

# Omniscience in Narrative Construction: Old Challenges and New

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**Abstract** Since modernism, narrative omniscience has been much attacked, yet little studied and understood. This in inverse ratio to the central role it actually plays in narrative discourse and metadiscourse alike: the telling, reading, grouping, evolving, conceptualizing of stories, invented (e.g., novelistic) or inspired (biblical, Homeric). Here I review the various old-new critical thrusts against epistemic superprivilege (outright denials, partisan judgments, attempted confinements, impairments, replacements, as well as genuine misunderstandings) arisen since my constructive theory of omniscience appeared, often in response to it. Those neo-modernist challenges meet, multiply, and frequently run to extremes in Jonathan Culler's (2004) antitheistic critique, which accordingly presents an overall mirror-image to how and where and why omniscient narrative is (re)constructed. Nor is this key question of epistemic privilege vs. disprivilege alone at stake. The argument shows afresh its bearings on larger issues yet, especially narrative's open-ended art of relations. Thus the relations between axes of perspective, between perspective and plot, between power and performance, between mimetic and artistic sense-making, between factual and fictional storytelling. Equally involved, at a higher level still, are the relations between part and whole, form and force or function, typology and teleology, theory and history, (meta)discourse and ideology, the realities of literature and the desires of the literati. Throughout, the choice ultimately lies between freezing, even nullifying those relations via package deals and allowing them free play in the spirit of the Proteus Principle.

The Lord knows and Israel shall know.

Joshua 22:22

Heaven knows, I know little enough of myself; I know nothing of others.

Somerset Maugham, "The Happy Man"

[Achilles to the Genie]: God? Who is God? . . . Would you mind telling me who—  
or what—God is?

Douglas Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach*

### 1. The State of the Art: A Personal Retrospect

The first question about the omniscient viewpoint on the storyworld, its power, its reality, its authority, its differentiability, its variants, and the difference each makes in turn, is where this superhumanly privileged lot comes from. My short answer would be, from what works best in our encounter and other dealings with texts, just like the rest of the (re)constructions we map on them for a purpose. High epistemic privilege arises therefrom not in "God's image"—as if ready-made and uniform—but in God's most suitable image as all-knower, always relative to the discursive job under way, the author's or the reader's and analyst's.

What distinguishes my approach to omniscience in discourse, as to point of view and plot and narrative at large, is accordingly its reference to the operative frame. Or frames, since the unique discourse-event that proceeds between author and reader—with its entire makeup, matrix, movement, mimesis, meaning, medium, mediacy at either end, all coordinated into a web of relations—never stands alone. A one-off coordinator, however powerful ad loc, the discourse frame has equivalents, possibly rivals, in larger networks; and its own (con)text of omniscience, like everything else, must appeal to them for more general determination. These wider frames enclosing the discourse refer us, for example, to the writer, the (sub)genre, the semiotic code, the aesthetic movement, the ideological climate, the diachronic juncture, the culture at large—with their norms, drives, hierarchies, traditions, exigencies, licenses, how-to-do-what repertoires, regularities of pattern and purpose, which govern perspective, inter alia. At all levels of analysis—theorizing, classifying, historicizing, reading—superknowledge turns on the complex of parameters deemed in force. It gets assigned to some viewpoint (if it does) and differentiated from other, even otherwise superknowing viewpoints (the way it does) as a part with a role to play in the storied whole at issue, and a role that makes better sense than offered by the available alternatives.

This means that omniscience can not only change pattern, but even come and go according to our frame of reference: with the reader's overall

understanding of what the tale would achieve and how, for example, or with the very reading's shifts of understanding from one stage in the process to another. Indeed, the changes operate here under a marked constraint. All-knowledge being an absolute feature, its reversal into normal awareness is unusual, its in-between modulation illogical, and its adjustment into a posture of limitedness far likelier; yet all the possibilities remain open to the sense-maker. The epistemology we figure out may thus change poles from superhuman to human—or, again, not, or not altogether—when an authorized-looking narrator abruptly pleads (admits? simulates? mocks?) ignorance. What we decide in response to such exigencies does not essentially affect the principle. Nor does the kind or “style” of response that we bring to the text, whether a matter of communicative negotiation, say, or of one-sided interpretation: whether reconstructive or constructive, in other words. I myself endorse the former discourse transaction, as suggested by the multiple framing above; but I'll nevertheless generally use here the latter, more inclusive (as well as permissive) term, exactly because the pattern-making rationale transcends even the otherwise important and debatable how's of reading. Across these differences, as across those in analytic level, omniscience arises or modulates or transforms by purpose-driven inference—from moment to moment in time art, and in narrative, between the generic action/discourse times as well. Leading such a life, it makes a functional construct rather than a formal given.

In earlier work—especially the books on temporal ordering (1978) and biblical poetics (1985), with various follow-ups such as “Factives and Perspectives” (2001b)—I have detailed the lines along which the super-knower's construction operates. Some of them have over the years been accepted, applied, extended, or specialized in the fields concerned. (Not always, though, with the implications pursued to the end of the functionalist line: even in today's more receiver-minded climate of opinion, inherent form may still exert its allure, to half-and-half effect.) But those lines need to be re-drawn, or retested, against opposing views that have persisted or emerged or resurged over the decades. Too assorted to generalize, these will be specified in the reanalysis below, at the pertinent junctures, as will various misunderstandings. Let me start, though, with a recent arrival that not only concentrates much of this assortment but also pushes the dissent to one surprising extreme after another. I'm referring to the old-new resistance to my theory and to the concept itself expressed by Jonathan Culler's “Omniscience” (2004).<sup>1</sup>

1. All references by page number hereafter are to this essay. A slightly modified version of it is Culler 2007: 182–201.

Old, because the objections raised often sound traditional, if not outdated. They echo (repeat, revive, reinvent) dogmas, especially typologies, prevalent in modernist or Structuralist formalism but already dismantled and rethought in the approach under challenge. Examples would be Culler's favoring of the self-contradictory "limited omniscience," or the opposite tendency to strengthen omniscience by infallible judgment.

Newer, because far less precedented and hardly ever driven to such lengths, is the antitheism that rages throughout Culler's argument. He starts by avowing it, then promising its suspension, then backsliding, with another immediate disclaimer. His work on "Omniscience," he notes, ran parallel to observing President George Bush's delusions of God-like knowledge; but "I have tried to keep my rising repugnance"—or "current political fantasy"—"from attaching to the concept of omniscience in narrative poetics." In the same breath, though, the declared impartial poetician cannot help recalling how Virginia Woolf found "something obscene" about a person "believing in God"; not, he hastens to add, that "I . . . think that the idea of omniscience is obscene" (22). The hostility unequivocally preached in an earlier essay on "Political Criticism: Confronting Religion" is much closer to the driving force here and will resurge in practice all along his critique. "The essential step . . . is not to assume that theistic beliefs deserve respect, any more than we would assume that sexist or racist beliefs deserve respect" (Culler 1988: 80).

So formalist compounds with antireligious a priorism, typological orthodoxy with ideopolitical militancy, resulting in a twofold diametric opposite to the spirit of my approach. This compound not only subsumes but outranges or entangles the various moves directed against storied omniscience to date, at times with updates in face of countermoves, too, and it repays examination accordingly. Unlike some, moreover, these diametric opposites enable comparison, even invite it, with a view to adjudication. For, if Culler's declared allegiance to "narrative poetics" is not single-minded here, nor is it a window dressing, either. Amid sharp disagreement, there survive enough common grounds on which to review the matters at issue productively: grounds logical, conceptual, taxonomic, empirical—say—as distinct from doctrinal. The same holds for most other opponents, as well as friendly misreaders. Fortunately so, or else review, rebuttal, reanalysis would be a waste of time. Though a believer in open argument, and without pretending to the detachment of Joyce's God, I have little interest in polemics as such, least of all about faith, nor in scoring rhetorical points. What with its exemplary test-case value, a major question like ours deserves, and will I hope fare, better than getting muddled by sheer desire at the crossroads.

## 2. Omniscience among Narrative Features: Packaged vs. Protean Composites

First principles come first, especially in face of their outright denial as relating to a phenomenon nonexistent, at best inaccessible and inoperative. Where Culler outdoes most (not all) of his own allies, past or present, is in his bid for a clean sweep, purging narrative of omniscience and the whole divine model with it. Or bids, rather, since the grounds adduced shift or multiply, with a view to a cumulative effect, it appears.

Most generally and recurrently, Culler would disqualify this supernatural privilege, or my theorizing of it, as a mixed bag. Omniscience “is not a useful concept for the study of narration,” because “it conflates and confuses several different factors that should be separated if they are to be well understood . . . it obfuscates the various phenomena that provoke us to posit the idea” (22). Funnily, it is Culler himself, like many before him, and often along the same routine lines, who does the conflating and confusing and obfuscating. Worse, as will soon emerge, what he confuses again are precisely the factors, or features, that I have taken such care to disentangle in reconceptualizing narrative omniscience, so as to accommodate its flexible art of relations. This flexibility shows, moreover, both in the interplay of the epistemic with other perspectival attributes, which may but need not, and at times do not, attach to it, and in the interplay of variables within the epistemic sphere itself, often likewise reified by theory into automatic concomitance. Fragments apart, this overall line of argument has apparently been lost on Culler: from exposure of traditional misconceptions to fresh start, from rationale to combinatory possibilities to examples, and from inter-feature to single-feature dynamism. As befits a titular target, the latter, epistemic interplay is the main victim of his “Omniscience,” and accordingly most in need of unshackling once again. I’ll begin, though, by quickly reviewing the larger, inter-feature manifold, just to suggest the common principle and enable us to glance at further communities below.

On this master principle, here is the key statement, often echoed since. “Whatever logic or theology may lead us to expect, there are no package deals in narration” (Sternberg 1978: 256). Or constructively, in the fullest sense of the word, this principle speaks for “the advantages of isolating inherent and relational features of narration instead of classifying narrators in toto, and of viewing each (actual or possible) narrator as a variable, ad hoc rather than as a mutually implicative and hence predictable complex of features” (ibid.: 279). “Package deals” thus run against “the Proteus Principle,” whereby teleology governs typology: narrative discourse always assumes (chooses, implies, ascribes) and coordinates such perspec-

tival features as best serve its ends. Every single discursive trait and every multi-trait viewpoint—authorial, narratorial, addressee-minded, unself-conscious—will then arise by reference to its function within the discourse. It will be constructed (and if necessary, re-constructed) to fit the optimum part/whole, means/end interplay in context, whatever the construct's a priori expectability or its formal propriety (harmony, normality) on the given surface. Thus, among other dynamics to be revisited, the teller's high epistemic privilege ("supernature") may come with or without creative license, with or without ideological authority, with or without authorized artistry, with or without disinvolvement, with or without a fictional contract, and vice versa.

This protean, frame-specific rationale governs a fortiori all low-mimetic perspectives, evidently devoid by nature of any author-like superpower, and so constructible in relative (as opposed to binary) terms. For example, Mr. Knightley is Emma's superior in judgment but not always in knowledge, while Henry Tilney has an advantage over Catherine in both. Or, within their respective contexts, Humbert is a better writer than Huck Finn, yet a worse moralist, whereas Barry Lyndon has the worst of both features. Here, a "tense" perspectival cross of more with less, less with more; there, a "harmonious" coupling of degrees, now for good, now for ill—just as with the either/or's of supernatural author-likeness, only relativized. If you disagree with my examples, you're welcome to substitute your own graded constructions, and clinch my point thereby. (We'll have our interpretive quarrel some other time.)

This modular image-building, then, extends from the teller to the last discourser (voice, view) along the transmissional chain, to the network of perspectives composing the discourse as a whole—and again regardless of the typologist's will to fixture by dint of reason, religion, roundness, realism, routine, rule, or what passes for such. Throughout, the rage for stable order, easily classified and applicable, leads to fusing discrete transmissional attributes; fusion incurs confusion of variable with law-like (obligatory, exclusive) junctures; and confusion misrepresents the genre's boundless ("protean") integrating possibilities and practices—or ours in face of them, as sense-makers of narrative and narratives. Instead of reifying perspectival art into a limited order and number of static mergers, we must therefore allow for its demonstrable combinatory license.

Such fixtures have long impeded narrative theory, even outside formal taxonomic maps, and nowhere more so than in the package deals imposed on (and, recall, within) omniscience. Of these, Culler has inherited at least four, but examining two will now suffice. The epistemic axis of perspective is thereby misassociated with the ontic and the evaluative axes: the factor

of the transmitter's knowledge (complete vs. limited) with that of potence, above all, and of reliability.

### **2.1. Omnipotence and Related Ontic Connections:**

#### ***Dynamizing the Fiction/History Line***

Narrative omnipotence has been more widely assumed than omniscience, yet even less studied, least of all under this name. Among other results, their collocation in God has been mistaken for an intrinsic juncture. The passing glances at the relations between the two privileges accordingly exhibit a constant interlinkage amid changing forms, labels, grounds, or directions.

Briefly, the very references in narrative study to the author as omnipotent, as one who creates (“invents”) and controls the represented world, give away a bent toward the fictional, even specifically novelistic pole of the genre—exclusive of all nonfictional traditions, some central to the literary canon itself. Excluded are both empirical factography, like Gibbon or Boswell on Johnson, which definitionally rules out authorial omnipotence, and privileged history telling from the Bible to Milton, which doesn't, and needn't, with a polar difference in truth claim vis-à-vis the younger novelistic subgenre. There, the Bible encodes a storyworld as divinely created and controlled and communicated, yet not invented nor plottable at will, because supposed to mirror historical reality. It also mirror images and, diachronically, originates our fictive author, patterned on God. Yet, if the empirical, low-mimetic tradition is at least sometimes overtly opposed by analysts to fictionality, the higher one, aesthetically as ontically, is just ignored. For aspirants to a theory of narrative, or of either ontic branch, the one-sidedness comes at the price of overgeneralization to the limit of category mistakes: erasing key variables and cross-linkages will yield some neat poetics or typology that is inadequate even as far as it goes.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, in the fictional subgenre itself, the author's omnipotence gets coupled, at times conflated, with omniscience, by open or tacit appeal to divine authorship of the world. Seymour Chatman (1990: 74–108 *passim*, 116, 119, 138), having defined “the implied author” as fictionist, “the principle of invention in the text,” derives omniscience therefrom: “Only the implied author can be said to ‘know,’ because the implied author has invented it all” (*ibid.*: 130; or Genette 1993: 82; Cohn 1999: 95; Royle 2003:

2. E.g., on the most general level, Chatman (1990: 119) defines “Narrative as an invention, by an implied author, of events and characters and objects (the story) and of a modus (the discourse) by which these are communicated”: so much for the goal of an inclusive narratology. And likewise in other theories, where the inventor remains as criterial and restrictive, but comes less to the fore.

256–57; Nelles 2006: 120). Less routinely, John Barth (1984: 42) inverts the causal linkage: “the novelist, whose trade is the manufacture of universes, needs ideally to know everything, or else he’s liable to do an even odder job than God did.” Others loosely co-attribute or intersubstitute or merge these two privileges. “The Panopticon effects an exemplary conjunction of seeing and power,” or more explicitly yet, “the technique of omniscient narration” interchanges with “absolute panopticism” (Seltzer 1984: 49, 54). Sartre’s (1955 [1947]: 7–23) famous attack on François Mauriac virtually identifies his omniscient telling with an outrageous, inartistic, divinity-like omnipotence that nullifies the characters’ free agency. Again, William Nelles (2006: 119–20) so fuses the two supernatural powers that omnipotence becomes an “attribute” (aspect, component) of omniscience, just like omnipresence. Strictly, he adds, the one “logically entails” the other as its generator (*ibid.*). However, since omnipotence makes “a core attribute” of omniscience, the entailment even runs both ways, on top of everything.

