At the Crossroads of Narratology and Stylistics: A Contribution to the Study of Fictional Narrative

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It is a long-standing, though not undisputed, postulate of narrative theory and criticism that the core of storytelling is plot structure. From Aristotle's *muthos* through the Russian formalists' *fabula/sjužet* to the French structuralists' *histoire/récit* and the story/plot and story/discourse of English-language scholarship, to take but the most prominent variants, the idea is that it is the principal story line, with its beginning, middle, and end, around which all other elements of story are organized. The various narratological approaches, particularly in the early stages, sought either to map out the structures of story content in the form of narrative grammars and logics or to study the rearrangement of story content into discourse features and patterns. Overall, these endeavors resulted in static theories by modeling textual organization at the price of bracketing out questions relating to the dynamic nature of the narrative process. Important work aimed at remedying this situation has been undertaken by, among others, Meir Sternberg (1978, 1990, 1992, 2006), Peter Brooks (1984), Paul Ricoeur (1983–85), James Phelan (1989, 1996), Monika Fludernik (1996), Emma Kafalenos (1999), Raphaël Baroni (2007), Hilary P. Dannenberg (2008), and Michael Toolan (2009).

Dan Shen's *Style and Rhetoric of Short Narrative Fiction: Covert Progressions behind Overt Plots* is a significant and pathbreaking addition to these studies. Although

Shen mentions some of the authors listed above, her principal point of reference is the Chicago school's neo-Aristotelian rhetorical theory of narrative. At the same time, something new is brought to the debate, for she develops a set of tools with which to explore dimensions of prose fiction that, as demonstrated by her textual analyses, tend to elude narrative theorists and critics working within the confines of plot-based structures. An accomplished stylistician, moreover, Shen approaches narrative analysis through a perceptive and productive synthesis of narratology and stylistics. In the essay "What Narratology and Stylistics Can Do for Each Other" (Shen 2005a), which can be considered a prolegomenon to her book, she sets out a number of differences and overlaps between the two fields. Discourse in the narratological sense of *how the story is told*, she points out, is primarily concerned with textual organization at the macrostructural level, while style—*how the content is presented*—is the result of linguistic choices and thus operates microtextually. Thus whether an event is related one time or many times or whether, in the ordering of story and discourse, analepsis and prolepsis are employed are options relating to narrative strategy, not linguistic or stylistic choices; with focalization or modes of speech presentation, however, the narratologist and the stylistician enter common territory, although not with an eye to the same details. The two fields are seldom conjoined (Fludernik and David Herman are given as exceptions), and it is notable that in rhetorical narratology, the accent generally falls on character and action, precluding questions of style.[1] Shen's (ibid.: 146) interest, in contrast, is to see how "narratological features and stylistic features interact and reinforce each other," for a full picture of narrative presentation combines the textual/organizational dimension and the linguistic/stylistic level.

Of particular interest, and key to the overall argument of the book, is Shen's innovative notion of covert progression. Covert progression builds on a fundamental principle that Phelan calls narrative progression. An expansion of story-level, sequence-based plot aimed at embracing a more general narrative dynamics, narrative progression "identifies the movement of narrative as the synthesis of two dynamic systems, one governing a narrative's internal logic as it unfolds from beginning through middle to end [instabilities, or textual dynamics], and the other governing the developing interests and responses of the audience to that unfolding [tensions, or readerly dynamics]" (Phelan 2005a: 359; see also Phelan 1996: 90; Shang 2011: 49ff.). In accordance with the subtitle of her book, Shen concentrates not so much on narrative progression as she does on covert progression, a "parallel textual

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1. It should be noted that Shen follows Geoffrey N. Leech and Michael H. Short's (1981) linguistic stylistics.

movement" that accompanies or underlies the overt plot development inherited from Aristotelian poetics (3, 11, 145).[2] Covert progression interacts with plot in numerous ways but does not identify with it. In keeping with rhetorical narratology, moreover, covert progression is described as "an ethical-aesthetic undercurrent running throughout the text behind the overt plot development. The relation between the ethical significance generated by the covert progression and the overt plot varies from narrative to narrative, ranging from supplementation to subversion, which complicates the audience's response in various ways" (3).

