like” to be an individual like the protagonist. It should again be stressed (and thus constantly kept in mind) that these tools are ... tools: means for shaping meaning in a given context, and therefore not themselves connected with a predeterminate meaning or a fixed function (in short: the use of one and the same of these tools in different contexts may produce different meaning effects).

2. Three tools for meaning making

2.1 Focalization

By focalization is trivially meant the point of view from which things are seen. It can be embedded within a sentient being who does not only perceive, but also explicitly evaluates, judges, thinks, etc. Focalization or perspective can also be disembodied, disentangled from any concretely perceiving being and located at some narrating or telling point of view in space. The latter can all as easily as the former evaluate, make judgments or respond emotionally, as is seen from Len Talmy's constructed example.

[1]

Its body **glistening**, the porpoise leapt **gracefully** out of the water, rose **majestically** into the air, executed a **beautiful** somersault at the top of its arc, and dove back into the water **barely** perturbing the surface (Talmy 2000, 433).

Bolded words specify consciousness in this respect ('glistening' is a perceptual judgment implying a proximal point of view; 'gracefully,' 'majestically' and 'beautiful' evaluate the leap and specify the emotional response; whereas 'barely' implies a counterfactual representation, an expectation (say, with more than mere perturbation of the surface)).

My claim is here simply that there exists a focalization axis in linguistic and literary representation of consciousness. This axis of course covers the spectrum from internal to non-focalization (in the sense of internal or external perspective, *vision-avec* vs. *vision-dehors*). So in one end we have fully embodied perspective, fully internal focalization, and in the other end an abstractly located and disembodied perspective. Obviously, it contains a critical point where the perspective changes from internal tonon-internal, or vice-versa. This does not imply, however, that it is not subtly graduated; it not only distinguishes between internal and external, it also, and importantly, accommodates different qualitative degrees of internal focalization, since all sorts of internal focalizations exist; i.e. perspective can be embedded in sentient beings to which we can have varying kinds of

access: sometimes we only see things through a given character's eyes without knowing what he actually feels or thinks; sometimes we have indirect, general access to his thought (in terms of what Cohn (1978) called "psychonarration" or Wallace Chafe "verbally uncommitted thought"²); other times we have indirect, but precise access to his thoughts (as in free indirect thought or represented thought), and, finally, we may have direct access to his thoughts (as in direct thought).

The point is now that this axis is not only—as the correlative axis in Stanzel's circle (1984)—a tool for distributing different texts in a typological landscape with respect to focalization. Rather, it constitutes a symbolic forming tool within one and the same text in that variations of it (by means of "turning" the focalization "button" up or down, as it were) may profile situations in specific ways, i.e. trigger certain correlated meaning effects. Wallace Chafe (1994) has supplied with a marvelous case in point. The passage represents the culminating point of Hemingway's "The Big Two-Hearted River: Part II" where Nick succeeds in landing a very large trout:

[2]

[a] He thought of the trout somewhere on the bottom, holding himself steady over the gravel, far down below the light, under the logs, with

² Verbally uncommitted thought designates a representation of a given character's thoughts which does not necessarily correspond to what literally went through his mind. It gives verbal shape to its contents, without pretending to reflect its concise character.

the hook in his jaw, Nick knew the trout's teeth would cut through the snell of the hook. The hook would imbed itself in his jaw. **[b]** He'd bet the trout was angry. Anything that size would be angry. That was a trout. He had been solidly hooked. Solid as a rock. He felt like a rock, too, before he started off. By God, he was a big one. **[c]** By God, he was the biggest one I ever heard of (Hemingway, 177; Chafe 1994, 257; my letters in bold).

Chafe acutely observes the intensification of internal focalization through the passage, that is to say the more and more direct or less and less mediated access to Nick's online consciousness (a progression which is unique in this story): from verbally uncommitted thought in the section marked with **[a]**, through a section with plain indirect free thought **[b]**, to the final exclamation **[c]**, in almost direct thought: past tense has been maintained, but for the first and only time in the story an *I* pops up. Chafe's concludes convincingly:

It is a story without a clear plot, but the devices employed in [the passage]—moving from verbally uncommitted thought to verbatim indirect thought [free indirect thought] to (almost) direct thought—make it appear that Nick's encounter with this unusually large trout

constituted the high point of his experience
(Chafe 1994, 257).

In short, here is not only a form-content match—say between increasing direct access to Nick’s consciousness and the intensity of the experience: rather, the very fact that Nick is experiencing something intense is yielded by the very variation on the focalization axis. Notice that, interestingly, the proto-epiphanic character of the experience, and what it feels like to be Nick in that situation, is not specified by any single lexical item or grammatical construction. It is, again, provided by the focalization device.

Now, obviously, if focalization really is a genuine narrative meaning making device, it should be possible to find different applications of it: that is to say not only variations toward increasing empathy in a protagonist’s consciousness, but also, say, motivated variation away from the protagonist’s consciousness, de-focalization, as it were. Here follow three cognate examples of this phenomenon. The first two of them are by Joyce. Here the respective passages—from “Eveline” and “Clay”—correspond to the climax of the story (or in “Clay” to what follows immediately after the climax). So we have the same situation as in Hemingway—namely a crucial experience at the represented level—but an inverse mode of presenting it—namely one of de-focalization:

[3]

[Eveline finally decides not to leave Dublin
with her fiancé Frank]

A bell clanged upon her heart. She felt him
seize her hand:

—Come!