In this regard, if the all-knowing narrator varies from the author’s two-fold fixture, it is often only to fall into the opposite, divisive mold. Either a categorical, generally automatic extension of omnipotence, as inventiveness and the like, or a categorical deprivation. Opinions thus polarize between, say, “third person omniscient narrators fictionally *determine* what counts as the ‘story,’ creating the fictional world with their godlike voice” (Goldfarb 1996: 61, or Ryan 1981) and “the omniscient narrators of Victorian novels . . . have perfect knowledge of a world they have not made” (Miller 1968: 64–66, or Chatman 1990: 130, 226n24; Fludernik 1996: 368–71).

Culler not only further diversifies but thematizes and centralizes this inherited ontic nexus. It already leaps to the eye in his earliest “fundamental point.” “Divine omniscience is not a model that helps us think about authors or about literary narratives” but quite the contrary: “the example of the novelist who creates his world, peopling it with creatures who come to seem to us autonomous . . . , helps us to imagine the possibility of a creator, a god, a sentient being, as undetectable to us as the novelist would be” to “*his* creatures” (23). Most frequently and doctrinally, Culler yokes together omniscience with omnipotence—including relatives like “creator” here or “performativity” thereafter—to an extent rare even among standard mixers of epistemic with ontic privilege. The careless jump from one to the other in the above quote, and not there alone, elsewhere assumes a color of reason. Thus, “the basis of ‘omniscience’” lies in the famous analogy whereby “the author creates the world of the novel as God created our world, and just as the world holds no secrets for God, so the novelist

knows everything that is to be known about the world of the novel" (23). Whichever way the analogy runs, then, from or to theology, creatorship/omnipotence allegedly entails omniscience. So much so that in the sequel, we'll find, it would replace omniscience altogether, concerning the narrator as well as the author, to the point of dispensing with it (26–32 *passim*).

As always, however, this routine-plus linkage fails several times over. A major disproof (or, positively, reshuffle) is best illustrated from the Bible, which Culler himself describes as "the true model of omniscient narration" in his reference to my chapter on this very juncture of epistemic with existential power (26). Only, he apparently forgets the thrust of the argument there.

Author of the (created) universe and the (inspired) discourse alike, the Bible's God unprecedentedly combines omniscience with omnipotence, while the narrator disclaims God-like omnipotence for the same reason that he claims God-given omniscience: in the interests of recording the Lord's dealings with humanity to the most authoritative and persuasive effect within the cultural framework. This inspired historian would undercut his entire truth-telling stance and project (with the wanted impact on the audience's faith) if he doubled as the Lord's equivalent in world-making, hence possibly even as his fictionalizer or inventor. The strategy requires, instead, both a heavenly author who joins and a heaven-oriented narrator who disjoins the two privileges at issue (*Poetics* [1985]: 58–128).

Homer and his Muse, neither of them omnipotent over *their* storyworld past, offer a Greek variation on this interplay. Here originates another line of descent among aspirants to truth-telling beyond ordinary human empirical limits. Later, medieval historiography, in both Muslim and Western culture, exhibits the disjuncture afresh—now without appeal to superpowers, any more than prejudice to the truth claim. The historiographic code itself licenses there the incorporation of the humanly inaccessible: private encounters, interior states, scenes beyond death (Shoshan 2004: esp. 52–60; Partner 1999, who locates the origin of the novel in such "omniscient narration"). Again, occult knowledge cooperates with an authoritative reference to a preexisting world, made by a self-declared inquirer ("histor") at that. And Milton crosses Scripture's heritage with the epic's, inspiration with invocation, in retelling Genesis as *Paradise Lost*.

Accordingly, moreover, it is not this ontic/epistemic package deal alone that collapses. Also untenable on the same ground, it emerges, are the larger ones of omniscience as well as omnipotence with fiction *and* of their humanly restricted opposites with historiography. At either pole, no fewer than three variables get yoked together: a subgenre of narrative with epi-

stemic and ontic (dis)privilege. That is, the absence of a truth claim about the representation must allegedly go with the presence of absolute knowledge and control; its presence, with their absence. These polar threefold composites so typify the approaches and disciplines involved—fictional, historical, narrative theory—that one needn't multiply examples. In one book-length narratological study, Dorrit Cohn (1999), invoking Käte Hamburger (1973) and others, thus stakes everything on this ill-grounded “distinction of fiction,” on its unique access to mental life, above all, with results to suit.

The bigger the package and the sharper the polarity drawn between the respective threefold complexes, the more exposed latter-day prejudice, born of novel-centrist myopia or amnesia: it disregards prenovelistic arts and masterworks, including the genre's foundational exemplars. Nevertheless, such generic practice falsifies the typologist's favorite marriages, twofold or threefold, as well as highlighting the narrational promiscuity of narrative. The suppressed returns with a vengeance.

The more so because these privileged attributes needn't meet or merge even in fiction. All narrative has liaisons rather than marriages made in heaven. Strictly, that the fictionist's omnipotence entails omniscience—if “creates,” then “knows everything”—is itself debatable, and falsified in limit cases, though it normally counts as valid. Think of the Mad Hatter in Wonderland unequal to his own riddle, or of Robert Coover's teller in “The Magic Poker.” Having opened by “inventing” and populating an island, he suddenly asks in midaction: “But where is the caretaker's son? I don't know. . . . This is awkward. Didn't I invent him myself, along with the girls and the man in the turtleneck shirt? . . . I don't know” (Coover 1970: 20, 27). As every parent discovers, one doesn't always know one's own creation.<sup>3</sup>

But even where this inter-feature entailment obtains—or granted its usual force in all possible worlds outside history—the converse certainly doesn't obtain, any more than it does with Homer's strengthless Muse. Like her in truth-claiming discourse, why should absolute control over the world ensue from absolute knowledge about the world, or just attend it by some weaker nexus than logic? For now, consider the age-old practice of disjuncture that is “sentimentally” novelized in Thomas Mann's *The Holy Sinner*: a tradition-bound yet omniscient retelling of an inherited *fabula*, with the antipoles both advertised at that. “I count on your belief,” says its monkish narrator Clement, “just as I count on my ability to tell in a

3. In a sense—on which more later—beginning with God himself in face of the humanity created in his image to exercise free will.

credible manner what has been told me”; yet he also calls himself “the incarnate spirit of storytelling,” free to shuttle among times, places, minds (Mann 1951: 244, 8).<sup>4</sup>

The two privileges draw still further asunder as we move from the novelist to a superknowing teller or reflector to a part-knower of the kind that Culler so desires (26). An inerrant weather predictor, for example, cannot yet hasten or delay the event itself, but must wait, like the rest of us, for his prediction to come true. Unless, of course—which demonstrates the point another way—the fictionist endows him with the corresponding part-omnipotence as well: a magic ring, a time machine, a cosmic thermostat, a “superwoman” who “controlled weather systems” (Fowler 2005: 151).

With all such variant interplays taken together, finally, the packaging also reveals itself as counterproductive in operational, sense-making terms, along the entire discourse front. It blurs a vital difference (on which more later) between two complementary sets of questions, oriented to knowledge and to existence, respectively. Even in the process of reading the storyworld itself, we must ask both how-and-why the narrative discloses or darkens it to us, for example, and, regardless of disclosure, whether the narrative invents/controls or records that world. The answers freely cross, because the very same information has two faces—if not three—down to the meaning, standard, judgment of “truth” (e.g., as extendible *or* opposed to fictionality) associated with either.

In brief, our judgments of information as “true” or not relative to the represented world (hence turning on the discourser’s well-/ill-informedness and informativeness in context, whether fictional, historical, ambiguous) are one thing; quite different are the judgments made relative to the actual world (hence seeking to polarize historical with fictional discourse according to truth-boundness, whatever the information’s truth-in-context, its objectivity/subjectivity vis-à-vis the author and other given viewpoints). Less central to narratology, yet different again, is the issue of whether the information runs true/false to established fact—of its truth value—newly crossing the fiction/history line. Emma Woodhouse’s portrait as “handsome, clever and rich . . .” is true in one sense (because reliable, harmonious with all the available data) and untrue or nontrue in the other (because portraying an imaginary figure); while the converse would hold for an inconsistent *or* glowing account of Jack the Ripper. The respective

4. By contrast, a historical novelist, supposedly playing by much the same rules, claims both privileges, not only “the right . . . to attribute motive—something the conscientious historian or biographer ought never to do,” but also the power of life and death over the characters: “I revived Edward Livingston [who had died months before the dialogue in which he appears] because I needed him at that point” (Vidal 1974: 563).

questions and answers—two or three—stay distinct in theory, with variable mergers, according to the narrative features on which they bear.

Epistemic privilege would therefore lose rather than gain intelligibility if assimilated to ontic almightiness, which is focused elsewhere: at best its working complement, yet not its necessary superordinate or condition or outcome or, strictly, concomitant. This negative rule (the other face of the liberating multiple choice) holds even when the two powers do meet. An omnipotence-flaunting novel like *Jacques the Fatalist* would hardly recommend itself as a model of God's omniscience, or anyone's, though it does co-exercise this power without such fanfare.

Actually, the same passage (23) where Culler would reverse the analogy in omniscience from theological to novelistic origination, via a jump to omnipotence, intermixes mixtures. It thus ends with another slippage: "a god . . . as undetectable to us as the novelist would be to the characters." His "undetectable" merely renames in perceptual language the attribute of separate existence, apart from the real or narrated arena.<sup>5</sup> An equivalent, this, of F. K. Stanzel's (1984) typology of mediators by their existence outside/inside the fictional reality.<sup>6</sup> Far more popular is Gérard Genette's (1980: 227–52, 1988: 84ff.) terminology, whereby "undetectable" would match "extradiegetic," especially when joined to "heterodiegesis." Anyone divided from storied existents by "level" plus "absence" must elude their perception, as it were. Thus "Homer," embedder and outsider at once, would get twice removed from the story. Culler indeed refers elsewhere to "extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narration" (29–31), at times with explicit linkage to superknowledge, as do of course a host of narratologists.

Take Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan on the "both extradiegetic and heterodiegetic narrators" of *Tom Jones*, *Père Goriot*, and *Sons and Lovers*: "It is precisely their being absent from the story and their higher narrational authority in relation to it that confers on such narrators the quality that has often been called omniscience" (1983: 95). With "confers," the linkage tightens into a causal non sequitur; but would a looser fixed correlation obtain? If it did, then a recent historian of the Trojan War (not to speak of other

5. The term, including its association with superknowledge as well as high control, may relate to Jeremy Bentham's and Michel Foucault's Panopticon, from whose central observation tower "one sees everything without being seen" (Foucault 1979: 200–207).

6. So is the distancing misnomer "third-person," or, obliquely, the misreference to "omniscient narration" as "a discursive category" that "belongs to sujet" (Walsh 2001: 599): i.e., no omniscients inside the fabulaic storyworld, against the paradigm of the Bible's (hi)storied God. Inversely with narrators who do "belong to sujet": every disjuncture of their epistemic from other God-like privileges (or vice versa) falsifies Walsh's (1997) doctrinal, even defiant equation of the extrafabulaic narrator with the author. Either way, this mode of reference to the epistemology/ontology package fares no better than the more current labels.

impersonal factographers) must share the otherworldly cognitive privilege with “Homer”; a fortiori at that, given the increase in distance from the storyworld. But, compounding the usual fallacy, Rimmon-Kenan’s teller needn’t even be heterodiegetic to enjoy this privilege. Extradiegesis will do for the purpose: superior narrative “level”—with or without absence from the arena—meets the order of superior knowledge about the narrated. As “the adult Pip is a higher narratorial authority in relation to the story which he narrates, as it were, from ‘above’ . . . he knows everything about it, like the former [e.g., *Père Goriot*’s] extradiegetic narrator” (ibid.). Pip himself recurrently declares the contrary. Thus, “What purpose I had in view when I was hot on tracing out and proving Estella’s parentage, I cannot say. . . . I really do not know whether . . . or whether. . . . Perhaps the latter possibility may be the nearer to the truth” (Dickens 1985 [1860–61]: 420). And Pip’s gaps still hardly compare with Marlowe’s or Dowell’s.

Under any label, then, the outsider’s high epistemic connection is equally current and equally false. So is the insider’s disconnection. Among other counterevidence, take the polar extreme to the modern historian of ancient Greece, who, essentially removed from the narrated object, will yet disclaim both superknowledge and superagency. The Bible’s God, who claims both powers, is immanent rather than transcendent; and so, more occasionally and peripherally, is Fielding’s narrator or *Vanity Fair*’s. The compulsory linkage proves contingent either way, and within either sub-generic discourse world, historical or fictive.

No more tenable (as I already hinted, and will soon detail) is Culler’s frequent marriage or interchange of omniscience among near-relatives to omnipotence, like creativity, performativity, stipulation, invention. However, since all these betray further mixtures of epistemology with ontology—as well as intermixtures of distinct ontic traits per se—let us now proceed to the relations with axiology: the aspect of (in)fallible or (un)reliable judgment.

## **2.2. (Super)Knowledge, (Un)Reliability, and Critical Obstacles to Their Interplay**

For a change, it may appear, here Culler parallels my theory as originally encapsulated in the following key statement on combinatory license in perspective-making. The author, I argued, “may indeed choose to create the narrator in his own image by investing him” with “the whole complex of godlike privileges and artistic attributes” that characterize himself: witness Homer, Fielding, or George Eliot. But

he also may, and in many instances he does, break the identity to a greater or lesser extent by depriving his narrator of one or more of these attributes,

thus retiring to his position behind the scenes. Significantly, this is true even of omniscient narration. The authors of *Vanity Fair*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Don Quixote*, or “The Overcoat”—to cite a few notable examples—partly divest their narrators of reliability, though leaving them as variously omniscient as George Eliot’s. In *Don Quixote*, for example, the author (who also acts as editor or primary narrator) is not content with making his characters impugn the veracity of Cid Hamet Benengeli, the Moorish historian from whose manuscript the bulk of the story is “translated,” but goes out of his way to do so himself both with reference to particular episodes and to the infidel narrator’s procedure as a whole. . . .

It thus emerges that the almost axiomatic presupposition of novel criticism since Lubbock that the omniscient narrator coincides with the author at all points or rather *is* the author—a presupposition that accounts for the prevalent tendency to use the two terms interchangeably—fails to stand up to the facts; the omniscient narrator is as much a creation of the author’s as are dramatized narrators that are obviously distant from him. The eponymous narrators in *Barry Lyndon* or *Tristram Shandy*, for instance, have only been placed at one further remove from their authors, being self-conscious but restricted as well as unreliable; while in Gogol’s “A Diary of a Madman” or James’s “The Diary of a Man of Fifty” they are wholly unselfconscious into the bargain. Whatever logic or theology may lead us to expect, there are no package-deals in narration. (Sternberg 1978: 255–56)

At the time, identifying the omniscient narrator with the author in everything, primarily including reliability, and so even in name, was a tendency too prevalent among narrative analysts to require much illustration. The merger still showed where—or when—one might expect a new or firm line-drawing, as in the sea change from Norman Friedman’s (1955) modernist typology to Wayne Booth’s countervailing *Rhetoric* (1961), for example. As a defense of reliable commentary, the latter even has a vested interest in (re)bracketing the two kinds of narrative authority for maximum persuasiveness. Package dealing for a purpose, rather than for taxonomic pigeonholing, as usual? This brings the shared misconception to a contradiction in terms: formalism under a functional banner, associated with Aristotle. Yet the drive toward such rhetorical overkill (and inversely, the underrating of silent, oblique, unreliably mediated rhetoric) prevails in Booth and his lineage.