Key to bringing out the "ethical-aesthetic undercurrent" is stylistic analysis, as amply and impressively demonstrated in the discussion of a well-balanced corpus of six short stories. Shen insists, however, that covert progression, in works where it exists, is not a sort of "second story" that readers must infer to complete or make sense of the plot development. Instead, covert progression runs throughout the narrative but does not form an indispensable constituent of the plot or a hidden link in the chain of action. Rather, it develops in a parallel fashion: its movement is "aesthetically appealing and ethically thought provoking, and [its] effect increasingly intensifies in the process of gradual discovery" (9). At the same time (although this is not mentioned by Shen), covert progression cannot be equated with the "disnarrated," defined as "all events that *do not* happen though they could have and are nonetheless referred to (in a negative or hypothetical mode) by the narrative text" (Prince 1992: 30) and treated as a form of virtuality (Ryan 1991: 166–69) or as a type of counterfactual (Dannenberg 2008: 114–15). What is characteristic of covert progression is that it lies in its stylistically induced effects. Examining these effects requires an approach that combines discourse (in the narratological sense of textual organization) with style, thus incorporating into narratology a rejuvenated form of close reading, as demonstrated by Shen in the fine-grained analyses of her corpus (cf. Shen 2005a: 147).

Another important aspect of covert progression is that it is often accompanied by a pervasive form of irony. Where traditional accounts of irony rest either on "a discrepancy between the literal/ostensible meaning and the intended/implied meaning of a statement [verbal irony]" or on "an

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2. A recent overview classifies theories of plot according to: (1) a fixed, global structure (the configuration of the arrangement of all story events, from beginning, to middle, to end); (2a) a progressive structuration (the connections between story events, motivations, and consequences as readers perceive them); (2b) as part of the authorial design (the author's way of structuring the narrative to achieve particular effects is considered) (Kukkonen 2014). Narrative progression is classified under (2b) authorial design, but it in fact also includes the first two types. Covert progression, by contrast, operates "behind" (3) and in some cases even counter to plot: it does not seek to achieve Phelan's synthesis of textual and readerly dynamics.

incongruity between the expected outcome of an action and its actual (unexpected or undesired) outcome [situational irony]," irony in rhetorical narratology is structural, arising out of a "'secret communion' between the implied author and the implied/authorial reader at the expense of the narrator" (7–8). Shen, however, goes a step further than Wayne C. Booth or Phelan by introducing a second level of irony. Here irony results, in one variant, from "the unreliable narrator's unconscious self-condemnation and self-conviction" (ibid.). This occurs in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," where the narrator-protagonist projects his own dissemblance onto the police to such an extent that his ruse unintentionally backfires and his crime is revealed, thus creating a distance between the narrator and the author/reader (see chapter 1). Here the dramatic irony, which arises out of the narrator constantly taking delight in his own dissemblance but at the same time finding the projected dissemblance (his own) immoral and unbearable, runs from the beginning to the end of the text. Pervasive as it is, however, this overall dramatic irony has eluded critical attention, because it forms a layer of meaning that can be teased out only in the covert progression running underneath the narrator's unreliable and ironized claim to sanity at the level of the plot development. In other cases, however, an even more implicit ironic undercurrent is at work, shared by the protagonist and the author/narrator/reader. Thus in Katherine Mansfield's "The Singing Lesson" the protagonist's fiancé calls off the wedding before abruptly changing his mind. The protagonist is revealed, through the subtle use of focalization and speech representation, to be preoccupied with marriage not for reasons of love but to be spared the opprobrium of spinsterhood. Underlying the overt plot is a protest against the forces of patriarchal social values, even though these forces are not directly thematized (see chapter 5).