All the seas of the world tumbled about her
heart. He was drawing her into them: he would
drown her. She gripped with both hands at the
iron railing.

—Come!

No! No! No! It was impossible. Her hands
clutched, the iron in frenzy. Amid the seas she
sent a cry of anguish!

—Eveline! Evvy!

He rushed beyond the barrier and called to
her to follow. He was shouted at to go on but he
still called to her. She set her white face to him,
passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave
him no sign of love or farewell or recognition
(Joyce, *Dubliners*, “Eveline”, p. 43).

As most of the lines in this passage, the whole story is an unfolding of Eveline’s immediate perceptions, memories of her past life in Dublin and imaginations as regards her future life with Frank. The reader steps inside her consciousness in the opening lines and follows her divagations and sensations till the bitter end. Remarkably, however, her point of view is abruptly abandoned at the very moment she decides not to leave, i.e. when she’s irreversibly left alone. In “No! No! No! It was impossible” we of course have a piece of represented thought or indirect free thought, whereas in “She set her

white face to him, passive, ...” we are suddenly, and for the very first time, experiencing Eveline from the outside, from Frank’s point of view. In short, her point of view is abandoned, defocalization takes place (with sporadic focalization in Franck), at the very moment she herself is left alone. An inverse analogue to Hemingway’s meaning making device.

Basically, the same is the case in “Clay,” where Maria is asked to sing after having got first the ominous clay—but “that was no play”—and then, eventually, the prayer-book. Again, the story has from the outset been internally focalized in Maria, and again it changes at the culminating point:

[4]

At last the children grew tired and sleepy and Joe asked Maria would she not sing some little song before she went, one of the old songs. Mrs Donnelly said *Do, please, Maria!* and so Maria had to get up and stand beside the piano. Mrs Donnelly bade the children be quiet and listen to Maria’s song. Then she played the prelude and said *Now, Maria!* and Maria blushing very much, began to sing in a tiny quavering voice. She sang *I Dreamt that I Dwelt*, and when she came to the second verse she sang again [...].

But no one tried to show her mistake; and when she had ended her song Joe was very much moved. He said that there was no time like the long ago and no music for him like

poor old Balfe, what ever other people might say; and his eyes filled up so much with tears that he could not find what he was looking for and in the end he had to ask his wife to tell him where the corkscrew was (Joyce, *Dubliners*, “Clay”, ending lines).

From “Maria, blushing very much, began to sing in a tiny quavering voice” focalization changes and remains shifted, i.e. external with respect to Maria (and internal with respect to Joe): Maria is from now on seen from the outside (“blushing very much”), and the assessment of the quality of her voice is clearly not hers. Aside the obvious finality of that shift—to represent the pitiful character of her existence obvious to anyone but to herself—it also makes out a formal counterpart to the represented situation: her dereliction is further emphasized by the loss of perspective, as it were.³

³ A third and classical example by Joyce could be mentioned: the confession scene in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. It has been extensively commented on by Dorrit Cohn (1978, p. 102f.), and by Franz K. Stanzel (1978, p. 250) who strongly emphasizes the semiotic effects of the transposition from internal to external focalization. It reads: “The slide was shot to suddenly. The penitent came out. He was next. He stood up in terror and walked blindly into the box.

At last it had come. He knelt in the silent gloom and raised his eyes to the white crucifix suspended above him. God could see that he was sorry. He would tell all his sins. His confession would be long, long. Everybody in the chapel would know then what a sinner he had been. Let them know. It was true. But God had promised to forgive him if he was sorry. He was sorry. He clasped his hands and raised them towards the white form, praying with his darkened eyes, praying with all his trembling body, swaying his head to and fro like a lost creature, praying with whimpering lips” (Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, P. 143).

The final example, in the same vein, but with a different meaning effect, are the closing lines of Julio Cortázar's "A Leg of the Journey," where the protagonist, Diana, fatally—and fantastically—blends with a portrait, seen in a museum, of a dead woman sitting in a room which is identical with the one Diana is presently sitting in.:

[5]

[...] she still had many cigarettes to smoke; she could lean on the table and allow her gaze to lose itself in the darkness of the far wall. She could leave whenever she wanted, of course, and she could also stay here; perhaps it would be beautiful to see whether the sunlight crept up the wall, continuing to lengthen the shadow of her body, of the table and of the chair. Or would it remain like this, changing nothing, the light as motionless as all the rest, as motionless as herself and the motionless smoke? (Cortázar, *A Leg of the Journey*, closing lines).

The point is here that Diana, quite literally, conflates with the woman portrayed in the painting she had seen in the

As Stanzel observes the focalization of the passage is initially internal while at the end Stephen is clearly seen from the outside (as an almost verbatim counterpart to the description of Eveline as a "helpless animal", who by the way also moves her "lips in silent fervent prayer" (Joyce, "Eveline", p. 42). Again, the change from internal to external corresponds quite precisely to the protagonist's self-experience of dereliction: we leave Stephen's point of view at the very moment when he really feels like having being left radically on his own.

museum: she ceases to exist in any standard three-dimensional of being, as it were. Now this effect obtains, with quite some virtuosity, in the very last sentence which sets out with internal focalization, in the vein of the preceding pieces of either verbally uncommitted thought or indirect free thought (Diana musing over this and that), and ends up with a clear non-internal focalization: the view of the petrified Diana and the smoke from her cigarette which, *per impossibile*, is motionless. Here, focalization changes as Diana's consciousness seemingly switches off the light.