At its most general, we see it in the hierarchy established, whereby the epistemic underling can only rise if its very meaning stretches to embrace the greater privilege as well: “omniscience” then becomes “a choice of the moral, not merely the technical, angle of vision from which the story is to be told” (Booth 1961: 265). By the same token, in one pinpoint variant, “only an omniscient narrator could use with success” evaluative terms

like “gallant.” It amounts to saying that no value-laden epithet predicated by any human, real or imagined, carries weight: a means/end fixture, or monopoly, that would befit a formalist. Or, having once “surrendered to an omniscient narrator,” the reader doesn’t “separate the narrator’s judgment from the thing or character judged.” Or the negative way, “The commentator who fails in this mode [and ‘the heavy-footed author’ with him] is the one who claims omniscience and reveals stupidity and prejudice.” In short, the all-knowing narrator doubles as “the all-wise author”: within this union, the first capacity ranks lower than the second, but reinforces its persuasive effect (ibid.: 265, 12, 53, 221, 146). Inversely, a broad generalization about the narrated events “could never come with authority from any character fully involved in the action,” who simply doesn’t “know enough about the meaning of the whole to go beyond his present problems” (ibid.: 197–98). The fancied linkage between the privileges, then, also works the other way to merge the respective disprivileged antipoles.

So, at this juncture, Booth’s revisionism not only echoed the old dogma but gave it a new lease on life and legitimacy, with traceable follow-ups. By other developments, notably the rise of Structuralism, the old typological spirit also assumed new guises, to much the same packaging effect. Hence the emphasis I laid in the above quote from *Expositional Modes* (1978: 255–56) on the narrator’s open-ended construction or delegation by the author; or in other words, on the essential distinctness of the perspectival features concerned (as well as of the narrative agents between whom they may vary and pass, with distinct names to suit). Like the rest, these two axes enjoy a mutual independence. They definitionally join epistemic with evaluative privilege in the omniscient fictive author, while composing as will into accord or discord, with him and each other, all along the chain of transmission that he fictionalizes and interposes in order to communicate silently with ourselves. (Given implied omniscient divine authorship, the same constants and variables operate within a historiographic matrix.) From the receiving end of discourse, the order of advance, toward *our* silent opposite number, reverses. So does the certitude of the whole construction, now proceeding by readerly trial and error—even the communicative goals need inferring—except for the generic reference points: the storytelling universals and the literary (fictive, inspiring) communicator’s definitional omniscience.

Confronted with the finished narrative, we thus progressively figure out some intermediate chain of transmission that goes back to the author. En route, we endow each transmitter with such features (including the pair now at issue) as most fit his mediative role in what would appear the overall design underlying the text-in-context. All along this line of interposed,

quoted authorial surrogates, from mouths to minds, from hands to eyes to ears, from global narrator to inset tellers or reflectors to the last dialogist or monologist that they quote in turn, we correlate the variables of knowledge and judgment into the twofold pattern of (dis)privilege that best makes sense—or, reconstructively, that best coheres with our author’s image and implications.

The correlative inferencing between the axes dynamizes accordingly. Here, the pole of omniscience would appear to go well with that of reliability; here, one pole dovetails instead with the other’s antipole; here, again, the two antipoles integrate into an effective pattern, functionally interlink. This basic set of combinatory options is exemplified in the above quote regarding primary, work-length mediators, and elsewhere also traced further down the narrative chain.<sup>7</sup>

To complicate and enrich the dynamism, moreover, at least two additional factors need to be reckoned with, one processual, one scalar. Any epistemic/evaluative correlation inferred about any transmissional link (voice, view) remains provisional to the last word, if not left ambiguous at the end itself. It is subject to adjustment, even reversal, under the pressure of what happens and/or unfolds next—like everything else processed between the two sequences unique to narrative. In other words, these gaps in perspective (hypothetical closure and all) operate under the same time rule as those in plot, since the two lacunae equally belong to the narrated world. In disentangling the perspectival montage built into reported discourse, we often find questions like “Whose (mis)information?” and “Whose (mis)judgment?” hard to settle in immediate context, if ever. Experimental writing radicalizes such enigmas. But the rule applies even to cases at either perspectival limit, where the narrator at once invites closure as authorial (e.g., Fielding-like) *or* antipolar (e.g., Gogol’s mad diarist) in both respects. Though early and easy, the narrator’s reading as such gains specificity and certitude, at times also depth and complexity, on the way to the terminus.

Further, unlike the (theo)logical either/or of knowledge, the reliable/unreliable polarity is by nature both gradable on a value scale and divisible into autonomous value-laden subpolarities (e.g., ethical, cultural, artis-

7. E.g., Sternberg 1978, 1982a, 1982b, 1985, 1986, 1991, 2001b, 2005, forthcoming, on how narration alternates with speech/thought quotation, itself free to quote other characters and to interact with them in different ways, harmoniously and/or conflictually, on different perspectival axes. A wide-ranging approach to (un)reliability as a perspectival hypothesis of integration has been developed in Yacobi 1981, 1987a, 1987b, 2000, 2001, 2005. She sometimes revisits there the play of features under discussion now, but her followers would generally appear to have missed the point, except for Cohn (1999: e.g., 148–49).

tic, as well as epistemic).<sup>8</sup> Just recall our brief examples of how varieties of more and less, better and worse, higher and lower, superior here and inferior there, converge or diverge among mediators whose judgments we judge. On top of everything, then, the epistemic binaries compose with a set of quantifiable normative (dis)privileges to characterize every inset viewpoint vis-à-vis the authorial frame.

Nevertheless, the tendency to bracket the two axes has generally persisted in face of reason and evidence—including their steady elaboration in Tamar Yacobi's work on reliability, which has otherwise proved influential. Here, apparently, the allure of package dealing, or the rage for typological neatness, is at its strongest. For example: "The first-person narrator is by definition an 'unreliable narrator,'" while "the unrestricted omniscient narrator" is always and alone reliable (Stanzel 1984: 89–90, 150–52). Notably, the stable two-way correlation is implied here to tighten further yet: into causal followability ("x, hence y") between kindred attributes.<sup>9</sup> That such theorists would narrow down (un)reliability to informational (un)reliability, exclusive of ideological or poetic (mis)judgment, has only worsened matters. Such reduction facilitates the linkage to omniscient/constrained access: two faces of the same epistemic (dis)privilege, as it were.

### **2.2.1. A Comparison with Performative Mimesis as against (Un)Persuasive**

**Maxim** By contrast, Culler perhaps seems on the right track when he emphatically distinguishes the authority inherent in "the mimetic content of narratorial sentences from affirmations that are not narrative or descriptive: generalizations, aphorisms, opinions, moral views," which "may receive various degrees of acceptance from readers" (27; following Felix Martinez-Bonati). The narrator's "performative" mimesis is always true, the maxims contingent on our persuasion. In effect, omniscience disjoined from value-laden reliability? No, for at least three reasons.

One of them is conceptual, and enough to invalidate Culler's proposal, as well as to contrast it with my approach. By the Proteus Principle, narratorial omniscience assumes different forms, as between the advertised and the reticent, or between the communicative and the suppressive, or among mind-reading, access to private events, long backreference, and seeing into the humanly opaque future. So, even more changeably, does reliability, as between the ethical and the aesthetic, again, or the strategies for communicating any aspect of valuation. These means range between

8. The need for this subdivision of (un)reliability was already noted in Booth 1961, though meanwhile forgotten by some and reinvented by others.

9. Also, e.g., Prince 1982: 12; Chatman 1978: 233–37, 1990: 130–54 passim; Ryan 2001: 147–48.

the discourser's plain and intricate judgment: overt and oblique, univocal and ambivalent, conventional and heterodox, transparent and two-faced, immediate and emergent, stable or steadily evolving as the action develops and surprisingly twisted round in belated disclosure, each with a rhetoric to match.<sup>10</sup> And the same multiformity typifies the respective disprivileges.

On the other hand, the two features that Culler names are in effect distinguished *by* their surface form: enacted mimesis vs. generalized maxim, representing vs. commenting. This distinction therefore remains all too partial, in separating the narrator's "mimetic" authority only from his explicit views and judgments (as though to invert Booth's preference for doubly authorized, "all-wise" narratorial commentary). What, then, would become of the ubiquitous network of implicit judgment built into mimesis itself? There's no representation without oblique evaluation (e.g., via relative foregrounding) and generalization (about the way of the world, say, or causal probability). If so, going by Culler's separatism, all these value-laden implications must fall between the stools.

So must, in turn, the mimetic implications themselves, headed by the causal ones, indispensable to narrative emplotment, and the latent pointers to the work's ontic key. Such implications not only lurk in force between the lines of the "heterodiegetic" narrator's "performatives" but also run throughout between the lines of the formally nonperformative discourse conveyed by all "homodiegetic" narrators, subjects, interlocutors. To deny performativity to the first group because of their implicitness is to rule out all inference about the fictional world (e.g., *Emma's*) from and beyond the givens; to deny it to the second is even to blank out the world's very fictionality (e.g., that of *Lolita*, narrated without a single direct "heterodiegetic" performative). In literary fiction, "narrative sentences not produced by characters are true, whereas in nonfiction similar statements would have a different status" (27): it would follow that statements produced by characters in fiction (even throughout a novel) have the same ontic status as their equivalents in nonfiction. How, then, would such "narrative fiction differ radically from nonfiction" (*ibid.*)?

Nor can Culler repair these yawning holes.<sup>11</sup> He might have avoided the

10. Booth (1961) lays special emphasis on the first two pairs of options. For the others, particularly those involving the sequential arts of narrative, see my 1978: 90ff., 1985: esp. 264-365, 441-515, 1991, 2001b; Yacobi 1986, 1987a, 2000, 2005.

11. As Cohn (1999), faced with another heterodiegetic/homodiegetic divide, takes the desperate measure of assigning different "signposts of fictionality" to the two extremes: omniscient mind-reading and narrator/author noncoincidence, respectively. Both signposts founder on the Bible's historiography, omniscient by inspiration yet nonomnipotent, to single out the divine inspiring author; and either signpost also fails elsewhere, as we've seen.

trouble altogether had he adhered to his initial assignment of fiction-making to the creative, inventive author, “the novelist” (23). The author would then have the narration performed, the action mimeticized, the fiction signaled, as well as the evaluation communicated, via any surface form that appeared most appropriate. Whatever the discourse form chosen, whether more vocal and straight or less, everything would remain implicit in terms of the silent authorial frame. Instead, Culler shifts ground here to the narrator, because he wants to replace the omniscient’s privilege (including “wisdom”) by the omnipotent’s performative, and so must exclude all that stands in the way. No room for the half of fiction that enacts a history-like mimesis by a creaturely rather than world-creating teller, and for everything else in fiction whose force (ontic, normative) hinges on the wordless author’s frame, rather than being overt, immediate, self-generated, as it were. Trouble inevitably ensues. For representing, commenting, explicitly *and/or* implicitly, with *and/or* against the author’s own implications in context, are activities that run across the orders of narrator. To align implicit with explicit mimesis and/or valuation under the fictionist’s all-embracing oblique control, as required, would therefore erase the dividing lines on which Culler’s whole proposal turns: that between the authorized (or so-called extradiegetic-heterodiegetic) narrator’s omnipotent, “performative” mimetic statement (“sentence”), which allegedly replaces omniscience, and his own maxims, and that between his potent mimesis and the figural (“homodiegetic”) narrator’s nonperformative counterpart. If the one’s sentence, just like the other’s, necessarily implies a commentary and an enlargement on the narrated world, how to maintain the absolute divide, either between the respective speakers or between the respective speech acts? Inversely, how to keep out the omniscience/restrictedness polarity, as desired, given that such implicit commentary has to do with knowledge of the world? A hopeless catch.

Further, the division between performative mimesis and rejectible morality, or maxim at large, is as arbitrary.<sup>12</sup> If a fictionist can create a world by fiat—postulate it, that is—why not a worldview by another (and perforce intersecting) fiat? Inversely, if the reader can refuse to play by the latter rules, because deemed immoral or unwise, say, why not object to the former as unrealistic? Why not indeed find both (world/worldview) sets of rules untrue, or detrimental, to life, as with a tale whose very march

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Yet the theory at least attempts to cover the entire range of fictionality by somehow reckoning with its perspectival variations.

12. Contrast the reference of maxims to verisimilitude in Genette 1968 and to authoriality, including Jane Austen’s, in Lanser 1992: 17 and *passim*.

toward a happy end invites us to connive at successful villainy? What with the unavoidable interpenetration of the two sets of rules—no neutral, pure mimesis, no maxim suspended in a vacuum—dividing them at will is a theoretical impossibility and, practically, an obstacle to sense-making.<sup>13</sup> A postulate is a postulate, a suppose game a suppose game, either accepted as a whole for the duration or rejected, certainly rejectible, as a whole by appeal to norms extrinsic to it.

Culler's binarism is therefore untenable. Even so, does it in effect—under other names and auspices, as far as these go—disjoin omniscience from reliability? On the contrary, his own disjunction of “mimetic” from “moral” weight is meant to oppose and supersede the imagined mandatory linkage of these very privileges under the God-like “omniscience” umbrella: as if the term in my usage, following standard routine, conflated informational with ideological authority, theology-style. For him, this two-fold inheres in the very idea, model, even name of omniscience, hence to be taken or, better, left as such. The third choice, proposed and exemplified in my theory, never occurs to him, any more than it did to traditionalists, nor apparently registers: free knowledge/value interplay. So, in the attempt to expel the old fixture, he both adopts it for a target and misattributes it across the board. Himself relapsing into another customary package deal that I specifically dismantled and dynamized, he wishes it on me.

Culler already twins these powers, under this nominal umbrella, in his introductory self-opposition to George Bush, as one “studying omniscience while observing a president who espouses Total Information Awareness . . . and is convinced of the infallibility of his judgment of evil in accordance with God's” (22; see also note 60 below). Much as usual in narrative criticism, his omniscient would thus join evaluative to informational God-likeness and so become, for the antitheist, doubly undesirable. Likewise, only with emphasis and particularity, when it comes to narrative

13. The simple correlation of the mimetic/moral with the true/rejectible binarisms may look plausible, at first glance, owing to the dissymmetrical presentation of the mimetic/moral binaries. Thus, Culler juxtaposes the particular statement that Mr. Woodhouse “was obliged to see the whole party set off . . .” with *Anna Karenina's* opening formula, “All happy families are alike, . . .” and argues therefrom that we “must accept as true” the former claim, but not the latter (27; cf. the tipping of the scales in Searle 1979: 73–74). By the very uneven choice of the examples juxtaposed, the “mimetic” one appears integral to the narrative fabric, because emplotted, while the maxim looks detachable and so dismissible without loss. But switch examples to an overt causal rule generalizing the mimetic action logic (deducible by us, hence dispensable) as against an implicit judgment (e.g., via foregrounding) of some particular act, and the appearances will reverse. Indeed, the maxim “All happy families are alike . . .” itself doubles as such a causal or at least existential rule of mimesis, and “was obliged” implies a smiling judgment of the overclinging father. Inevitably so, given the Gordian knot of evaluation/representation.

proper. There, Culler repeatedly insists, “opinions, moral views” need to be disengaged from “mimetic content,” evaluation divorced from representation, not co-authorized, “as they would have to [be] if the narrator were indeed omniscient” or “modeled on divine omniscience” (27–28).