Rhetorical narrative theory has not by and large devoted much attention to sociohistorical contexts. This, Shen claims, is due not only to the ahistorical position inherited from the first generation of the Chicago school neo-Aristotelians, as a reaction against long-standing historical approaches to literature,[3] but also to the focus on the author's "second self"—the implied author—as opposed to the "flesh-and-blood person" of the real author (16–20). Booth (1983 [1961]: xiii) himself, writing at the height of the New Criticism, states in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, "I am aware that in pursuing the author's means of controlling his reader I have arbitrarily isolated the technique from all of the social and psychological forces that affect authors and readers" (quoted by Shen, 17). Booth (1983 [1961]: 420) did, however, open

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3. Shen refers in particular to Ronald S. Crane's "History versus Criticism in the Study of Literature" (1967 [1935]).

the way to these forces in acknowledging that writers change their images from one work to another,[4] before going on in the afterword to the second edition to adopt the idea of a "relatively stable audience postulated by the implied author—the readers the text asks us to become" (quoted by Shen, 17). The evolution of Booth's thought on this matter reflects an influential contribution to rhetorical theory by Peter J. Rabinowitz (1977, 1987) on the nature of narrative audiences, which are divided into four types: flesh and blood, authorial (or hypothetical), narrative, and ideal narrative audiences.[5] Shen, placing particular emphasis on the interaction between the authorial audience (the ideal or implied reader) and actual readers, differs from other rhetorical critics in that she seeks to integrate sociohistorical contexts and biographical material into her analyses.[6] In Shen 2011 and 2013, but also in her new book, she argues that Booth's "implied author" actually refers to the role-playing writer of the text, while the "real author" refers to the same person in daily life, not engaged in the writing process (19).[7] In Shen's brand of rhetorical narratology, context and biography, while not at the heart of analysis, cannot be sidelined, so that reconstructing the authorial audience will require inferences about the implied author which, in certain cases, may be greatly assisted through reference to biographical information about the real author and the context.[8]

4. "Just as one's personal letters imply different versions of oneself, depending on the different relationships with each correspondent and the purpose of each letter, so the writer sets himself out with a different air depending on the needs of particular works" (Booth 1983 [1961]: 71).
5. For a brief summary of these types, see Phelan 2005b: 503; a critical discussion is in Phelan 1996: 135–53. For a general discussion of the authorial audience, see Shang 2011: 59–64.
6. In his latest discussion of the subject, Booth (2005) insists that only the implied author is relevant to rhetorical criticism and not the real author.
7. For Booth, the implied author refers "at once to the person who writes the text in a particular manner (encoding process) and to the textual image of this writer for the reader (decoding process) . . . the distinction between the implied author and the real author is a simple one between the person in the writing process and this same person in daily life" (Shen 2011: 90).
8. It is noteworthy that Shen's understanding of the implied author does not fall within Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller's (2006: 162–81) classification of the concept into "intention-alistic" and "non-intentionalistic" theories. According to them, most discussions since Booth's introduction of the implied author have adopted a nonintentionalistic stance and reflect positions of the New Criticism, structuralism, and post-structuralism: the emphasis falls not on "what an author wanted to say but only [on] what his text means" (ibid.: 162). Proponents of intentionalistic approaches, rarer in number, are drawn to specifying the implied author's intentions, either "actual" or "hypothetical." The former are geared to the empirical author's intended meaning but are constrained by knowledge of the author's biography, effectively canceling out the notion of implied author. On the basis of hypothetical intentionalism, by contrast, "it is possible to give an exact statement of how the empirical author can be under-stood as a point of reference for interpretation without also being the ultimate objective pursued by it" (ibid.: 175). What this "ultimate objective" is remains unspecified. Shen, by seeking to achieve an authorial reading of specific texts, addresses this problem through methodical examination of the dynamic relations between overt plot and covert progression. Moreover,

A case in point is Kate Chopin's "Désirée's Baby" (chapter 3). Uncovering the covert progression in this text reveals that two racial systems are at work, one in which, as Shen's analysis goes, whites do not practice racial discrimination and the other in which it is the blacks who perpetrate racial oppression. This does not seem to be the case when the short story is viewed from the overt plot, where the implied author appears to adopt an antiracist stance, putting the work alongside Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. However, Shen's close analysis of textual details, both narrative and stylistic, shows that this apparent antiracism is undermined by the covert progression, effectively mythologizing an idealized benevolent racial system dominated by southern whites. Many readers will find this shocking, but Shen backs up her observations with evidence showing how the implied Chopin's racist views stemmed from the historical Chopin's racist family background and her daily experience during the Civil War era and after. In "Désirée's Baby" the implied Chopin transformed and veiled the circumstances of her life, at the same time undermining the feminist theme with which the story has often been credited together with widely held views of the author's ethics and ideology (84–85, 90–92). Here, then, is a vivid example of how the authorial audience, addressed by the implied author, can be adequately delineated only if the details of Chopin's life are taken into account, for these details run covertly beneath the overt plot.