To conclude. Variations on the focalization axis may have obvious meaning effects. In [2], from Chafe (1994), variation *selects* the passage in question as the narrative climax of the story (an event whose experienced importance could otherwise have gone by unnoticed). In the two following Joyce examples, [3] and [4] shifted focalization is *a formal, presentational counterpart* to the content of the represented scenery (dereliction of the protagonists). In [5], the shift in focalization simply conveys what happens: Diana's fatal identification with the portrayed woman.

2.2. Mode of narration

The term mode of narration is here used in a loose Stanzel-sense: i.e. it concerns the degree to which and the way in which a narrating instance is either overtly present in the text or encapsulated within one of the protagonists'

consciousness/viewpoint. We are thus dealing with a sort of teller-reflector axis, again in Stanzel's sense, with all sorts of possible text tokens defined by their approximate position on that axis. Now, once again, my point here is not to use this category as a typological tool, but—exactly as above—to consider it as a means of meaning making within one and the same text. In other words, just as variations on the focalization axis can be shown to have genuine semiotic consequences, so can any given artist vary on the mode of narration axis in view of obtaining certain meaning effects.

Here are some examples:

[6]

Robert Cohn was once middle-weight boxing champion of Princeton. Do not think that I am very much impressed by that as a boxing title, but it meant a lot to Cohn. He cared nothing for boxing, in fact, he disliked it, but he learned it painfully and thoroughly to counteract the feeling of inferiority and shyness he had felt on being treated as a Jew at Princeton.

Hemingway, *And the Sun Also Rises*, opening lines.

[7]

We sat close against each other. I put my arm round her and she rested against me comfortably. It was very hot and bright and the

houses looked sharply white. We turned out on the Gran Vía.

‘Oh, Jake,’ Brett said, ‘we could have had such a damned good time together.’

Ahead was a mounted policeman in khaki directing traffic. He raised his baton. The car slowed suddenly, pressing Brett against me.

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘Isn’t it pretty to think so.’

(Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, closing lines.)

[8]

TRUE! - nervous - very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses—not destroyed—not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily—how calmly I can tell you the whole story.
(Poe, *The Tell-Tale Heart*, opening lines)

[9]

Oh God! what could I do? I foamed - I raved - I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder - louder - louder! And

still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled.
Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God!
- no, no! They heard! - they suspected! - they
knew! - they were making a mockery of my
horror!-this I thought, and this I think. But
anything was better than this agony! Anything
was more tolerable than this derision! I could
bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt
that I must scream or die! and now - again! -
hark! louder! louder! louder! louder!
"Villains!" I shrieked, "dissemble no more! I
admit the deed! - tear up the planks! here, here!
- It is the beating of his hideous heart!"
(Poe, *The Tell-Tale Heart*, closing lines)

The idea here is simply that while these texts set out with something we could consider an armchair 1st person narrator, an overt teller, narrating *post festum*, dominating the temporal horizon of the events, they both end up in a sort of reflector no man's land, pretty far away from the initial armchair, with, say, discursive mastery reduced to pure perception, sensation, etc. In neither of the above texts there is a teller left, or a narrator occupying an unambiguous spatiotemporal position from which the story is told;⁴ In Hemingway's case, the contrast is of

⁴ The significant, aesthetically convincing, artificiality of the first person setting in Hemingway's texts seem to radically call into question Hamburger's distinction between first and third person narration in terms of *als ob* and *als* fiction: in many of Hemingway's first person fictions, like the one above, there is no voice assuming the pretense (*Fingierbarkeit*), i.e. the reader is by no means listening to any transmitted experience, but is, say, sharing the perceptions online

course so much more striking than the narrator initially seems to be a sort of heterodiegetic teller-instance who intends to tell, not his own story, but Robert Cohn's.⁵

Now, what would be the semantic point of this? Probably, or obviously, the point is a semiotically, and aesthetically, impressive match between mode of narrative presentation and represented story world. The first person narrator's change from some sort of detached, knowing, insightful, etc. teller instance in the first lines of *The Sun Also Rises* to the reflecting instance in the closing lines, with a perceptive and epistemic horizon restricted to the interior of a taxi—with no future perspectives—is a perfect formal counterpart to and illustration of Jake Barnes' route to definite misery in that novel.

Needless to say that the same kind of variation in Poe's short story⁶ conveys a similar effect. Again we have a passage from teller to reflector, i.e. from the, albeit a little hectic, but nevertheless retrospectively telling narrator to the sheer online, hallucinatory presentation of an auditory object (with no return to the initial armchair narrative situation). And again this formal variation reflects rather faithfully the process undergone by the

with the protagonist, within the limited horizon of his consciousness. In this sense, Hemingway's first person narrators behave like certain reflector voices in third person narrations: that's probably part of their misery.