Again giving theology’s dog a bad (i.e., double-barreled) name and burying it? Yes, but now with a counterargument added that defeats the purpose: it re-invokes another package deal, familiar and falsified by now, down to the substitution of ontic for epistemic license that is newly attempted here. The counterargument proposes to explain why, in disengagement, the novel’s reader agrees or quarrels with the “moral views” at will, yet allegedly accepts the absolute truth of the “mimesis.” Such acceptance “is not a matter of omniscience but of the constitutive convention of fiction” over against history, whereby “narrative sentences not produced by characters are true,” because “performative”—or in other words, charged with omnipotence.<sup>14</sup>

Just recall the disproofs: the inspired historian who claims truth by force of an omniscience without omnipotence, on pain of counting as fictionalizer; the all-knowing yet tradition-bound reteller; the part-superknowing but otherwise humanly disempowered weather predictor; and so forth. Narrative “truth,” then, can dispense with privileged might and rest on (in)sight alone.

Inversely, moreover, nowhere does Culler himself accommodate, far less envisage or exemplify, a truth-giving omnipotence without omniscience: his “constitutive convention” in effect presupposes all along the superknowledge that he denies and would displace.<sup>15</sup> You’ll find the presuppositional lurking in Culler’s different moves there. This begins with the example from “Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich . . .” and the argument based on it: “we might think that we are dealing with special, supernatural knowledge. But in fact it is not a question of knowledge. You could know this about a friend” (26–27). Of course you could, because the knowledge of Emma’s looks, wit, and wealth (or the friend’s equivalent) is common knowledge: *unprivileged, nonspecial, natural*.<sup>16</sup> Who

14. Phelan 2005: 115n12 endorses this claim.

15. For good measure, the superknower presupposed by him is also dematerialized (“not . . . characters”) and disinvolved (“heterodiegetic”): in the image of the complete transcendent God. What is presupposed breaks surface later. E.g., “the extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrators” of the realist novel must fictionalize, as usual, while making “the best case for the pertinence of omniscience” (31–32).

16. In other words, the narrator who voices this opening sentence may be limited, or “homodiegetic,” or even biographical, for all we know. Culler knows otherwise by hindsight and inference alone, from the novelistic sequel presupposed, including its unnatural epistemic access.

“might think” otherwise? And so it merely confuses the issue on the way to the “performative truth” alternative. Regarding genuine superknowledge, however, its presuppositional obliquely emerges in the confinement of performative truth to statements “not produced by characters” (27). Little wonder, for how would truth (whatever its warrant) attach throughout to representations coming from the blind and bewildered figures, Marlow or Strether or Benjy? They no more wield epistemic than creative authority, failing to qualify as sheer truth-mediators on either ground. Nor (outside of the figural arena itself, and so of statements “produced by characters”) do the “extradiegetic-heterodiegetic” yet fallible or actually unreliable narrators already exemplified: Culler must ignore them, because they run against his presupposed, as against the ongoing traditional, linkage. With an authorized narrator like *Anna Karenina*’s, by contrast, one can highlight the alleged omnipotent performativity and tacitly bring in the omniscient co-privilege.

Even judged by its own logic, therefore, the counteridea miscarries at both poles.<sup>17</sup> The exclusion (nonperformativity) of figural and otherwise fallible discourse leaves the question of truth in the air—what would separate lie and error from veracity there, or fictionality from factography?—while the presupposed doubling of the author-like narrator leaves the warrant for truth equivocal at best. Yet the doubling remains a must here, or else a misstating “performative” (red herring, hidden irony) would count as true. Hence, to crown the argument’s breakdown, goodbye to the mimetic/moral distinction in turn. If “omniscience” must go with reliability—in the orthodox view, for which I allegedly speak—then so must the tacit, double-barreled omnipotence on Culler’s own account. Back to the old confluences, under a new and worse guise, in face of a liberating and attested principle.

In short, having falsely joined reliability to omniscience—against my explicit warning—Culler would eliminate omniscience by falsely replacing it with an omnipotence disjoined from reliability. As both of them are forms of unhappily widespread linkages—the axiological/epistemic coupling and the epistemic/ontic interchange—they aggravate each other here. Without going into further weaknesses, therefore, we may reaffirm the Protean law, specifically its bearing on how any two (or more) perspectival features interrelate: twinnability, yes; twinship, no. For polar extremes on different axes may equally combine, however uneasily, as in the examples

17. And between them, too. E.g., the very idea of creating a world by the performative word traces to the Bible’s God, who not only doubles as superknower and as implied author in history but also leads a character-like existence.

given of perfect knowledge with low, even lost control and/or partial judgment, or, relatively, of superiority anywhere with inferiority elsewhere. Our theorizing, classifying, and reading of narrative must exhibit a generic combinatory dynamism to suit.

### 3. Storied Omniscience: Facts, Fancies, Fortunes

Turning now to omniscience as such, disembarassed of its possible associates, what's wrong with it? Culler opens with a barrage of objections, some unprecedented:

The basis of "omniscience" appears to be the frequently articulated analogy between God and the author . . . : the author creates the world of the novel as God created our world, and just as the world holds no secrets for God, so the novelist knows everything that is to be known about the world of the novel. This is all very well, but if, for instance, we do not believe in an omniscient and omnipotent God, then we cannot draw on what we know of God to illuminate properties of narrative. Even if we believe in God, there is precious little knowledge about him on which to rely. If you look into theological discussions of omniscience, you will quickly be dissuaded of any idea that God's omniscience could serve as a useful model for omniscience in narration, for discussions of divine omniscience are generally based on what is called "Perfect Being Theology." God is by definition perfect, and since to lack knowledge of any kind would be to fall short of perfection, God must be all-knowing. The main problem for theological discussions of omniscience then becomes whether the perfection of divine omniscience is compatible with free will, both of which are taken for granted as necessary and desirable. Since criticism need not presuppose either the perfection of the author or the freedom of characters, it seems unlikely that criticism can learn much from these theological debates.

The fundamental point is that since we do not know whether there is a God and what she might know, divine omniscience is not a model that helps us think about authors or about literary narration. (23)

This statement of the problem bristles with inaccuracies—commissions, exclusions, omissions—liable to distract or misdirect. So, to bring the key questions into focus, let us quickly set the record straight first on a few points.

#### 3.1. Authorial Perfection, Agentive Freedom

Some of these trouble spots have already been covered or dispense with full coverage here. By now, the "omniscient and omnipotent" pairing (with the former's derivation from the latter, via "creates") needn't detain us: we'll examine the epistemic trait at issue on its own. Also familiar is the

depreciation of theology, as though its long and diverse and subtle grapplings with “divine omniscience” were “generally” reducible to the single modern offshoot (“Perfect Being”) dismissively cited. Nor, in a literary and literary critical view, do the facts justify the short shrift given to the agonizing of these modern (and, in reality, all earlier) theologians over the two immemorial cruxes named.

What else are we considering, if not “the perfection of the author,” at will delegated to the narrator, by analogy to that of “divine omniscience”? It has in effect triggered Culler’s antitheistic essay, bent on partial, imperfect knowledge, as it had elicited a spectrum of previous approvals and objections bearing on all-knowledge and related authorial masteries (or, from our side, coherences). Under diverse guises, these stretch from the Rabbis and Church Fathers presuming Scripture perfect all round, because divinely authored, to the latest refusal or revival of the implied author, qua infallible authority. Even when theologized, or otherwise ideologized, the issue has cardinal implications for our way with discourse, especially when facing apparent lapses (e.g., of style, memory, reason, judgment, control). There ensues a basic interpretive forking. Do we read them as lapses from authorial perfection or omnicompetence, and accordingly integrate them in terms of some genetic misadventure en route to the given discourse? Or do we read them as lapses arranged by the definitionally perfect author to imply a certain motivation, in terms of, say, some imperfect, unauthorized, unreliable mediator (narrator, viewer) responsible for them? Unwitting self-betrayal or masterful enactment of another’s self-betrayal? Or perhaps, instead of either doctrinal extreme, now this, now that, according to what fits best in context?<sup>18</sup> The explanations polarize—or, better, multiply and compete—with the respective strategic assumptions. So much so that nobody can really help taking a stand on authorship and escape involvement in the ongoing debate.

Apropos omniscience itself, we haven’t seen the last of the perfect author, either. We will encounter him throughout, whether targeted for attack, division, replacement as a religious undesirable or upheld by myself as a communicative premise (the reader’s unitary working hypothesis) and implied normative reference-point (measure of the narrator’s placement between omnicompetence and incompetence, among author-likeness delegated and delimited and withheld). Culler’s relegation of the crux to theology is overhasty, to say the least.

18. My biblical work (1985: 7ff., 1998) also refers to these alternatives as “source- vs. discourse-oriented” inquiry and applies them to a variety of textual problems, under either label. For a theoretical overview, see also my 1983, 2001b: esp. 150–67, and for a recent narratological demonstration, see Yacobi 2005.

Similarly with the “freedom of characters,” to which this perfectness supposedly poses a threat. Nowhere does the friction between the two loom larger than in the theory and practice of modernity. The literati have caught up with theology, as it were. Witness Sartre’s (1955 [1947]: 7–23) condemnation of Mauriac for depriving his characters of free will in assuming a God-like omniscient posture about and above them. Or observe Bakhtin’s lifelong worry over the author’s cognitive “plus”—to him, an inherent force against polyphony, even in Dostoevsky—resumed by Gary Morson’s *Narrative and Freedom* (1994). Or the running metacommentary on the tension in John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*. Or the problematics behind Muriel Spark’s entire oeuvre, manifestly thematized in the plot of her first novel, *The Comforters*, where Caroline keeps hearing a typewriter voicing her thoughts.<sup>19</sup> Though demonstrably fallacious—in confusing the viewpoint with what it views—the knowledge/freedom nexus has always exercised literature, parallel or counter to the ruling theology or secular philosophy. Nor does Culler’s dismissal of it accord even with his own ends, since it might in theory problematize omniscience: his own Panopticon allies have taken up the theologians’ dilemma in casting life under an all-seeing eye as a penitentiary.<sup>20</sup> But then, he’s reluctant to admit this omniscience in the first instance. Practically speaking, at any rate, that Culler brushes the dilemma aside spares us the need for going into it here.

### **3.2. Concept, Corpus, and Culture, or Premodernism, Modernism, and Neo-Modernist Reversions**

Far more important, and relevant, are the omissions in the passage quoted. Incredibly, Culler speaks here as if the concept of the storyteller’s omniscience, with its underlying divine model, were a proposal recently invented or imported by some narrative theorists—one in particular—and now coming up for overdue judgment on its merits as such. He thus treats omniscience much as one would, say, Genette’s focalizing. (Royle 2003: 356ff. indeed brackets the two concepts, with a preposterous late dating of the former.) Does it “illuminate properties of narrative”? Does it help “us think about authors or literary narration”? Answer these questions in the negative—a foregone conclusion, given the questioner’s agenda—and you will have accordingly quashed the proposal of omniscience to clear the ground for some useful alternative(s). The whole idea will then hopefully vanish, into the Found Wanting limbo of narratology, and good riddance.

19. Now reenacted (unawares, it would appear) in Marc Forster’s film *Stranger Than Fiction* (2006).

20. Cf. also the debate on the topic with Dorrit Cohn in *New Literary History* 26 (1995): 3–37; Fludernik 1996: 367–71; and Jaffe’s (1991: 9) “invasion of privacy.”

All this in disregard for the idea's currency and power over millennia of narrative history. Observable currency at that: from discourse surface—omniscience voiced by narrator and/or characters—to readerly, analytic, lexical, even bibliographical metadiscourse since antiquity. Nor do these multifold reflexes trace to the Bible and Homer alone, or the respective cultures. As early as the seventh century BC, the library catalogue of Assyria's King Ashurbanipal lists the works' otherworldly source of inspiration, among other data. The *Erra Epic*, for example, is listed as “[what] was revealed to [Kabti-Ilani-Marduk, son of Dabibi], and which he spoke”; or, in the epic's longer attribution, “It was revealed to him in the night, and when he spoke it in the morning, \ \ He did not leave out a single line, nor did he add one to it” (Lambert 1962: 65, 70; Sternberg 1985: 65–66). This quiet clerical or scribal recording of superhuman authority, as a matter of fact, offers the firmest possible evidence for cultural encoding. The idea's point of origin goes back further yet, to time unrecorded, and deeper down, to the yearning of the species for a point of cognitive reference, no less than for metaphysical perfectness. Driven by basic needs, man created Scripture's God in an image polar to the human condition and transferable to God-inspired (then to God-like) human narration. The independent birth of the Muse, and parallel superknowers elsewhere, only confirms the depth and universality of the forces that generated this concept in prehistorical humankind and have kept it alive over the ages since—within art itself as throughout culture at large.

Among the sequels, recall such landmarks as medieval historiography and Miltonian epic. The line of succession, ever more traceable, protean, self-aware, extends unbroken to this day. For now, without running too much ahead of my argument, just a few telegraphic reminders from latter-day artistic practice to update the selected prenovelistic references above.

Witness how narrators have continued to describe themselves as omniscient, even God-like, as exercising some particular epistemic license, or denying themselves its services, for the moment or on a regular basis. If anything, the metanarrative self-castings in this or that image of God only proliferate and diversify with time. Never have they broken surface in such force and foreground as since the rise of the novel, all the way to modernism and beyond. When a Jamesian narrator, for example, voices and motivates his choice not to tell about this development or from that viewpoint, he in effect flaunts his own omniscience—no less than do the surrogates of a Fielding or an Austen or a Dickens in their advertised maneuvers between limitless vision and self-limited narration, invariable power and ever-shifting performance. What separates the modernist from pre-

modernism, whose “muffled majesty of irresponsible authorship” (James 1962 [1934]: 328) he deplores, are the how’s of omniscient telling alone, in line with the respective strategic why’s guiding the communicative affair. High among such novel why’s rank the inward turn as against the deployment of a social panorama, for example, or the drive toward unresolved as well as temporary ambiguity, both arising from the all-knowing teller’s self-limitation to a humanly limited mediator, who narrates or reflects the action in subjective terms.

In other capacities, too, innovators and experimentalists over the last century have been remarkably vocal about storied God-likeness, not least omniscience. Examples include Henry James’s “Prefaces” (1962 [1934]) or the essays of Borges (2000) and Barth (1984) or the *Paris Review*’s “Writers at Work” interviews with contemporary authors. All constantly invoke the divine model, whether advocating its untrammelled, restricted, or ad hoc application. Borges even yearns for the epic and saga, as well as admiring so-called traditionalists in novelistic omniscience: from Cervantes to Stevenson to H. G. Wells. (Compare James’s appreciation of Fielding and Balzac, Gertrude Stein’s of Trollope, Scott Fitzgerald’s of *Vanity Fair*, Barth’s, let alone Isak Dinesen’s, of Scheherazade, amid strategic difference.) Though a declared unbeliever (2000: 256), Borges was also fascinated by theology, not least owing to the poetry of its supernatural concepts and models: angelology, Cabbalism, divine attributes, God as Someone abstracted into Nobody, mechanisms of literary inspiration. I would recommend his essay on the dream vision behind Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan,” with its glances at further cases of oneiric or “unconscious” or “inspired” poesis. These range from the medieval Caedmon in Bede’s *History* to Robert Louis Stevenson’s “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” to, “perhaps,” an ongoing “series of dreams” that “has no end” (Borges 2000 [1951]: 369–72). Or, as he described this endless dream series elsewhere, with Emerson: literature as a whole “is plainly the work of one all-seeing, all-hearing gentleman” (Borges 2000 [1945]: 240), also conceivable as “the Holy Spirit” (Borges 2000 [1978]: 493). What with his occupation as librarian, he would have taken delight in Ashurbanipal’s catalogue.