If the implied author can be regarded as the person in the process of writing who adopts a particular stance by "trying on masks, or assuming roles" (Booth 1983 [1961]: 71; quoted in Shen 2013: 141), it follows that the position adopted by the implied author may vary from work to work (see note 4). Drawing on intertextual evidence, Shen concludes that different Chopin narratives adopt contrasting views on racial matters, although the implied authors of the only two narratives about antebellum Louisiana do share a common racist outlook in the covert progression (84–90). In this and other chapters of the book, the comparative or intertextual treatment of various texts by the same author and/or by other authors tends to put these works in a significantly new light. Analysis of the satirically subversive covert progression in Stephen Crane's "An Episode of War," for example, shows that the protagonist, a Civil War army lieutenant whose arm must be

framing the implied author in terms of intentionalism/(non)intentionalism leads Kindt and Müller (ibid.: 13, 176) to abandon the term in favor of a "hypothetical" or "postulated author"—an author projected by the reader. This stands in sharp contrast to Shen's (2011: 85) reading of Booth, where "implied" is not synonymous with "intended" but rather points both to the text (an author's works will imply different versions of himself or herself, not the real author as an entity) and to the producer of the text (the person "who writes in this manner").

amputated following an accidental gunshot wound, is a weak and vulnerable man, woefully lacking in the manly qualities befitting a soldier. A comparison with the stylistic choices made in Crane's "A Mystery of Heroism"—where a lieutenant sustains a wound to the arm on the battlefield but reacts stoically—underscores the satirical tone of the implied author in "An Episode of War" (54–55). Similar comparisons are carried out in the chapters devoted to other stories (most notably Mansfield's "Revelations"). The point is that, while intertextual relations, like contextual considerations, may corroborate or even refine the findings of textual analysis, they do not in themselves enable one to ferret out the subtleties running through the covert progression (149).

From these examples it can be seen that achieving an authorial reading, one that is responsive to the ethical and aesthetic values that inform a given work's rhetoric, involves accounting for textual and factual details not through examination of the overt plot alone, where certain details might appear to be peripheral or insignificant, but through analysis of the work's covert progressions. Such analysis requires a certain readerly effort, however, and so Shen calls for a "shared reading." Shared readings, unlike those proposed by reader-response theory, constructivism, or deconstruction, result from "the rhetorical critics' efforts to arrive at authorial reading [and from] the belief that different readers are willing or eager to accept the implied author's invitation and will more or less succeed in entering the authorial audience" (152n12).[9] There exist at least four varieties of shared reading, two of which Shen considers relevant to her analyses (25). In one type readers may experience certain effects of a work only in a vague and unconscious way, but once these effects have been adequately interpreted and explained, they will be more fully understood and appreciated. Another type occurs when, on encountering new readings, readers may be led to revise their views of a given text and adopt a more adequate interpretation, closer to the author's communicated intentions. Such revisions, Shen claims, can be greatly aided by identifying the more or less concealed patterns of covert progression, a process that requires close attention to patterns of style and structure coupled with the identification of sociohistorical context and intertextual features. Shen thus judiciously takes stock of the published criticism on each of the short stories in her corpus. With the aim of sharpening her own interpretations, she cites this criticism either to incorporate the findings of other critics into her own argument or to demonstrate how some critics have gone astray but always in a spirit of open dialogue that enhances the book's accessibility and pedagogical qualities. Aimed at achiev-

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9. Shared reading is a common concern among third-generation rhetorical critics; the notion runs through much of Phelan's work.

ing a shared reading of the corpus, Shen's integration of style, narratology, context, and intertextuality contributes to that rare synthesis in narrative studies described by Prince (1995: 129) as "narratological criticism."