⁵ Of course, Robert Cohn therefore becomes some sort of a symmetric counterpart figure to Jake Barnes himself: physically able, mentally pathetic, whereas the inverse seems to hold for Barnes.

⁶ The same is basically the case in other of his short story, for example "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," which sets out as a scientific report and ends up with the vision of a puddle of putrescent matter.

narrator-protagonist. In both the above cases, showing eventually prevails. Yet showing as pure showing—as a quasi dysphoric epiphany—unaccompanied by any epistemic catharsis of any sort, since conveyed, as it were, by a narrator who used to know, but now can only display.

Variation in narrative mode is also present in 3rd person narration. In fact, the transition from an initial authorial narrative situation, setting things up, casting characters, etc. to a subsequent figural narrative situation, with internal focalization and reflector figures, is far from being a rare phenomenon. In such cases, the authorial introduction will typically work as a frame against which subsequent actions, experiences, thoughts, and plans, in short, the flow of the reflector character's *innere Lebensform*, will be assessed. As Jahn (1997) observes, Joyce has provided some remarkable examples of this; remarkable, not because of their being particularly clear-cut or exemplary, but because they demonstrate to what extent the authorial frame set up initially specifies the meaning of whole passages which, integrated in another context, could very well have taken on an entirely different signification. Consider the closing passage from Joyce's "The Boarding-House":

[10]

Polly sat for a little time on the side of the bed, crying. Then she dried her eyes and went over to the looking-glass. She dipped the end of the towel in the water-jug and refreshed her eyes with the cool water.

She looked at herself in profile and readjusted a hairpin above her ear. Then she went back to the bed again and sat at the foot. She regarded the pillows for a long time, and the sight of them awakened in her mind secret, amiable memories. She rested the nape of her neck against the cool iron bedrail and fell into a reverie. There was no longer any perturbation visible on her face.

She waited on patiently, almost cheerfully, without alarm, her memories gradually giving place to hopes and visions of the future. Her hopes and visions were so intricate that she no longer saw the white pillows on which her gaze was fixed, or remembered that she was waiting for anything.

At last she heard her mother calling. She started to her feet and ran to the banisters.

'Polly! Polly!'

'Yes, mamma?'

'Come down, dear. Mr Doran wants to speak to you.'

Then she remembered what she had been waiting for.

(Joyce, *Dubliners*, "The Boarding-House")

Arguably,⁷ this passage could elsewhere have displayed the inner life of some honest young woman, at some important turning point in her life, submerged in the kind of reveries young women in literature usually delve into

⁷ Notice, however, the external focalization "There was no longer any perturbation visible on her face", which in this context, of course, reveals the feigned character of her crying.

when facing a future which promises to be bright and plentiful of love (etc.). Now, as we know from the authorial introduction, the above scene follows the final stage of the scheme forged by Polly's mother, the *Madame* of the Boarding-House, in order to marry her away to an otherwise honorable man she has let Polly seduce to a point of no return. The initial authorial frame obviously redefines whatever emotional responses, sentimental expectations and loving maternal feelings are expressed in the passage. Yet, not only that: it contributes a clearly audible duality, a narrative overtone perceivable to all readers, but not to Polly; a sort of timbre which tells us much more than what is straightforwardly displayed in Polly's consciousness.

My last example of variation in narrative mode is, I gather, more seldom—at least as far as the author is concerned—and has a less evident semiotic import. It is a case where an author chooses to introduce an overt telling voice in a minutely de-narrativized context of pure showing/reflecting. The opening scene of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* has often been claimed to epitomize the narrative reflector mode (cf. Jahn 1997, p. 445 ff.):

[11]

He lay flat on the brown, pine-needled floor of the forest, his chin on his folded arms, and high overhead the wind blew in the tops of the pine trees. The mountainside sloped gently where he lay; but below it was steep and he could see the

dark of the oiled road winding through the pass.
There was a stream alongside the road and far
down he saw a mill beside the stream and the
falling water of the dam, white in the summer
sunlight.

“Is that the mill?” he asked

“Yes.”

(Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*,
opening lines)

Here, as is easily seen, Hemingway has carefully activated a pure reflector mode, with exclusive rendering of the protagonist’s perceptual experiences, and even the dialogue is likely to reflect not only what was actually said, but also the protagonist’s experience of saying and hearing what was said (a “Sí” instead of “Yes” would for example have shifted focalization from internal to non-internal). Now given this narrative framework where all conveyed information is coextensive with Robert Jordan’s inner life, the following passage, in fact only a few pages later on, is astonishing in its conspicuous teller style (Robert Jordan and the old Spaniard have been joined by another Castilian Republican who seems a little recalcitrant as regards Jordan’s mission):

[12]

The old man turned toward him suddenly and spoke rapidly and furiously in a dialect that Robert Jordan could just follow. It was like reading Quevedo. Anselmo was speaking old

Castilian and it went something like this, “Art thou a brute? Yes. Art thou a beast? Yes, many times. Hast thou a brain? Nay. None. Now we come for something of consummate importance and thee, with thy dwelling place to be undisturbed, puts thy fox-hole before the interests of humanity [...] I this and that in the this and that of thy father. I this and that and that in thy this. Pick up that bag.” (Hemingway, *ibid.*, p. 15)