For a militant like Culler, though, such overwhelming evidence is best ignored, no matter how large it looms in my work. Nor is he the first to ignore it: the memory of novel-centrist criticism and reform has always been shorter, or more selective, than the novel’s own. In effect, one discerns here a throwback to modernism’s notorious drive against narrational overprivilege—not least epistemic overtelling—complete with the familiar attendant moves and impulses. Thus the will to literary change, in the

interests of a different, storyteller-limiting canon; the desirable narrative model (especially point of view), where artistry combines with up-to-date realism, tailored to suit by the interested party; the obliviousness to the long history of prenovelistic (a fortiori extrafictional, let alone extraliterary) practice and the competing rationales behind it. Flaubert and James, with their large artistic and critical following, the Impressionists of the Ford-Conrad persuasion, the stream-of-consciousness experimenters and enthusiasts, the proponents of the newly unearthed free indirect style, Bakhtin and Sartre, just cited as freedom lovers, all meet on this ground of modernist disempowerment, real or ostensible. Small wonder it rose to such dominant canonicity in the first half of the twentieth century.

The forceful reaction to this modernist orthodoxy has dethroned but never quite uprooted it, in favor of limitless narrative pluralism. Actually, and most significantly, the reaction on the literary critical front, as spear-headed by Booth (1961), did not even primarily aim at rehabilitating the free exercise of omniscient narration as such vis-à-vis the limited (“first-person”) and self-limited (reflector-centered) modernist favorite. Instead, Booth’s priority was redressing another balance of artistic legitimacy. The equality he would establish lay between disfavored “telling” and normative, canonized “showing,” between the narrator’s reliable commentary (à la Fielding) and unobtrusive representation from within the subject or equivocal self-representation (*Portrait of the Artist*, *The Good Soldier*)—with free omniscience assimilated to the former mode as reinforcer of guidance and the guide’s authority.

Booth himself repeatedly lays down the appropriate scale of priorities. Among distances in perspective, there stands highest “that between the fallible or unreliable narrator and the implied author who carries the reader with him in judging the narrator.” For, in terms of “literary effects, surely the moral and intellectual qualities of the narrator” weigh more than “whether he is referred to as ‘I’ or ‘he,’ or whether he is privileged or limited. If . . . discovered to be untrustworthy, then the total effect of the work he relays to us is transformed” (Booth 1961: 158). No amount of factual knowledge can by itself supply, far less rival, what a narrator/author like Austen’s “knows” as “a perfect human being.” Such

“omniscience” is thus a much more remarkable thing than is ordinarily implied by the term. All good novelists know all about their characters—all that they need to know. And the question of how their narrators are to find out all that *they* need to know, the question of “authority,” is a relatively simple one. The real choice is much more profound than this would imply. It is a choice of the moral, not merely the technical, angle of vision from which the story is to be told. (Ibid.: 265)

The opposition of “profound” to “relatively simple . . . technical”—or, ideally, the former’s subsuming the latter as an aid to rhetoric—miniatures the Boothian hierarchy of narrative importance, hence of analytic interest.<sup>21</sup>

Booth’s notorious lapses into moralism doubtless reflect in an extreme form his own ethics-before-epistemology agenda; but narrative epistemology stands relatively low on the wider countermovement’s order of priorities as well. Nothing like a comparable reevaluation of it arose in the process, or a sharpened collective aliveness to its practice and possibilities, or even a single notable inquiry. To me, when first approaching the topic of omniscience with more questions and hunches than answers, this came as a genuine surprise; nor has the wonder been quite dissipated by intervening developments. Narratologists today may have to exercise the historical imagination to appreciate the sound and the fury of the showing/telling quarrel. But they need only look at the present scene with fresh eyes to perceive the ongoing imbalance in favor of (un)reliability as against other (dis)privileges, the epistemic variable, above all. And where this epistemic variable does come to the fore, the variation favored in terms of notice and approval alike is generally the disprivileged one, rather than the omniscient variant commended in Booth, if only as a helpmate to narrative authority. What with the corresponding emphasis on unreliability vis-à-vis reliability itself, the current state of the art exhibits, not a turn—even less so than before, and least of all toward an evenhanded and inclusive poetics—but a return to an ante-Booth scale of interest and merit.<sup>22</sup> In a silent takeover, the disempowered agents have newly stolen the critical show, skewed the picture and repertoire, against little opposition. Concerning the informational axis of perspective, we’ll soon find that narrative theory

21. “Instead of the omniscient/indirect categories, Professor Booth proposes a distinction between reliable and unreliable narrators” (Harvey 1965: 74): an exaggeration, doubtless, but still a measure of the relative emphasis laid on the two contrasts there, with the field’s approval. In the later version of Booth’s “rhetorical” approach, his overemphasis of value judgment gets crossed with incompatible Structuralist methods and biases, to odd effect, especially on (un)reliability. See the next paragraph and note 25 below on Phelan 2005.

22. The correspondence in disprivilege also shows on other axes. E.g., Diengott (1995) would render unreliability doubly vulnerable by locating it in focalizers rather than narrators: not an extension, which goes without saying, but a substitution, whereby the fallible mediator would become unself-conscious as well. So, a reticent exterior narrator like *Emma’s* is “reliability-neutral” altogether; and even the older Pip, we hear, reliably exposes the mistakes of his younger focal self. The latter alone qualifies as target. Contrast the more usual monopoly on this disprivilege given by Stanzel (1984: 152) to the limited “first-person” teller, exclusive of the reflector-focalizer. In short, if not ignorance, then another blind spot (here, the illusion of privacy) will compound the mediator’s unreliable viewpoint. Either way, a package of negatives results.

has largely remained neo-modernist to this day, and more an heir to the zealous Jamesians than to the broader-minded James himself at that.

It was rather in the literary arena itself that the modernist drive toward (self-) limited narration came to be opposed, outgrown, often even reversed. Inevitably so, given the shifts in matter and/or manner forced on poetic history by the law of estrangement, on pain of death by automatism. Having defamiliarized narrative in working against the classical unbridled omniscient, (self-)limitation couldn't for long avoid the fate of any divergence from a standard, and, more particularly, shared the fate of the anti-chronological drive associated with it throughout modernism. Either of the counterdrives, a fortiori their bracketing, must "in turn grow more and more familiar with every recourse to it, till it eventually loses its strangeness and perceptibility altogether, hence its aesthetic along with its experiential and semiological impact. . . . Far from violating the norm," epistemic constraint "then becomes itself the norm, whose violation in the interests of optimum making strange calls for nothing less than the return" to a free omniscient telling—with the orderly [gapless] chronology it alone enables—"as the diametric extreme. Figure and ground, breach and routine, 'device' and 'material': all again change places, only for a time, as always," of course (Sternberg 2006: 201).

I've elsewhere outlined how this law of diachrony manifested itself in subsequent narrative practice (ibid.: 197–230, passim). Briefly, even in the heyday of modernism, traditional storytelling far outnumbered it by any standard, from sheer production to readership to cultural appeal, and kept defying the regnant high-literary norm. As that norm lost its estranging force and vitality, however, the traditional narrative arts advanced from what the literary establishment deemed the genre's periphery to make a bid for recanonization on the ground of artistic renewal. At the same time, former adherents of the modernist orthodoxy itself changed (back) strategies to match, along with uncommitted newcomers in quest of novelty. By such convergence, the freely omniscient pole returned to favor, with a difference, of course—history never quite repeats itself, and modernism left behind its insights and repertoire—yet unmistakably. Nowhere to such noticeable effect as in the English novel, on which the Jamesian dogma of limitation had exerted the strongest pressure. Among the original non-Jamesian achievements since the 1940s, consider Henry Green's *Loving*, Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, J. G. Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur*, or Patrick O'Brian's magnificent saga of the Napoleonic War. Further examples could be endlessly multiplied—ex cathedra statements, too,

like Borges's—in inverse ratio to the shrinkage of modernist practice, now at best assimilated, rather than developed.

But this epistemic return, like its chronological associate, is conspicuous for its absence in our institutionalized histories of literature.<sup>23</sup> The absence compounds with that of epistemic privilege (or its orderly temporal mate) in standard narratologies as a rival, never mind viable, option. Together or apart, these absences loom larger considering that estrangement has been the one stable critical shibboleth over the last century (Culler harps on it), and return, mythic or psychic, among the leading figures of thought as well. Here, though, other forces have prevailed nevertheless in the critical establishment, like inertia, ideopolitics, and sheer, even willful isolationism. This cumulative anomaly testifies to the ever-widening gulf that divides the literary realities of writing, reading, sense-making, appreciating, evolving—even within higher, nonpopular culture—from the esoteric values and interests of literary canon-makers. By hook or by crook, they would fix the unfixable norms of their desire, complete with forms reified accordingly, against the grain of theory and history alike, as well as the weight of the evidence in both. Inversely, here as elsewhere, all these speak together for the Proteus Principle, which subsumes, coordinates, and explains the respective form/function dynamisms.

God-like epistemology is, therefore, no less paradigmatic than the arrow-like chronology whose rationale and fortunes I explored in the *Telling in Time* series.<sup>24</sup> Where history meets theory, conceptualized or applied, the typical gulf between protean literature and partisan literati grows twofold with regard to perspective. Decades after modernism, its bias has kept resurging in assorted thrusts and pockets of rearguard critical action against narrative omniscience. On the largest scale of all, this prejudice reveals, or conceals, itself in Structuralist narratology, with its heritage to this day. Roland Barthes's furious attacks on traditional novelistic viewpoint and/as value system assume an analytic guise and apparatus in the school's most influential theory. Discreetly but deeply value-laden, the entire Genettian account of "perspective" is slanted toward "focalization" as "a restriction of 'field' . . . a selection of narrative information with respect to what was traditionally called *omniscience*" (Genette 1988: 74).

Observe how Genette's approach keeps narrowing on its way to this slant. First, among all the axes of perspective, it confines itself to the epi-

23. For a discussion of some relevant diachronic "metanarratives," see McHale 1992. McHale himself tells a story of an epistemology-driven modernism followed by postmodernism's ontic concerns.

24. On this correlation, see already my 1990, 1992, 2006, as well as 1978, 1985.

stemic. There alone belong the “modalities” whereby the narrative can “choose to regulate the information it delivers, not with a sort of even screening, but according to the capacities of knowledge of one or another participant,” the focal subject (Genette 1980: 162). This excludes all the alternative, ever-available options. It is as if narrative couldn’t and doesn’t perspectivize (modalize, regulate, focus), or on the contrary, defocus or authorize the transmission, via a subject’s ontology, culture, ideology, idiolect, emotivity, self-consciousness, artistic values and competence. . . . Any of these axes is, in theory and practice, as significant, distinctive, variform, traceable as the one given a monopoly on “perspective” by Genette et al.

What’s more, these dimensions can all not only interrelate with the epistemic favorite even as such—and widely do, along various lines—but also outrank and overshadow it, together or apart. For example, think how the informational factor is subordinated to unself-consciousness in the diary or in the opposition of secret to social discourse everywhere; to the workings of private life and language in interior monologue; to vocal expressivity in *skaz*; to cultural difference, with one-sided or mutual estrangement, in the staging of intergroup encounters; and, not least or rarest, to the ethical or ideological coordinate, from the Bible onward. Thereby, a heart in the right place, even Gimple the Fool’s (Yacobi 2001), carries more interest, value, weight than a well-informed mind. But Genette would appear oblivious, or indifferent, to this shifting hierarchy of viewpoint axes; worse, he decidedly banishes the axiological ones from narratology, and with them in effect the reliability judgments implied (1988: 151–54). Little wonder some narratologists reduce such judgments to the univalence of informational right and wrong: a compromise in name only.<sup>25</sup>

25. Thus for Chatman (1978: 233–37), Humbert Humbert is “reliable”—however “unsavory” and whatever his character—because he does “his best to tell us what in fact happened”; while the narrator of the flashback in Hitchcock’s *Stage Fright* is unreliable because he “lies.” (See also, e.g., Chatman 1978: 233–37, 1990: 130–32, 134–36, 149–54; Prince 1982: 12; Stanzel 1984: 89–90, 150–52; Walton 1990: 358–63; Lodge 1992: 155; Ryan 1991: 27, 72, 113, 2001: 147–48. At least four of them are Structuralists, or were, but the exclusive fact-mindedness persists regardless.) Nor do broader-based approaches escape the backswing and mind-set of Structuralist narratology, with unhappy results that may even go further or deeper than excluding noninformational parameters of value. For example, James Phelan (2005: 49–53) subgroups unreliability into three axes, and accordingly three “different kinds of deviation.” It may occur along the axis of (1) “characters, facts, and events” reported; (2) “knowledge and perception”; (3) “ethics and evaluation.” The peculiar neo-modernist imbalances reappear here in a “rhetorical” guise. To begin with, (2) is redundant, falling between (1) and (3)—as the details there establish beyond doubt—yet it appears under an epistemic name. Second, the typology is geared to the unreliable pole of each axis, by the newly voguish privileging of disprivilege. Third, this privileging runs to the very definition of the feature, conceptually loading the dice for one pole and against the other. On all axes, unreliability is grasped by Phelan in deviationist terms—à la Genette again—as opposed to my or Yacobi’s inte-

Again, this unidimensionality newly threatens to blur the dividing line between fictional and factual perspectivizing, hence storytelling. In both, the narrative “screening” would count as (un)even and the focal screener as (un)reliable according to the (dis)proportionality or (in)correctness of the information transmitted alone—regardless of their possibly opposed status (hence judgment) by fiction’s multiple criteria and the perspectival discords in which it specializes. Fictive and genuine eyewitness testimony, imaginative storytelling and inspired history telling, Bridget Jones’s and Samuel Pepys’s diary, the letters ghostwritten by Jane Austen and Austen’s own to Cassandra, all would fall under the same and single epistemic rule, to prohibitive generic loss. A modernist overpreaching the role of epistemology, as if it were the be-all and end-all of narrative viewpoint, even of narrative art—against the practice at the time, his own generally included—couldn’t do worse.

Genette’s neo-modernism only escalates, then, in the shrinkage of “perspective” (on the epistemic axis itself) to “focalized” knowledge: “a restriction of ‘field’ . . . a selection of narrative information with respect to what was traditionally called *omniscience*.”<sup>26</sup> Note the definitional slant toward information limited and excluded, rather than that always possessed and communicated even in the “focalizing,” so that the roving omniscient marks the negative pole of “*nonfocalized* narrative, or narrative with *zero focalization*.” Why cast a positive quality—if anything, an unrivaled plenitude of knowledge—into a double negative? Because a methodology geared to deviation can only register and handle deviant forms, which it also appreciates as such (Genette openly does). Epistemic perfection eludes and bores the deviationist, along with the associated perfect, iconic, orderly chronology (note 24 above) or authorized reliability (note 25). “What was traditionally called *omniscience*” is an embarrassment to the theory, really, which has nothing positive to say about this licensed excess of knowledge (overinformedness plus overinformativeness, as it were) and therefore con-

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grationist sense-making: how best to organize and explain the text—perspectivally and/or otherwise, via reliable and/or unreliable mediacy—in operative context. A measure of the conceptual gulf between the approaches is that they polarize between balance and imbalance. To the integrationist, reliability and unreliability are both constructive options, and as such equal amid polarity; to the deviationist, reliability must in effect count as zero-deviation and accordingly become marginal and uninteresting, if at all discussible, just like omniscience in Genettian “zero-focalization.” That the imbalance reverses Booth’s order of priorities, within a rhetoric modeled on his, further underlines it. Predictably, Phelan’s book focuses on “character narration,” often by appeal to “focalizing” at that. See also note 22 above.