Conducted along the lines of rhetorical narratology, although with greater attention to style and context, the study exhibits a marked concern for entering the position of the authorial audience. This means, among other things, that the implied author, within a particular historical context, may presuppose certain knowledge on the part of the authorial audience. In the case of Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," nineteenth-century American readers were familiar with the much-debated question of the legal responsibility of criminals found to be insane and were thus well equipped to perceive the irony underlying the narrator-protagonist's unconscious self-condemnation throughout the plot (44–49). Similarly with the readers of Mansfield's "The Singing Lesson": only if they are aware of the demeaning social status of unmarried women in Victorian society will they meet the demands presented to the authorial audience by the author and thus appreciate the subtle critique of patriarchal social forces that runs through the covert textual progression (19, 115–16). Here Shen demonstrates that only by taking account of the historical context can such a rhetorical interpretation be achieved.

One important consequence of Shen's strategy for achieving an authorial reading is that the rhetorical approach remains deliberately distinct from, although not entirely unrelated to, cognitive theory and criticism. As the book briefly mentions, cognitive approaches are focused not on the authorial audience of a work but on what Shen calls the "generic audience," with its stereotypical assumptions, expectations, frames, scripts, plans, schemata, and so forth that apply to narratives generally (15, 152n8; cf. Shen 2005b: 155–57). A similar difference exists between constructivist and rhetorical approaches. According to Shen (2014: § 3.2), the emphasis in constructivism falls on our "reading-hypotheses." Here Shen refers to Tamar Yacobi's (notably 2005) work on narratorial reliability and unreliability, which shows how readerly conjectures can be adjusted, inverted, or replaced by other hypotheses, with the result that what is deemed reliable in one context may be judged unreliable in another context. But from a rhetorical perspective, Shen points out, what counts is that the gap between the narrator and the implied author is encoded in the text rather than being a constructivist hypothesis; the reader is thus invited to adopt the position of the authorial audience and not merely to observe how different actual readers might deal with textual incongruities. Shen's rhetorical argument clearly falls within the scope of shared reading, as discussed above. At the same time, it is interesting to note that the question of unreliable narration is not a central issue in her book. Rather, it appears that this question is largely shifted to the interactions between overt and covert

progressions. In what ways and to what extent are reliability and unreliability the effect of such interactions? This is a complex subject, which calls for deeper analysis than can be undertaken here and which, I surmise, may provoke some controversy.

   Now for the book's corpus, it is made up of short stories that represent romanticism (Poe), realism (Crane), regionalism (Chopin), and British modernism (Mansfield) and that at the same time methodically explore the issues covered by the theoretical model outlined above. No attempt will be made here to comment on the details of Shen's perceptive and fine-tuned readings, some of them innovative contributions to scholarship on the individual authors. I wish simply to offer a few general observations. The corpus is organized in keeping with the definition of covert progression quoted above. In particular, it exemplifies the relation of subversion or of supplementation that may occur between covert progression and overt plot; each relation further breaks down into two subcategories (23–24):

(1) subversive covert progression may be (a) ethically problematic or unacceptable (the racist undercurrent in Chopin's "Désirée's Baby") or (b) ethically agreeable to the audience (the satiric antiwar undercurrent of Crane's "An Episode of War" in contrast to the realist overt plot; the oppressive social and patriarchal values running through the textual undercurrent in Mansfield's "Revelations" and "The Singing Lesson," which account for the asocial—neurotic, in the first case, ill-humored, in the second—personal behavior of the protagonists in the overt plot);

(2) supplementary covert progression goes (a) in the same direction as the overt plot (the dual covert progression of the narrator-protagonist's unconscious self-condemnation and self-conviction in Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" run parallel to the crime—and punishment—plot) or (b) in a different direction from the overt plot (the ironic undercurrent of the protagonist's vanity and self-importance in Mansfield's "The Fly" in contrast to his overt portrayal as a victim of war and the killer of a fly).