Certainly, the passage conveys what it feels like, or what it may have felt like, for Robert Jordan to hear a dialect containing such archaic pronominal and verbal forms. However, even if a sentence “It was like reading Quevedo” still could be part of Jordan’s immediate consciousness (provided he had such competencies in Spanish Baroque poetry), the following sentence “and it went something like this” is obviously not part of his conscious world, but a statement made by a displaced teller, coming up with a pseudo-Shakespearian English analogue in order to convey to the reader an idea about what kind of talk Robert Jordan was listening to: Listening to that kind of talk may, indeed, have made Jordan think of Quevedo, but it seems unlikely, to say the least, that he should have actually thought it was like reading Elizabethan English. In short, the origin of the deictic “this” (in “it went something like this”) is evidently not Jordan’s here and now, but the teller narrator’s here and now. And the “nays”, the “thous”, the “arts” are not part of Jordan’s consciousness, but words

used by the narrator to evoke the right representation in the reader.

It is difficult to assess the import of this last example of variation in narrative mode (of course aside it being a genuine rarity in Hemingway's work). Yet, the shift in case probably does frame the story, and thus reading, in the sense that it recalls the told or mediated character of the narration, hereby suggesting that while narration is generally focalized in Robert Jordan, the narrative focus exceeds Jordan as an individual: it is on the civil war at large, and more particularly on those for whom the bell tolls.

In this section, I have called attention on the semiotic effects linked to shifts in narrative mode within one and the same narrative. In [6] through [9], the passage from an authorial teller mode to a figural reflector mode was shown to mirror or formally match a substantial change at the represented level (the loss of, say epistemic mastery experienced by the main characters). In [10], from Joyce's "The Boarding-House", we saw how an initial authorial type of narration allows setting up a frame in which a concise signification can be assigned to a subsequent, rather large text passage which could have taken on other meanings within other frames. Finally, the narrative shifts in [11] and [12] were discussed as regards the way in which they may frame reader experience with respect to a possible specification of thematic focus.

2.3. Granularity and density.

Granularity and density capture the fineness/coarseness of a description and its richness with respect to elements mentioned within it. Variation in granularity is a well-known means to select a given object as particularly significant or mark a given situation with particular importance. My concern here is somewhat different, though. I would like to consider how such variation—either within one and the same text or with respect to a standard level of granularity—may serve as a means to represent consciousness in literature: “represent” in several senses: firstly, in the sense of displaying the protagonist’s experiences (his outer perceptions); secondly, in the sense of representing the importance the protagonist assigns to his experiences; and finally, in the more general sense of displaying the inner life, the very personality of the fictional individual (his inner perceptions).

Consider the following passages from Hemingway’s “Big Two-Hearted River”

[13]

Nick looked at the burned-over stretch of hillside, where he had expected to find the scattered houses of the town and then walked down the railroad track to the bridge over the river. The river was there. It swirled against the

log spires of the bridge. Nick looked down into the clear, brown water, colored from the pebbly bottom, and watched the trout keeping themselves steady in the current with wavering fins. As he watched them they changed their positions again by quick angles, only to hold steady in the fast water again. Nick watched them a long time.

He watched them holding themselves with their noses into the current, many trout in deep, fast moving water, slightly distorted as he watched far down through the glassy convex surface of the pool its surface pushing and swelling smooth against the resistance of the log-driven piles of the bridge. At the bottom of the pool were the big trout. Nick did not see them at first. Then he saw them at the bottom of the pool, big trout looking to hold themselves on the gravel bottom in a varying mist of gravel and sand, raised in spurts by the current.

[14]

Nick walked back up the ties to where his pack lay in the cinders beside the railway track. [...] He adjusted the pack harness around the bundle, pulling straps tight, slung the pack on his back, got his arms through the shoulder straps and took some of the pull off his

shoulder by leaning against the wide band of the tump-line [...] He had his leather rod-case in his hand and leaning forward to keep the weight of the pack high on his shoulder he walked along the road that paralleled the railway track, leaving the burned town behind in the heat, and then turned off around a hill with a high, fire-scarred hill on either side onto a road that went back into the country. [...] It was hard work walking up-hill. His muscles ached and the day was hot, but Nick felt happy. [...] Nick leaned back against a stump and slipped out of the pack harness. [...] Nick sat down [...]

Although both are focalized within Nick, the description in [13] is obviously much more fine grained than the one in [14], with specifications of subtle qualitative properties (“glassy convex surface”, “pushing and smelling smooth”, “varying mist of gravel and sand, raised in spurts”, etc.) accompanied by a steady zooming in on the first the river, then the standard trout, as it were, and finally, at the bottom, the big trout. The richness of the description, its granularity (assessed against the average degree of granularity in the rest of the short story), obviously selects the big trout as particularly significant for Nick while marking his experience as particularly intense.