26. Nor does the Structuralist reversion end here, but culminates in the mixture of the knower’s power (access, range) and performance, as will appear below, notes 58, 59, and section 6.3.

signs the awkward excess to a minus state or zero point vis-à-vis the discriminately, discussibly omissive (“selective,” restricted, gappy) focusings.

More open and hostile, Barthes fashion, extremists would literally reduce omniscient narrative to zero, denying its existence or discrediting its practice or, in polemical heat, both. The mixed lot includes Ann Banfield’s (1982) anti-communicative theory of free indirect style; Panopticon analogists like Mark Seltzer (1984, 1995), John Bender (1987, 1995), and D. A. Miller (1988), who also bear that free style’s name in vain, as they do human freedom’s; Richard Maxwell (1979) and Audrey Jaffe (1991) apropos Dickens (or, most recently, Nelles [2006] on Austen); Hillis Miller (1968, 2005) and Elizabeth Ermarth (1983), who domesticate the omniscient into society’s “collective consciousness,” an extension of the ordinary mind; Royle (2003) preaching telepathic insight; and now Culler, bringing to the fore the antitheism often latent or secondary elsewhere. Related to them are passing digs at omniscience, or counterfactual assumptions that its time has passed, in blissful disregard for the evidence.<sup>27</sup> Not to mention the looser kinship to thrusts against privileged discourse control rather than epistemology, or epistemology alone, under the banner of the interior monologist’s autonomy (Cohn 1978: 217ff.) and, above all, of interpretive freedom: valorized by “reader response” proponents, for example, and the opponents of implied authorship.

As always, history repeats itself with a difference in this reversional revisionism. Not always the same difference, or differences, or to the same degree, yet unmistakable nevertheless amid the persistent family likeness. For one thing, there is the frequent shift from modernism’s chiefly aesthetic or ideoaesthetic priorities to antireligious and otherwise ideopolitical agendas. For another thing, the extremism heightens while concentrating on a narrower front. Thus the shift from disfavoring the muffled majesty of irresponsible authorship—fiction’s prerogative of supernatural knowledge arbitrarily wielded, the abuse made worse by flaunted omnipotence and uninhibited commentary, worst of all if metafictional—to denying epistemic privilege as such and alone. (Oddly for an antitheist, yet

27. Besides the data already outlined, just contrast two recent updates picked almost at random from the field itself. One contemporary science fiction novelist wonders, “Omniscient POV is supposed to be very 19th century, archaic, passé. So why are more and more authors using it? And how are they getting it to work as well?” (Kress 1998: 9). Another, more canonical writer, Edward P. Jones, when asked why his novel on slavery, *The Known World* (2004), so abounds in proleptic commentary, replied that his narrator was “simply exercising God-like omniscience.” This exchange occurred during a reading given on March 28, 2005, at Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia. Thanks to Suzanne Keen, who asked the question, for the report. She also rightly observes that novelists are less afraid than theorists to invoke the Divinity. So, as a crowning irony, are scientists: see note 35 below.

typically enough, Culler, unlike James or Sartre, can live with omnipotence: to the extent of proposing it as an “alternative” to omniscience.) One must also reckon with the difference that separates an avant-garde turned mainstream, at least within the literary canon and circle, from a vocal minority group of critics zealously striving to turn back the wheel, often in the service of other or otherwise mixed causes. As frequent here is the distance between the latter’s ideological commitment and their modest narratological investment, whether in theoretical, diachronic, or descriptive poetics. Under this disparity, the reality principle suffers. Compared with modernism’s foremost practitioners, or practitioners-theorists, some embattled neo-modernists are discernibly less aware of what has happened in narrative history and what happens in the generic writing/reading; nor do they always seem to care.

So even the stronger of Booth’s arguments in the 1960s, what with their emphasis on commentary and evaluation rather than knowledge, seldom reapply. But the resumed drive toward literary (critical) paradigm change, at the heart of narrative’s perspectival system, remains instructive nonetheless, across the multifold disparity.

Whatever Culler may profess at this juncture or that, he ultimately wages war not so much on the conceptualization of narrative omniscience as on the canon, even the culture (mis)associated with narrative omniscience, because that corpus encodes, perpetuates, and supposedly, subliminally, legitimates the unholy theology of omniscience. “It is the *idea* of omniscient narrative rather than the diverse practices to which the name applies, that should sadden or outrage us” (32). The same holds for Royle (2003) and, to some extent, Jaffe (1991) and those harping on the imagined Panopticon-like unfreedom of the all-seeing tale; while Nelles (2006) on Austen, title apart, avoids ideopolitics.

Note the double (con)fusion of “the *idea* of omniscient narrative” with a certain (Judeo-Christian, especially, but also panoptic) model of omniscience *and* with its endorsement.<sup>28</sup> A counterexample testifying to the human mind’s resourcefulness is provided by Sartre himself. Having con-

28. But, as will appear, the error of reifying this high perspectival form by tying to it the worldview on which it draws (i.e., packaging vantage with value, God-like stance with God-centrism) is also found outside the militant reactionary camp. Thus, to Olson (1997: 11), “the ideology of omniscient narration” lies in the very “analogy of the novelist to God.” As if the analogy couldn’t and didn’t operate across ideologies, at times against the heavenly analogue. Or inversely, as if the notion and narrative of omniscience couldn’t arise without the divine analogy, hence the ideology, theistic or otherwise heaven-bound. (See also the interplay of logic and theo-logic below, e.g., note 66.) This form/faith reification predictably vitiates her account of the novelists discussed and her reference to my comparisons of biblical with novelistic and modern (ideo)poetics.

demned Mauriac's quasi-divine telling, the notorious antitheist of modernism preaches and practices a secular equivalent in his biography of Flaubert. Its intention, he writes, is to show that

in the end everything is communicable and that one can, without being God but just a man like any other, arrive at perfect understanding of a man, if one has all the necessary elements. I can anticipate Flaubert, I know him and that's my aim to prove that every man is perfectly knowable as long as one uses the appropriate methods and has available the necessary documents. (Sartre 1976: 106; translated in Ellis 2000: 145)

For Sartre, then, once you have replaced God by the self-made omniscient biographer, or *histor* at large—and the freedom-denying Omnipotent with him—the objection to “perfect understanding,” as to humanity's perfect knowability, vanishes without trace. Debatable though this replacement may be, it brings home the detachability of the high epistemic type from the heavenly, let alone monotheistic token, or any other particular schema of omniscience. One doesn't even need fiction to separate “the idea” from the pattern, discourse, and construct of all-knowledge; or, more generally yet, to appreciate the mutual independence, hence open-ended correlation, of vantage and value.<sup>29</sup> Or else, it's idolatry in reverse.<sup>30</sup>

This inverted reification merely changes agendas. In the opponent's eyes, the insidious theistic brainwashing (just like sexism or racism) deepens and spreads with every fresh performance on the model,<sup>31</sup> every fresh exposure or reference to its underlying assumptions. In short, Culler's real quarrel is less with the theory than with the writing and reading practice of narrative omniscience over the ages, in the hope of a God-free substitute culture. Or less with the theory per se than with its aiding and abetting the practice. Making sense of omniscience counts as legitimating the narrative, fictionwide legitimator of theology via narratology; and the better the sense made, the worse.

That is why Culler targets my account, introduced as one that “wholeheartedly approves” and offers a “defense” of the “concept of omniscient narration” (23): a sheer projection of his own mirror image, in binary agonistic language, as if I were an apologist for God. Again, that is why

29. As well as, across axes, of omniscience and omnipotence, or the corresponding low-mimetic disprivileges.

30. This thesis runs through my *Hebrews between Cultures* (1998), especially chapter 4 on “Proteus in Culture Land: Stereotypes, Metastereotypes, and Idolatry.”

31. Strangely, again, on the model in its epistemic aspect, exclusive of the ontic. Given that omnipotence would operate as insidiously—to a package-dealer, also inseparably—you wonder why it escapes attack and even comes to replace the anathema, under assorted labels (e.g., “performative power of language . . . invention . . . incontrovertible stipulation” [24]).

he gets that uncongenial account so often wrong in the process, on substantive issues as well, like the packagings of Proteus above or to come. All unawares, no doubt, yet all the more revealingly for a (meta)critic of his ability and experience. That is also why he proposes not a counter-theory but so-called “alternatives” to omniscience. And that is also why he’s driven to minimize the ever-growing extension and reception of the omniscience canon, while trumpeting the poor alleged substitutes, blown up out of all proportion. On the whole, his and his allies’ is an ideopolitical rather than a metapoetic fight, and often conducted accordingly. Here, nearer equivalents than modernism would be found among committed militants, from Puritan iconoclasm, say, to Socialist Realism, Marxism, Feminism, Postcolonialism. Earliest of all, Plato already questions artistic omni-knowledge, exalted in Homer’s divine claims and status, with a view to banishing the pretenders from the Republic. The ideal polis calls for epistemic policing.

### **3.3. *Belief or Suspension of Disbelief?***

The passage from Culler (23) with which this section opened joins battle accordingly. When one comes to the genuine-seeming arguments leveled there against omniscience by reference to our “belief” and “knowledge,” one must beware of the false premise and ground that they would establish for the discussion. These counterarguments divert notice from the inconvenient mass of data to a series of contingencies, literally conditionals (“if . . . . Even if . . . if . . .”) ignoring, in effect denying, its existence and implications. Where a single-minded professional critique would face the variform facts of omniscience that any narrative theory must accommodate and conceptualize, the polemicist raises iffy difficulties that may supposedly disable the very possibility, let alone the theorizing, of narrative omniscience. But the stubborn facts remain on the table, in all their cumulative manifestations.

As a matter of fact, especially telltale to the nonbeliever, humans have been impelled to invent omniscience *ex nihilo*, regarding divinity or discourse or both, in time immemorial, and more than once, judging by its spread. Cultures have widely adopted, ascribed, modeled, and explored it ever since, under this and equivalent names, in various fields, complexes, intersections. Storytellers have all along claimed, flaunted, delegated, withheld, conventionalized, transformed the privilege—often by equally open reference to supernatural empowerment and/or analogy—so that its presumption and extendibility keep in force even where implicit. In turn, readers (or in art at large, receivers) common and professional have so internalized it that application to discourse comes easily, even when unso-

licited via metacommentary. And children, illiterates, pagans, agnostics, atheists are generally no exception to the rule, at either the transmitter's end or the understander's. In face of such massive givens, any attempt to challenge the viability of omniscience, in the name of our possible disbelief and alleged ignorance regarding it, points the wrong way. It is idle to pretend that what has happened over the millennia has never happened, or that abstract maybe's ("if . . .") could wipe the slate clean and restart from scratch. The question for the theorist, any narrative theorist, is rather where, how, why all this privileging has happened—or, as in some literary and most life stories, hasn't. Under what (mental, cultural, artistic) auspices has omniscient discourse operated? Along what lines? In what variants, or packages, or cross-links? By what rationales? And with what difference from nonomniscient insets (e.g., figural monologue, dialogue, tale within tale) or strategies (e.g., restricted telling, factual and fictional)?

Moreover, those two iffy counterarguments from readerly "belief" and "knowledge" will as little bear theoretical, or even logical, as empirical scrutiny. Take belief first. It has often been connected to the author, under the illusion that storied omniscience entails a believing storyteller and framework. On this illusive ground, disapproving antitheists and descriptive analysts alike associate the high narrative mode with an inherently God-centered worldview (and by implication at least, secularize the unGod-like perspectives). David Lodge (1986: 121, 1992: 10) thus alleges "a normative correlation" both ways: "between omniscient authorial narration and an explicitly Christian perspective on events; and correspondingly, between limited narrators and a more secular humanist perspective."<sup>32</sup> Others emphasize the linkage in one of these directions. Barbara Olson's (1997) entire book is founded, and founders, on the premise that "the ideology of omniscient narration" lies in the very "analogy of the novelist to God" (ibid.: 11; cf. note 28 above). Inversely, and less simplistically, with a recent cognitivist discussion of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*. He would like to emulate "God novelists" such as Fielding, if only because they "give us the best account of our ordinary experience." As a modern agnostic, "writing long after the period when British culture centered on a common Christian heritage, however, McEwan does not enjoy such freedom" (Vermeule 2004: 154–63; but see already Scholes and Kellogg 1966: 274–79, and compare note 74 below).

What makes this package deal illusive in all variants and both ways,

32. As usual, Jewish and Muslim literatures are not excepted but marginalized, unthinkingly, and funnily enough if one considers the history of religion, its paradigmatic narrative included. But then, the fixture itself is parochial, reserved to a Western, modern, literary, infighting circle.

specifically regarding the author's normative viewpoint? Logically, as Sartre's perfect biographer illustrates, omniscient telling can dispense with the God-like model and so doesn't entail it on any perspectival axis, from the epistemic to the ontic to the normative. This theoretical independence gains reinforcement from the fact that such telling has been practiced for millennia by nonmonotheistic cultures, traditions, writers—starting with Sumer, Homer, indeed all antiquity outside biblical Israel, and extending to great Asian literatures today. A fortiori with agnostic or antireligious practitioners of the modern era, who may even turn the privileges of omniscience against the theocentric worldview. What tool serves better than the all-seeing eye to expose the hidden life of the God-fearing and to empower the rhetoric of unbelief? This compositional autonomy, hence all-purposeness, should have gone without saying.

Not to belabor the point, let me just add that it equally holds for the polar narrative viewpoint. Or else, every piece of limited telling from Augustine's *Confessions* to Nabokov's *Lolita* ipso facto thrusts against God, no matter what worldview it embodies and its rhetoric advocates. Further, how come that C. L. Dodgson (Carroll 1979: 471–72) believed in telepathy and Lewis Carroll never practiced it? Does the absent practice belie the professed belief? Alternatively, does it reflect the balance of power between telepathic and theistic belief, whereby the actual practice (the Alice books, the Snark) assumed the God-like omniscient stance?<sup>33</sup> All normative deduction from the surface form again ends in idle speculation at best. Or take the convert to Catholicism, Muriel Spark, whose discussion is prefaced by Lodge's two-way linkage. Her novels alternate between "omniscient" and "limited" narration, but never between a "Christian" and "a more secular, humanist" perspective: the former remains constant, though not exactly with the Vatican's imprimatur. Lodge et al. also forget, of course, the only thing really entailed here, namely, that the limited teller, anyone's, anywhere, must still have been fictionalized by an omniscient author.

So much for this package deal. Rather than an entailment, or a correlation, or even a likelihood, we have a play between the factors of vantage and value, which may, inter alia, settle into a joint authorized God-centeredness.