   It seems to me that a few observations concerning the ethical dimension of covert progression are in order. The undercurrent of meaning revealed through Shen's close analysis of this progression in "An Episode of War" clearly satirizes the martial prowess befitting the soldier and conveys the implied author's antiwar stance. However, the ethical implications of this story will vary according to the reading public and the individual reader concerned. Unlike antiwar activists, members of the officer corps may well take a dim view of the satire, regarding the covert progression as ethically unpalatable. Conversely, the implicit racism of the covert progression that

undermines the antiracism of the plot line of "Désirée's Baby" is abhorrent to large segments of society today. But such abhorrence among southern readers at the time of the story's publication in 1893 was not so widespread, and indeed the antiracist tenor of the overt plot may well have been judged ideologically reprehensible by some, a judgment that persists in some corners of society even today.

Such perspectives on the two stories may not stand up to careful textual scrutiny. Indeed, taking account of subversive or supplementing covert progressions in these narratives, and no doubt in many others as well, is a viable alternative to the emphasis laid by cognitivists and constructivists on divergent readings by actual readers within a generic framework. Instead, Shen's stylistic and contextual analyses of covert progressions provide the critic with the means for a closer consideration of the authorial audience. At the same time, such analysis can serve as an antidote to ideological readings in their various forms, for it draws attention to textual mechanisms that may not be easily subordinated to the demands of preestablished values and criteria—one of the widely acknowledged risks of ideological criticism.

And yet the examples above do hint at the influence that ideological factors, however minimal or unconscious, may exert on meaning in narratives and on the reader's ethical evaluation of the characters, events, and worldview portrayed there. If the aim of rhetorical criticism, and of Shen's proposals for remedying some of its shortcomings, is to enable the reader to achieve an authorial reading, one shared by others in the authorial audience, the fact still remains that various historical and ideological factors will affect actual readers, contemporary or not. They will be predisposed to perceive a literary work in one light or another and also to understand the authorial audience in significantly different ways. Even when sharing readings with others, the flesh-and-blood reader may never succeed in entering the skin of the authorial audience.

One possible route to further elucidation of the issues involved here is the notion of "horizon of expectations." Initiated by Hans Robert Jauß of the Constance school of literary reception, this concept consists of the expectations and assumptions that readers bring to literary works at any given historical period and that determine how a work is understood, interpreted, and judged. As an illustration, Jauß (1970 [1967]) refers to the famous scandal that broke out at the time of the prepublication of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* in 1857. The subject of Flaubert's novel, adultery, was not taboo and was in fact quite similar to that of Ernest Feydeau's popular bourgeois novel *Fanny* (1868). Even so, Flaubert's work was denounced as utterly immoral and censured by the courts, largely because it failed to observe the novelistic convention of the narrator pronouncing unequivocal moral judgment on

Emma. Worse, by giving voice to the inner thoughts of an adulteress, it even seemed to condone what the prosecuting attorney described as the "glorification of adultery" (quoted in Jauß 1970 [1967]: 34).[10] By his masterful use of the *style indirect libre*, Flaubert adopted an impersonal narrative voice that allowed him to give a sense of Emma's subjective thoughts and feelings without narratorial intervention, leaving readers with the impression that he was speaking in his own name without any hint of disapproval. This technique, long since become a staple of prose fiction and extensively discussed by literary and linguistic scholarship, was not familiar to Flaubert's contemporaries (the term *discours indirect libre* dates from the 1920s). Its unfamiliarity led to condemnation of his novel in line with ethical and aesthetic judgments rooted in French society of the time. In effect, current knowledge in Flaubert's day was not an aid to readers but, on the contrary, acted as an obstacle to achieving an adequate authorial reading. Flaubert's intentions were widely misunderstood, at least by his less sophisticated readers; in any case, whether deliberately or not, he clearly flouted the norms of contemporary public opinion. This suggests that the actual reader had yet to catch up with the authorial audience or the implied reader of the novel and also that the authorial audience is not fixed in time but may be subject to historical evolution. The assumptions and standards of the horizon of expectations have evolved in France and elsewhere since the *Madame Bovary* court proceedings and now embrace feminist values and the right of women to make their own choices, for example. This change encourages readers to interpret textual cues differently and to arrive at very different types of judgments of Flaubert's novel as well as of its heroine.