Now, what is astonishing about [14] is that the description of the landscape, the environment of Nick’s

actions, the objects he manipulates, all this is rendered in a highly schematic, unspecified manner. Yet, even though no significant details are conveyed, even though the description is much more coarse grained than in [13], it still yields a lively and saturated presentation of Nick's doings, the place where he performs them and his experience of performing these actions.⁸ Why is it so? Here is my main assumption: this type of linguistic representation—as regards its granularity, schematic character, lack of specified details and its general intentional focus—*matches* (is a faithful reflection of) the average level of granularity, schematicity and intentional focus of perceptual experience itself. What does that mean? Well, that given the motor program Nick is performing, his intended action frame—namely walking from one place toward another place where he will be doing what he has planned to do, and like doing: fishing the big trout—granted all that, his conscious experience is likely to be running in exactly the manner presented in the text: he is distractedly conscious about the main qualities of the environment, the main direction of the road, the burnt character of the landscape, and most of all he is of course conscious about all the actions he fulfills and the pleasure he feels so doing.⁹ He needs not, and is

⁸ As Chafe (1994, p. 255) remarks that whenever focalization is internal, descriptive sentences such as “he adjusted the pack harness”, or “Nick sat down” do not simply address the action seen from the outside, but also the protagonist's own experience of performing these actions.

⁹ Whereas there are hardly any details specified in the passage, a lot of simple actions are expressed (“walk back up”, “adjust”, “pull”, “sling”, “get [one's arms] through”, “lean against,” etc). In his 2007 article, Thor Grünbaum very convincingly shows how vivid representation of spaces, locations rest on

in fact not at all, paying special attention to chosen parcels of the landscape (something he will certainly do a little later when he engages in another motor program or action script: fishing).

In other words, the granularity of the description is not a simple outcome of linguistic mediation. That is to say, the schematic character of the representation is not relative to the schematic, general or abstract meaning of linguistic word signs. Schematicity is an intrinsic core property of perception, which—as André Malraux and after him Merleau-Ponty (1960) had it — “already stylizes” (to this cf. Illum Hansen 2007). Notice that granularity is, of course, relative to the represented motor program or action scrip. If at some point in the above passage, a more fine-grained description had intervened, say something like: “Now, Nick looked to the left, then to right, and then to the left again,” this would most likely have signaled a significant change in Nick’s surroundings, an event of some sort that made Nick respond in a particular, if not peculiar way. If, on the other hand, the setting of the action, had been a city, and Nick’s walking down to the local Deli to get some food,

the representation of simple actions like the ones above, not on detailed accounts of objects and their exact position in that space. My claim here is cognate to his in the sense that I also found this feature on the basic characteristics of human perceptual intentionality itself. Notice that this feature is far from being self-evident: why shouldn’t more precisions, more quantitative and metrical specifications, more details, etc., why shouldn’t all this—according to the principle “more is better”—yield more vivid and lively representations? Well, exactly because this does not fit our average way of experiencing, perceptually intending or bodily interacting with things in prototypical or familiar situations. (Cf. examples [15], [16], and [17] below.)

then, within this action frame, the above description, and its degree of granularity, would have matched the more restricted scope of the motor program: to look to the left, the right, the left is a trivial part of the walking-in-the-city script.

The bottom-line of this is that when we have internal focalization and granularity of description adapted to the scope of the represented motor program, we obtain the above case of smooth, lively, direct displaying of the protagonist's consciousness, his inner life form (to use Wittgenstein's expression once again). A mode of representation which, in an often unnoticed way, prompts the reader to simply "run" that consciousness, as it were, in the sense that our own consciousness supports and performs the actualization of the experience assigned to a foreign point of view: we see, experience things as they happens, and in the way they happens and are experienced by the protagonist. There are, thus, ways of representing consciousness in literature which consist in making the reader simulate experience from the represented point of view.

Now, the English philosopher Barry Smith has in his article from 1987 "Brentano and Kafka," addressed the issue of representing consciousness as such; i.e. consciousness *in toto*, consciousness as the continuously experienced framework of our on-going outer experiences, in short, and with Franz Brentano's term, consciousness as "inner perception".

His point is that if anyone should intend to characterize, describe or represent "inner perception,"

such a description must necessarily resort to a description of those outer perceptions to which inner perception is always related (those contents of experience consciousness as such is always consciousness about); but in that case the representation would, according to him, necessarily deviate the reader's attention from the primary object, inner perception, to outer perceptions. So: when literary discourse, as in the Hemingway example above, is great in showing how consciousness (inner perception) actually works, then the reader is, allegedly, directed toward the outer objects whose experience he is grateful to simulate.

So, *que faire?* As Barry Smith suggests, the only way to disentangle inner and outer perception, the representation of consciousness *in toto* and the representation of its contents, seems to introduce some degree of disruption in the order of experiences and thereby check the immediate conflation of inner and outer perception. Here's Smith's full argument:

Let us suppose that we now wish to convey the data of inner perception in written form. Recall that inner perceptions are always, of their nature, dependent moments of more inclusive act-wholes which comprise also moments of outer perception; the oblique consciousness of a mental act presupposes also that there is some direct consciousness of the external target of the act. Hence it is impossible to convey the data of inner perception except in association

with an appropriate framework of outer perceptions. We might at first wish to appeal simply to ordinary experience for such a framework, but this would be to reinforce the established inertial habits and tendencies of mind; we would become once more absorbed in the outer world, and this would place almost insuperable obstacles in the way of our bringing to prominence the data of the inner life. For the attentions of the reader would in such circumstances follow their natural course (would be directed, in effect, to the external unfolding of the plot). It would seem, however, that the peculiar forms and structures of inner consciousness might begin to be made accessible, be brought to representation, if the mind of the reader could somehow be *deflected* from his settled interest in that which is normally unfolding in a represented normal outer world. This can be achieved I suggest, if the expected order of the outer world is presented matter-of-factly, in a step-by-step fashion, but is in some way *disrupted*. The consciousness of the reader is thereby diverted, connivingly, into the inner world, but without his clearly realizing that this is what is happening (Smith 1997, 93-94)