Disinterested analysts will presumably welcome the liberty gained for narrative by the unloosing of the fancied bond either way. Not so antitheists. Their target must drastically shrink thereby from the entire range of narrative omniscience as such to the normative monotheistic (and otherwise religious?) variety, if not to the fraction thereof that unreservedly preaches

33. Omniscient, mind you, beyond the telepath's narrow, psychic insight.

faith. By the same token, however, their target must extend, against the grain, to limited narration that upholds the undesirable theistic worldview: Augustine's *Confessions*, Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, Spark's *Loitering with Intent*, for example. Among the results, the campaign will have little to do with narratology. Even in misplaced zeal, they will need to judge each case on its underlying theological (de)merits, rather than a priori, by perspectival form.

Indeed, the current formal prejudice recalls a feminist attacking a work's "sexist" anaphoric language, regardless of the views on "gender" expressed or implied there. (Just as sexist views may underlie a PC surface elsewhere.) And in the ascent from verbal microsexism to perspectival macrotheism, still less of literary narrative would pass muster. The whole of fiction, its author definitionally omniscient and omnipotent—the latter according to Culler himself—would then fall victim to zealous prejudice. So, for consistency, would any work that exhibits a religious idea, memory, allusion, figure of speech. At best, a handful of earthbound factographic tales would survive to make a canon. The rage for cultural reform, via censorship in effect, thus leads to a choice between a near-wholesale and a selective depopulation of narrative literature—depending on whether the prejudice goes by God-like form or by God-centered faith.

Culler perhaps senses the boomerang effect. He does at times speak to authorial (dis)belief, especially toward the end: as when listing possible breaches of omniscience or advocating a shift from the Judeo-Christian model back to the Greek pantheon (26). The belief he foregrounds, though, is the reader's and analyst's, presumably taking his cue from Nicholas Royle: "To assume the efficacy and appropriateness of discussing literary works in terms of 'omniscient narration' is, however faintly or discreetly, to subscribe to a religious (and above all, a Christian) discourse and thinking" (2003: 260). Where Royle vituperates,<sup>34</sup> however, Culler introduces an argument of sorts designed to negate the very possibility of readerly appeal to omniscience. The outspoken doctrinal objection supposedly translates into a conceptual, cognitive obstacle (or obstacles, with the follow-up argument from our ignorance).

But consider the obstacle alleged. "If . . . we do not believe in an omniscient and omnipotent God, then we cannot draw on what we know of God to illuminate properties of narrative": surely, among the oddest non sequiturs on critical record. In fact, the oddities mount there. Who's "we,"

34. Typically, he avoids confrontation with my theory, to which he refers elsewhere (*ibid.*: 306n35).

to begin with? For all its pronominal rhetoric of solidarity, it is actually divisive, because contingent. The “If . . .” entails a believer/nonbeliever partition of readers, which in turn concedes the viability of omniscience to the theistic half.

This oddity recurs elsewhere. Jaffe (1991: 7) denies the existence of unproblematic omniscience anywhere “in the history of the novel”: it is just “a fantasy created by practical critics and narrative theorists.” But she at once contradicts herself in referring to “Dickens’s fantasy of omniscience.” So it turns out to be a novelistic fact—treated as such by Dickens, his readers, later critics and theorists—that counts as fantasy in Jaffe’s unbelieving, deconstructive eyes alone. Again, Nelles’s “Omniscience for Atheists” (2006) compounds this strangeness. The title equivocates between authorial and readerly unbelief, yet the analysis takes up neither. Having granted me Scripture’s omniscient communication, Nelles keeps silent on the doctrinal changes (in authors? in readers? in both?) supposed to make later (novelistic?) practice different. He never even explains how omniscience of any kind accords or otherwise correlates with either side’s atheism—let alone why Austen and/or her immediate readership count as atheists, what becomes of omniscient telling/reading among modern theists, and generally, of course, where is the reason or evidence for any postbiblical culture’s inability to suspend disbelief in the otherworldly. A titular flourish? A sheer critical bent under descriptive guise?

But nor does Culler’s “If . . . then” logically follow regarding nonbelievers, or find support in interpretive practice. Were it to follow, how would we/they understand the title of Joseph Heller’s novel *God Knows* or Genette’s remark that Marcel tells in his own name what he has heard “from Cottard, from Norpois, from the Duchess, or from God knows whom” (1980: 241), or use such phrases ourselves? Indeed, the meta-knowledge required for the purpose being the same on the lexical and the narrative level, the two quotes above even play between them in realizing the idiom. All the less likely, therefore, that any nonbeliever will pretend to find the phrases empty, mere noise, and their work-length extension inconceivable. Appropriately, Italo Calvino insists that the “suspension of disbelief,” which constitutes poetic faith, extends from the narrated world to the narrative act. On it, he reaffirms, “the success of every literary invention depends, even if it is admittedly within the realm of the fabulous and the incredible.” This law applies to “the mythical character of the blind Bard, visited by divine inspiration, with whom he identifies himself,” but also to all “the countless authors” whose writing self assumes “one or more levels of mythical or epic reality that draw material from the collective imagination” (Calvino 1986: 105–7).

The argument from belief is false to everybody's reading experience, alien to the most basic exercise and commonest workings of the imagination, to its very existence, in fact. It only compares with the hard-line positivism of the 1930s, "all statements about the nature of God are nonsensical [i.e., meaningless]" (Ayer 1971 [1936]: 153): long a byword for philosophy, or semantics, gone wrong.<sup>35</sup> By the same "if no belief, then no imag(in)ing and understanding" fallacy, we "cannot draw" on our knowledge of mythology "to illuminate" classical art, epic included, nor on anthropology to interpret tales from a distant culture, any more than we can bring our theological imagery of an all-knowing God and its countless literary analogues to bear on "properties of narrative." If at all capable of learning about world-frames unreal to us, we would abruptly suffer vis-à-vis narrative a total loss of representational memory and know-how as nonbelieving narratees. A fortiori in the absence (or ignorance) of any comparable specialized bodies of knowledge, traditional or scientific. It should then become impossible for us to make sense of represented fantastic worlds—least of all, when newly created—and indeed of any world, whatever its claims to realism or historicity, outside the one you happen to believe real. Nor would such solipsism disable world-making alone, in or out of art, but also ethics and learning and survival itself: how would our minds find a way to alterity, alternativity, adaptability?

Even among critics of omniscience, it takes rampant antitheism to land a theorist in absurdity of this order. What underlies the non sequitur about omniscience and its false corollaries is another, prescriptive non sequitur: given that theistic beliefs, just like racism or sexism, deserve no "respect," right-thinking people can't (mustn't?) suspend disbelief in them. But we all can and do, including Culler. How else would he conceive of the God/novelist analogy, or acknowledge instances of omniscient narrative, or preach an omnipotent substitute? Belief may affect our emotional and evaluative response to the worlds encountered or the viewpoints on them—particularly with readers other than implied, whether uneducated, opinionated, or subversive—but never conditions our boundless world- and viewpoint-imaging power. Culler's dogmatic resistance only serves to highlight anew the universality of the principle, with all that lies at stake.

35. Inter alia, it would make nonsense of both Einstein's argument for physical determinism, "God doesn't play dice," and his quantum-mechanical opponents' reference to the sum total of probabilities in a multiworld universe as surveyable from a God's eye view. Like writers, scientists are remarkably anxiety-free when it comes to handy models. They even favor the theological kind, exactly due to its imaginative, expressive, figurative as well as familiar supernaturalism, which literalists would purge from language and our literati from literature.

(Across the widest divergences in premise, method, and explanatory line, the history of criticism strikingly runs truer to these realities of our imaginative experience. Its story has yet to be told. It would open with Aristotle's inference by "paralogism," his ranking of a probable impossibility above an improbable or even sheer possibility, and his indifference between fact- or tradition-based and fictional plot-making. It would pass through the changes rung over the ages on artistic illusion and Coleridge's "suspension of disbelief that constitutes poetic faith." And it would end with enterprises that circle back in one way or another to the Aristotelian start: present-day constructivisms, say, cognitivist information-processing models, based on the schemata we bring to the text, possible-worlds logic, or exercises in the historical imagination [nowadays become a subgenre, alongside science fiction] premised on a counterfactual "If . . ."<sup>36</sup> In such long retrospect, the refusal to suspend disbelief in omniscient telling, a fortiori to acknowledge its very existence, looks like a momentary aberration without a future.

As to other disciplines concerned with the analysis and making of discourse—at times including narrative—their story reveals a tendency both opposed and ostensibly much simpler. For they operate on "real-life," low-realistic premises, with direct implications for point of view. Thus, the philosophy of history has long imposed its earthbound presumptions on everything and everyone involved, from the historical world-in-action narrated to the historian as limited, empirical, probabilistic narrator. Any deviation from the low-realistic model, culminating in the Bible's polar extreme—a world and a discourse authored, and a narrator authorized, by an all-privileged God—counts as unscientific, fictional, dogmatic, and the like. A quarrel between ideologies, really, each driving its own worldview and point of view, ontology and epistemology, in history telling. Much the same belief-laden assumptions lurk behind the scientific façade of discourse analysis, jurisprudence, the philosophy of language, pragmatics, linguistics—notably cognitive linguistics, which manifests a special interest in "perspective." Among its major exponents, George Lakoff [1987] thus rejects the metaphysics of "the God's eye view," and Ronald Langacker [1995: 154] translates the rejection into perspectival cognitive law: God's discourse is a mere "possible exception" to the rule of constrained human "viewing." This might please literary critical antitheists. Funnily, though, the practice itself contradicts the precept. For the analysts operate as if they were mind readers: the speech act theorist presumes knowledge of the speaker's "sincerity," for example, and the cognitive linguist,

36. On world-making at large as a Suppose game, see my "If-Plots" (2008).

of how the speaker mentally images what he is about to express. Low realism on the ground, then, goes with omniscience at the analytic level: the exact reverse of omniscient narrative denied or humanly leveled down by antitheism. Either way, however, prescriptive metadiscourse betrays its incongruity.<sup>37</sup>)

### **3.4. Knowledge of God: Readerly Perspective Construction amid Theological Plenitude**

Having disposed of (un)belief, we can advance to Culler's follow-up conditional that ostensibly leaves it behind in the concessive premise. "Even if we believe in God, there is precious little knowledge about him on which to rely": so little does theology provide that it merely goes to show that "God's omniscience" cannot "serve as a useful model for omniscience in narration."<sup>38</sup> Precious little? If anything, as already suggested, theology provides an excess of such knowledge in multiplying variants and details of God's omniscience—with their bearings on other features that enter into the respective portraits ("packages") of divinity. An embarrassment of riches, in fact.

In alleging ignorance, Culler speaks as if he and "we" were ancients prior or alien to the biblical revolution, some of them audible on literary record. Notoriously, in face of "Let my people go!" Pharaoh disclaims knowledge of the divine sender and authority behind Moses' call. "Who is the Lord that I should listen to him?" he jeers, before learning the answer the hard way, through the plagues inflicted on Egypt to make God known worldwide (Exodus 5:2). Possibly echoing this question unawares, to yet sharper ironic effect, Douglas Hofstadter's Achilles, puzzled by the word's very reference, keeps asking *his* interlocutor, "God? Who is God? . . . Would you mind telling me who—or what—God is?" (1980: 111–13). Achilles might well ask. Even apart from his Pharaoh-like ignorance, the recursive conundrums and acronyms of divinity sprung on him are mind-boggling. Beside them, the divine model applied in narrative construction looks simpler than ever, and accordingly more knowable for the purpose—regardless of the belief assumed in Culler's opening conditional.

But then, this actual plenitude of knowledge ready to our hand may still count as precious little, because Culler now silently raises the epistemic threshold for our God-imaging to its earlier height, if not higher yet, with the same unhappy results.

In the formulation just quoted, dead against the opening "Even if . . ." the sequel takes away this concession to the logic and psycho-logic and

37. For details, see my 1985: esp. 80–83, 2001b, 2008, forthcoming.

38. Cited with approval in Richardson 2006: 9.

sociocultural reality of world-making, reverting to the demand for credibility with a vengeance. Note how that sequel quibbles on “knowledge” (between the softer meaning of information—i.e., world images, regardless of truth value, as in Artificial Intelligence—and the hard factive, truth-committed meaning studied in my 2001b), and correspondingly quibbles on “to rely” (between the previous sentence’s information “to draw on” and factual, “reliable,” hence credible information). The turn, or return, leaps to the eye thereafter. For example, “The fundamental point is that . . . we do not know whether there is a God and what she might know” (ibid.); or, instead of “omniscience as . . . something given and known,” “we have only rumor and speculation to go on” (25); or “known quantity” (26). In effect, having been left behind, the belief condition not only gets smuggled in by the backstairs. It even hardens now—from subjective belief to objective, all-believable knowledge—via the truth and the ontic reliability demanded in order to establish God’s supernatural epistemology, hence its applicability to modeling “omniscience in narration.”

Obviously, theology being concerned with faith by definition, no amount of it will meet such a factual requirement. How would “even” the believer, lay or learned, possibly attain to hard knowledge of the All-Knower and *his* knowledge, without independently matching them as a fellow God? But nor will the impossible factual standard itself escape the reduction to absurdity that has already disposed of the belief stipulated earlier. The absurdity only sharpens with the belief-to-knowledge hardening, followed by a tacit, *de facto* lifting of both requirements—and apropos very different omniscient practices—so as to expose either as gratuitous.

This latter giveaway starts with Culler’s accepting the Bible’s as “the true model of omniscient narration” (26) and ends with his conceding its pertinence to the “central works of the realist tradition”: the “novels from George Eliot to Anthony Trollope with extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrators” (31–32; presumably following Hillis Miller [1968: 63], who regards the omniscient narrator convention in the nineteenth-century novel as “the determining principle of its form”). If the Bible, why not *The Faerie Queene* or *Paradise Lost*? And if “Eliot to Trollope,” why not the “extradiegetic-heterodiegetic” narrators of Madame de Clèves, Fielding, Austen, Balzac, Gogol, Tolstoy, Hawthorne, Conrad, Hemingway, Mann, Woolf, Greene, Spark, Fowles, Pynchon, . . . ? Under pressure, further narrative exemplars and traditions would doubtless equally be admitted to qualify for membership,<sup>39</sup> but these two suffice to confirm the principle. Failing hard knowledge of God, as always, and across wider variations in belief, culture,

39. “Omniscient narration . . . is common not only in traditional tales but in modern novels” (Culler 1997: 91).

poetics than usual, we readers yet model Biblical and Realist narrative alike on God-like all-knowledge. At the authorial end, the acknowledged self-modelers on Omniscience include George Eliot, whose most famous epigram begins with “God is inconceivable . . . ,” alongside the originators of his power and paradigm, with their lineage since. In turn, Culler having declared God incredible and unknowable, he himself later specifies what “an omniscient God would presumably know” (24). If so, nothing about the epistemic mind-set brought to any tale could a priori disable its reference in the telling/reading to a similar high epistemology.

In more positive terms, given sheer imaginative, poetic faith—always *pro tem*, because process-length, and the only one relevant to discourse—we can explain why and how the model has operated so long with such success on such a broad (con)textual front. At either end of discourse, humans have always easily coped with omniscient narrative, because the divine model and its previous literary instantiations have supplied them with all the epistemic know-how necessary for the purpose. They know all that they need to know, in the appropriate, pattern-(re)constructive sense of knowledge. Omniscience then figures among the basic exploratory and explanatory resources in the sense-making process: as a cognitive scheme of a narrative supercognizer, whereby to organize the humanly strange flow (givens, gaps) of information along the discourse encountered, or transmitted, into coherent patterns of action, meaning, and effect. Across the numberless variations on the scheme, two strategic constants persist: one regarding power and founding the very epistemic divinity/discourse analogy; the other regarding performance and enabling the power’s free (i.e., variable) adjustment to the wanted discourse process.