The horizon of expectations is not among the concepts employed in Shen's rhetorical narratology. Yet, it may shed light on her theory and analytic practice and in turn be enriched by insights gained through the dynamic interaction between overt plot and covert progression. Taking account of the contemporary state of knowledge is a prerequisite for achieving an authorial reading of "The Tell-Tale Heart" or of "The Singing Lesson," as mentioned above, but this does not appear to be entirely the case with works such as *Madame Bovary*, whose flesh-and-blood readers, misled by the strictures of contemporary *doxa*, misperceived the premises of Flaubert's authorial audience. In rhetorical terms, the gap between the narrator, whose voice fails to stand out against the other voices in the narrative, and the implied author was inadequately understood by Flaubert's contemporaries. This resulted in the

10. "'Who can condemn this woman?' asked the prosecuting attorney. 'No one. Such is the conclusion. There is no character in the book who can condemn her. If you find a well-behaved character in it, if you find a single principle by virtue of which adultery is stigmatized, I am wrong'" (Flaubert 1951: 666; quoted in Jauß 1970 [1967]: 35–36; my translation).

novel being taken to embrace unacceptable ethical and aesthetic standards. Clearly, historical and ideological factors play a role in such (mis)interpretations. Exploring covert progressions in *Madame Bovary* may well constitute a means of revising and refining readers' perceptions by capturing the various ways the text subverts and supplements the overt plot and thus come closer to the authorial reading intended by Flaubert. In this way, the rhetorical approach can provide a complement to studying the reception of this work along the lines of historically and socially changing horizons of expectations.

How the dynamic interplay between overt plot and covert progression can highlight the role of the authorial audience is demonstrated with particular acuity in the chapter devoted to Mansfield's "The Fly." A review of the criticism of this short story displays a wide diversity of thematic interpretations. According to Shen, this is because critical attention has focused almost exclusively on the plot movement: there the protagonist (the "boss"), who, like an enfeebled former employee come to the office for a visit, has lost his son in World War I, rescues a fly that has fallen into an ink pot, only to drown the creature by dropping blots of ink on it. This series of incidents in the plot, which "centers on war, death, existence, grief, memory, helplessness, suffering, loss, control, cruelty, indifference, victimization, and so forth" (128), lends itself to interpretations of diverse and even conflicting kinds. However, Shen's close observation of the patterns built up over the course of the covert progression relativizes, or even brings into question, the cogency of many of these readings (some of them opening up nonetheless potential lines of inquiry) by highlighting the boss's vanity and sense of self-importance. These qualities of the boss are so pervasive as to override his grief at the loss of his son, himself ultimately a manifestation of his father's pride and airs of superiority. Comparison of the two textual movements underscores the fact that an "ironic dissonance between the viewpoint of the narrator and that of the boss has eluded critical attention" (136), but it also brings into focus the ethical issues underlying the narrative and the aesthetic pleasure experienced through the apprehension of Mansfield's artistry.

What *Style and Rhetoric of Short Narrative Fiction* has accomplished in analyzing the various intricate interactions between overt and covert textual movements in a judiciously selected corpus is not only many insights into the subtleties of the narratives so meticulously examined but also the opening up of perspectives for the rhetorical analysis of other narratives and corpuses. Both precise and adaptable, the criteria and procedures for analyzing the interplay between the overt and the covert have much to offer to a methodology of narrative theory and analysis. And indeed, such is one of the ambitions of the book, as confirmed by the eight theses for uncovering covert progression discussed in the book's coda. An outgrowth of the Chicago school

neo-Aristotelian rhetorical narrative theory, Shen's contribution takes a step beyond the heritage of Aristotelian poetics in that it diverges from the traditional emphasis on plot to explore textual undercurrents running parallel to and sometimes counter to the plot development. On the other hand, by investigating with a keen critical eye the stylistic modulations that constitute covert progressions and evoke a variety of ethical undertones—matters often overlooked by scholars of narrative—Shen reaffirms the neo-Aristotelian triad of rhetoric, ethics, and aesthetics. Viewed from this angle, it can be said that Shen's book is an important contribution to ethical criticism. For "ethical reading," observes Liesbeth Korthals Altes (2005: 146), "if it is to take literature seriously, requires sophisticated skills in aesthetic (narratological and rhetorical) analysis."

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