Smith probably overestimates the degree to which the reader is solely simulating external perceptions. A point

in the above analysis—as well as in Chafe (1994), Stjernfelt and Zeuthen (2007) and Grünbaum (2007)—is indeed that descriptions of simple actions are, whenever focalization is internal, also descriptions of the protagonist's experience of himself performing them. In such cases, external perceptions are always embedded within an overarching inner perception. Smith's point is nonetheless acute since such deviations or deflections from straightforwardly represented consciousness obviously are major tools for representing consciousness as such: and even consciousness as such in the strong sense of representing what it is to be this and that character, independently of his actual ongoing experiences. Representation of disrupted consciousness represents inner perception independently of the outer perception.

Smith's example is from Kafka's *Beschreibung eines Kampfes* where one of the protagonist describes a walk through a marvelous landscape, so much more marvelous than he is drunk. In that case, we would have:

- (1) a series of contents of experience;
- (2) a reader embedded within a point of view and thus running the experiences on a simulating mode;
- (3) and then, by virtue of this estrangement effect, which prompts the understanding that this is not the usual way of seeing things and therefore represents or directly displays for the reader the global feeling (the inner perception, the global

consciousness) of what it feels like to have such experiences and be that kind of consciousness.

Here, I would simply claim that deflection from the prototype level of granularity (or density) is a powerful means to represent consciousnesses. Granted that there exists a baseline of granularity—i.e. an average level of attentional intensity—*local* variation of granularity can of course be used to show the signification a protagonist assigns a given object or event. Importantly, however, *global* variation of granularity can be used to immediately display a through and through disrupted consciousness (as Smith claims above).

Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie* and more emphatically Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* epitomize representations of minds whose exaggerated degree of descriptive exactitude or manic sensitivity to details immediately display their disrupted character (in the latter case, foreshadowing and accompanying the radically disrupted character of Bateman's acts). My examples are in the same vein, but less passionate. They are from the Swedish-German writer Peter Weiss' debut, the novella *The Shadow of the Body of the Coachman*. The first person narrator is living in a boarding house, along with a handful of other boarders, somewhere in a German speaking country at an unspecified time. What we read are the notes he writes at the end of the day, "in order to give an outline to what [he has] seen" during that day, yet with no success since, fundamentally, he hasn't got a clue whatsoever about what is going on at the place,

what may be significant and what not, and from all this “grows the insight that [his] activities [...] remain without result or purpose” (p. 17-18).

Now, this epistemic incompetence—his not knowing nor understanding anything—gives rise to descriptions as the ones below (the ones intended to shape his experiences):

[15]

The four walls, the floor and the ceiling forming his room are furnished in such a way that, upon entering, one sees a long, coarse wooden table, so rough that it seems put together by the doctor’s own hands, jutting out from right next to the door into the middle of the room where it touches a second table going to the right in a right angle which again touches a third table jutting out to the left in a right angle, nearly up to the window-wall opposite the door so that only a narrow space is left between the table and the wall; one can just squeeze through sideways, but with difficulty and in doing so pass a window to the left, [...] etc., *ad nauseam*] (Peter Weiss, *The Shadow of the Body of the Coachman*).

[16]

Get an ax, said the father, and the hired man [...] turned around, ran past the wicker table with the vase and the oval table with the vase,

climbed over the couch and ran to the door, opened the door, left it open behind him, ran through the hall, downstairs, through the downstairs hall, through the kitchen, threw open the kitchen door, ran out, leaving the kitchen open behind him, down the steps and across the yard to the shed; I saw him crossing the streak of light that was falling on the ground from the window [...] Then the hired man came from the shed, came running from the dark into the streak of light from the window, flew up the steps to the kitchen door, over the threshold of the kitchen door, pulled the kitchen door shut behind him [...], etc. *ad nauseam*] (Peter Weiss, *The Shadow of the Body of the Coachman*).

[17]

The son hunched over the music box and turned the key to wind the creaky works. I heard the spring beginning to crack inside the box, and I was already lifting my hand to warn him [...] but it was too late. The housekeeper jumped up knocking over a half-full coffee mug; the coffee ran over the table and into the lap of the mother who couldn't move away fast enough; the housekeeper heaved herself sideways past the father [...] and hit the glass the captain was holding in front of himself; and the contents of the glass, only a few drops, it is true, ran down

the lapel of his cutaway; the mother, shaking her skirt and squeezing by the table, caught her foot on the leg of the table, losing her shoe; then she stumbled toward the father who had [..., etc. *ad nauseam*] (Peter Weiss, *The Shadow of the Body of the Coachman*).

All three descriptions, and each in their way, are characterized by the fact that the narrator seems to compensate his notorious incapacity of grasping the general design features of any given situation with quantitative precision. In fact, they are quite precise *a contrario* examples of how the human mind works. This is probably why we are no as much witnesses of what the narrator had experienced during the day, as we are witnesses of his mind, the make-up of his mental set, we witness what it would be like to have a mind, a disrupted mind, like his.

The over-accurate description of the room in [15] actually hinders any immediate grasping of its basic make-up (so much more than the description just keeps going on and on), thus reducing the object world perceived by the protagonist to what it is for him: not a world of experiences, sensations, bodily interactions, but a sensory screen, as it were, a world of “optical resistance” (as Roland Barthes concisely characterized the perceived world of *La Jalousie*).

Likewise in [16], which describes an event that could have been rendered by “the hired man ran down the stairs, through the kitchen and into the shed in the yard

from where he came back with the ax in his hands”. Or in [17], which displays a causal chain reaction, but where the narrator is incapable of selecting the key moments of the causal event, and therefore—just like in [16]—minutely mentions every bit and piece of it.

So, what is wrong? Well, we do have linguistic accuracy, but no adequate representation, since no windowing of attention¹⁰ to use Len Talmy’s term (2000), i.e. no grasping of the hierarchy of sub-events, which allows to mention only some of them, while gapping the subordinate ones (as in the “hired man-ax” example). In short, what is displayed by virtue of the full-blown intake of all possible details is a consciousness incapable of perceptual (and conceptual) synthesis. We know from this variation on the granularity axis that his world is as optically present as it is phenomenologically opaque.

Granularity is a tool for meaning making, in the present sense, since suitable variations along its axis produce specific meaning effects. These effects can be

¹⁰ Windowing of attention is a pervasive mode of conceptualization, whose linguistic expression consists in only mentioning one or some of the constituents moments of a full event while gapping (and tacitly implying) the others. Hence “the pen rolled off the table, through the air and down on the ground” can be rendered, for example, by either “the pen rolled off the table” or “the pen rolled down on the ground” (each sentence would thereby express what part of the event speaker assigns intentional saliency). Similarly as regards causal event frames where the sentence “He broke the window” adequately covers the much more fine-grained sequence of sub-events: he broke the window by picking up a stone, lifting it with his hand, swinging his arm, releasing the stone, thereby propelling it forward, etc., etc. (Talmy 2000, vol. 1, p. 271 ff.). Weiss’ protagonist is a parade example of a windowing-impaired mind. Actually both passage [16] and [17] above would do as text book examples of what full event/causal chain frames are, they make out the stuff on which we usually operate our windowing abstractions.

local, when fine-grained description of a given object may reflect increased intentional focus on or interest in it (as in [13]). The choice of a given average level of granularity, adapted to the scope of a given action frame, may further smooth representation of a protagonist's inner perceptions, inner life form or consciousness *in toto* (as in [14]). Finally—but the list is not exhaustive—consequent deflection from the prototypical level of descriptive granularity may, in turn, be an efficient means to represent disrupted consciousness (as in [15], [16], and [17]) and thereby make this consciousness the genuine topic of the literary artwork.

2. Concluding remarks

Two of the three tools for meaning making in narrative art, which I have considered in this article, are standards in narratology, at least in the branch of narratology that acknowledges the existence of some narrating instance. These are of course focalization (perspective) and mode (teller vs. reflector). However, my intention has been—somewhat in the vein of Stanzel, who is always keen on tracking down the semiotic effects linked to these narrative parameters—to show how perspective, mode of narration, along with granularity, can be activated (in varying ways) within a single story in view of shaping determinate significations. If you boil things down to basics in the famous *Auseinandersetzung*

between the narrator-knocker Käte Hamburger and narrator-boosters such as Genette and Stanzel, then it comes down to, actually not the existence or non-existence of mediacy, but ultimately to, say, the existence or non-existence of some narrative object or situation which *precedes* narrative formatting (in a fabula-sjuzhet way). Hamburger denies the latter's existence, Stanzel not so. Now, if you bracket this ontological issue and thus consider narration as such—without addressing the mediacy issue, i.e. without asking whether at given story is just one among other possible representations of what it tells—it seems to me that differences diminish: in both cases, narrative art is a piece of discourse which requires the activation of either a narrative instance or a “narrative function” (*Erzählfunktion*, Hamburger 1957, p. 111 ff./Engl. tr., p. 136). According to the way in which the narrative instance is brought into play, and according to the way in which the narrative function is “assumed” or “handled” (*gehandhabt*, Hamburger, *ibid.*), different meanings obtain. The ontological issue is, of course, the hard problem, but the really hard problem is to provide with a rich and detailed description of the meaning shaping narrative instance/function; a description which suitably accommodates the empirical facts: our stories in all their diversity. We have to work our way toward a sound ontology of the literary work of art by means of sound descriptions; we cannot impose certain descriptions on the grounds of a pre-established ontology, at least not without converting our ontology into the Procrustes bed of literature. Description consists in grasping the

mechanics of literary craftsmanship. A key claim in this paper has been to consider focalization, mode of narration, and granularity, not simply as typological criteria, but as central variables of the narrative function which may be activated in various ways to make a semiotic difference within one and the same text.

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