Like God, the storied omniscient has unlimited access to all the world’s subdomains, markedly those closed to ourselves by nature. Included are the otherwise opaque, or contingent, future; the past distant or hidden or vanished without a trace; simultaneities too far apart for natural (as against all-present) co-registration in the happening; the workings of other minds, down to unconscious motive and mentation, not for nothing called the secret life; complete with seeing into how they interlink, namely, the laws (patterns, networks, regularities) governing each subdomain and coordinating them all. In brief, omnitemporality, omnipresence, omnimentality, omnilinkage, which among them cover everything about the world that is humanly inaccessible to any observer.

Amid the model’s operational unity, further, its theological and otherwise traditional variants come into narrative play as well. Or the other way round, the variations available make a significant distinctive repertoire of choices: each markedly opposed to its possible alternatives, within as well

as without the supernatural order, they make nonsense of any Genettian deviationist approach or zero-focalization. Recall how the author can flexibly attach or oppose the mediator's omniscience to the rest of the discourse powers, or how, on a single axis, existential postures may change: "The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork" (Joyce 1960 [1916]: 215). As with combinatory, so with communicative latitude. Here, like God at discourse, the storied omniscient alone moves at will between developing or disclosing the extraordinary knowledge in step with time—possibly even in advance—and withholding it from the reader's viewpoint on the world, in whole or in part, arbitrarily or systematically, for a time or forever. And the perspectival setup chosen maps itself onto plot. Always the plot desired, that is, because exempt from the limited knower's constraints as such; and exempt even where the superplotter motivates his own choice via the narrator's (e.g., Dowell's in *The Good Soldier*) or reflector's (Strether's in *The Ambassadors*) all too human epistemic constraint, likewise picked to suit. Upon this free variable hinges the relative dominance of narrative's three universals—suspense (prospaction), curiosity (retrospection), surprise (recognition)—which among them govern and dynamize everything in the narrative text, each to its own peculiar processual effect. Telling geared to happening time promotes the first interest; telling against or behind the order of happening activates the other two. But the high-epistemic unity of a telling/reading sequence freely made about an event sequence cuts across the infinite multiformity of perspectivized emplotment, of perspectival networks emplotted or emplottable by an omniscient coordinator.

In operational terms, such a coordinator alone enjoys the liberty of narrating the relevant march of events in the world (or, if an author, having it narrated) at pleasure, to the limit of limits: total, timely, transparent narration in iconic accord with the action, however mysterious to the human agents and beholders on the ground. There, omniscience actualizes the omniconnunication (from our side, the running, reader-friendly omnisclosure) that it elsewhere avoids. To avoid all-telling is to dechronologize, hence to withhold, along some broken narrative line. Instead of sharing the whole truth with us, the all-knower then disorders and divides it in consistent (e.g., Jamesian) or sporadic (Fielding-esque, Dickensian) fashion; disables it through unresolvable ambiguity; or at least distributes, suspends, and postpones it via temporary gapping. Details about this omniconnunicative/suppressive opposition will soon follow, but meanwhile the alternativity in address (narrative disclosure) within the polar alternativity in access (to the narrated domain vis-à-vis human ken) commands notice. The avoidance of orderly all-telling by an omniscient itself exhibits

an unmatched liberty of choice—given its possible self-limited variants, as well as its limited mirror image—so that it in turn signals a functional design behind the option chosen. To model and appreciate all these distinctive strategies, we have more than enough constructive knowledge of God.

#### 4. Gaps, Blanks, and Afterlives

As with the principle, so with the specific doubts that Culler goes on to express about all-knowledge and how we may know or conceptualize it. To begin with, citing my rule that the implied author enjoys omniscience by definition within his own microcosm of the universe, Culler alleges that what this means is hard to work out. “Does the author know only the facts stipulated in the novel, or does he by definition know the color of the eyes of each character in the novel, even if . . . never mentioned?” (23). The answers are, of course, no and yes, respectively: both writ so large in the cited books on Temporal Ordering and Biblical Poetics as to arouse wonder about the two questions.

Indeed, the first query is astonishing. For the books Culler cites so highlight the key role of facts left *unstipulated*, not in time or not ever. Narrativity itself lives here—in the discontinuities between the telling and the told sequence—with its ramification into the genre’s three processing universals. Suspense, curiosity, and surprise, with their familial dynamics, all hinge on various missing “stipulations”: on informational gaps about the tale’s opaque future, about a past left enigmatic, and about one that seems known until we discover otherwise, respectively. Here exactly also lies the variety in unity between what I call temporary and permanent gaps. The latter involve “facts” never “stipulated” in the discourse: enduring breaches of mimetic, plot continuity—hence of our mental certainty—that cry out for resolution. The former, temporary gaps, by contrast, only involve the delay of such “facts”; but up to the point of “stipulation”—its arrival always out of due time and never certain—they operate just like their permanent mates, as ambiguous breaches. The temporary/permanent distinction thus extends from gaps to their closures: the reader cannot wait for the end to find out which gap is which, on pain of cognitive breakdown of form, sense, memory. We temporarily repair every “unstipulated” fact, instead, as soon as the need for it arises, if only via a branching makeshift, in the hope of eventual resolution. Consider Iago’s and the Golden Dustman’s motives, respectively.

With either type, moreover, I have foregrounded the interworking of sequence and knowledge, temporal (dis)continuity and perspectival

(dis)parity, which the epistemic license of fiction (Culler's "novel") maximizes. Gaps, ambiguities, multiple hypotheses about anything within the narrated world, all arise from discrepancies in knowledge vis-à-vis the author, who is ultimately responsible for their opening, shape, play, mediacy, duration, closure, if any, and impact on both the narrated and the narrative process. These processes most often unfold as two human ordeals of knowledge, the mimetic one always framed within the discursive and forked among the agents, but running parallel to the discourse frame, as it were, each along its own time sequence, or what we make of it. Now the two ordeals unfold to the effect of character/reader virtual equality, now of disparity in either's favor, here interacting suspensefully, there enigmatically or surprisingly, here resolved together, there left open or opposed—always depending on the author's strategy of correlating the awareness of the respective humans on the move amid uncertainty about the world-in-motion. It all depends, in short, on whether or not (and if yes, on how, when, where) the telling elevates us throughout to the superhuman authorial vantage point, above the unprivileged agents, viewers, voices, and audiences within the arena. Culler himself will, moreover, soon invoke the polarity drawn in my work between gapless, "omnicommunicative" and gapped, "suppressive" telling. He would even extend these options to every teller (24–25). One can therefore only marvel at the question's amnesia, again unprecedented in the references to this narrative theory over the decades.

The second query above regarding the author's all-knowledge is evidently polemical in picking on marginalia, usually omitted for lack of interest: what I call "blanks" as against interest-laden "gaps" (e.g., 1985: 235–58, 2003: 362 ff.).<sup>40</sup> Even so, why should the author, or authorial narrator, be deemed ignorant of eye color? Among a myriad of other details on call, it is always freely specifiable at need, the way Agatha Christie alerts us to clues by referring to Poirot's shining green eyes or Trollope thematizes the old groom's "little bushy grey eyes that looked as though they could see through a stable door." After all, humanly restricted tellers in art and life, aware of fellow characters' appearance, may likewise opt for blanking or specifying or ambiguating it, just as their ken always outreaches "the facts stipulated" in their text. A fortiori with authors behind imagined worlds. Never would they conceivably know, select, maneuver less than their own fictional tellers, or than ourselves at (hi)storytelling. Apart from their defi-

40. Elsewhere, Culler himself acknowledges the difference: e.g., when paraphrasing my account of "omnicommunicative narrators" as those "who don't withhold any *important* information" (24; my emphasis). So one may narrate, hence know, "everything" while blanking out eye color—unless it assumes "importance" in the tale.

nitional omniscience and highest possible liberty of choice in disclosure, there is abundant empirical evidence for their exercise of both resources on such marginalia. Witness the full-scale portraits and event-lines (in cinematic jargon, “backstories”) written down or envisaged in the genesis, on which the actual finished tale (play, film) selectively draws.<sup>41</sup>

Color in fact generalizes into the entire knowledge of space and the author’s descriptive range. Strictly, therefore, Culler’s next query, as to “the complete history of minor characters,” then of major figures like Emma and Mr. Knightley, involves a change of target. Yet the variant question has been equally anticipated in principle and resolves itself on much the same grounds, down to “backstory” empirics. This with one seeming exception, perhaps, which in turn leads to more general issues. It bears on the open future, the afterlife left unrepresented. So, with the agents’ “eye color” replaced by their “complete history,” the object under challenge shifts in theory from statics to dynamics, the world-axis from space to time, the power from omni-presence or -portrayal to omnitemporality, and the genre from descriptive to narrative proper. Culler never says so, and his illustration appears to greet us with another weak, eye-color-like claimant to unknowability. But it would again pay to realize what lies at stake by implication.

We may smile in passing at the quibble on whether Jane Austen’s disclosure to her nephew of how long Emma’s father survived counts as “knowledge” or “ancillary anecdote.” Nelles (2006), in self-defense against what he categorically denies—an Austen who sees ahead—would probably also opt for the latter slot. But the “anecdote” told itself entails a world (fore)known. And linguistic hairsplitting apart, the novelist would hardly know less, or less certainly, about her world’s evolution in her professional, God-like than in her personal, auntish capacity. A self-defeating piece of empirical evidence, if anything.

But consider the somewhat larger follow-up against perfect omnitemporality: “Do we want to say that the novelist necessarily knows about the lives of the children that the heroine may or may not have had, as she lived happily ever after, after the wedding that concludes the novel?” (24). Again, why not, given Austen’s demonstrated access to so many arcane

41. As one contemporary novelist puts it, though the details of the imagined world “do not always need to be written into the book,” they are all present to the creative mind’s eye: “The setting and the people must be seen as clearly as a photograph—with no foggy spots” (Highsmith 1983: 37; cf. Trollope 1961 [1883]: 85, 212). The idea of “backstory” is traceable to the original, Horatian sense of *in medias res*: the author (e.g., Homer) selects from a pre-known large complex of occurrences (e.g., the Trojan War) the parts relevant to the narrative whole wanted (the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*). On the term and its fortunes, see my 1978: 35–41, 1992: 496–97, 2006: 131–36; Genette 1988: 30–31.

realities that elude or mislead her characters, along with us fellow humans, unless and until enlightened by herself? What is there about the future, or *Emma's* future—or Emma's posterity, most specifically—to break the rule of distinctive narratorial superknowledge established for the novel's past and present enigmas, interior and interpersonal secrets? Odder yet, this putative breach would also exceptionally and gratuitously break the epistemic analogy with God, who specializes in prophecy—not least regarding childbirth, and far more questionable childbirth than an Emma's, at that. (Recall the tribulations of the matriarchs in Genesis.) And the oddity again escalates in Culler's own terms. What would prevent the novelist, if not omniscient, then omnipotent, from making a “performative” statement about those future children, bringing them into the world *ipso facto*?<sup>42</sup>

By the same token, how to explain the traditional ending “and they lived happily ever after”? Are all concluding marriages to be afflicted with barrenness, for all anyone knows? Does the final kiss in classical Hollywood cinema foretell nothing beyond itself? Would the eventual conviction of an unmasked and self-confessed murderer remain opaque to the detective storyteller, or even to ourselves, whenever, and just because, left untold? If the answer to these were yes, or maybe, then the perturbing futurity would rebound upon the sense of the given ending itself—destabilize the closure, adulterate the (un)happy effect—which is evidently not the case in our actual experience of such tales. The very postmodernist rage against closure and omniscience at once—à la Barthes (1974 [1970]), D. A. Miller (1981), Hillis Miller (1978)—must look for its exemplars in very different practices. Throughout, rather, we newly encounter here omissions that read either as blanks in the afterlife or as gaps easily fillable by convention and elsewhere filled on the discourse surface. Even when one takes the irrelevant blank as an intriguing gap, the author is blessed or blamed for keeping silent about it.

As if to forestall such rebuttals, Culler makes another groundless distinction, this time between the two analogues in superhumanity. “An omniscient God would presumably know whether an Emma Woodhouse and

42. The only obstacle inheres in the thesis already found hopeless: that all “mimetic” statements, like all normative ones, are necessarily explicit, manifest. Culler must therefore rule out all might-have-been performatives, whether storable about the future or any other aspect of narrated reality. Equally inevitably, he must object not just to omniscience as a manifold of communicable knowledge but to the larger vital distinction between power and performance: it mustn't be acknowledged even in regard to expressible vs. expressed performatives, or else performativity wouldn't afford Culler so much as an ostensible alternative to omniscience. The two would amount to the same undesirable God-likeness on the whole novelistic front—including perfect command, and mention at pleasure, of developments ahead.

Mr. Knightley had children and what became of them and their children, but novelists are not omniscient in this sense, about aspects of the lives of characters not touched on in the book” (ibid.): this merely asserts (on a scale even larger than the omnipotemporal “aspect”) the improbable disanalogy that needs to be argued.<sup>43</sup> The future, along with the rest of the blanks or permanent gaps, is declared omnisciently knowable, but not to novelists (or, on Nelles’s more special and divisive pleading, not to *this* novelist). Why not? By sheer critical fiat, it would seem.

Even so, though left groundless, the asserted disanalogy is suggestive in giving away that the model, like any other, mustn’t be taken literally, inclusively, theistically, but constructively. Actually, moreover, any disanalogy arguable here works in favor of “the novelists.” To the Bible’s exemplary God, as a supervisor of or superagent within the (hi)story, the future is genuinely ahead—a time cum tense apart—in being yet unrealized, and accordingly difficult and creditable to foreknow. Nor, paradoxically, does he quite foreknow it. Or not regarding the future behavior of humans, “created in God’s image” to enjoy freedom of choice, with the resulting ethical dignity and accountability. In choosing to let his chosen creature choose, therefore, God has voluntarily suspended not only his omnipotence over internal workings and their objective results—the necessary move against predestination—but also the corresponding operative omniscience, in a sense. The exceptional suspensions join forces, for once, to render human contingency, and with it our God-like autonomy, doubly sure. At any cross-roads, even if the agent’s heart is an open book to the All-Seer, his future action must be left undetermined, as an article of revolutionary faith, until he performs it. “Now I know that thou art God-fearing” (Genesis 22:12), God says to Abraham *after* he has demonstrated his readiness to sacrifice Isaac, knife in hand and wood within reach for the burnt offering. Only now? An incredible-looking statement—given both God’s powers and Abraham’s lifelong piety—yet paradigmatic of the intricate reconception, due to this very strangeness. Yes, only “now I know,” because, when it comes to choice, even divine foreknowledge mustn’t and doesn’t qualify as categorical knowledge except after the human event. (So, no retribution, positive or punitive, before the event, however foreknown.) In turn, having learned to distinguish God’s potential from his actualized foresight and other superknowledge, the audience will hopefully appreciate what hangs

43. Nelles (2006: 119) further generalizes the improbable disparity across the board. While my logic of all-knowledge “would doubtless be true of ‘real’ omniscience, it does not seem compelling with regard to ‘pretend’ omniscience, which might readily be imagined as divisible.” How exactly the mind would imagine it on the premises, for a logical or antilogical change, he neglects to say.

in the balance and reenact the distinction on their own creaturely level, among themselves.<sup>44</sup> By the same token, however, this bold epistemic paradox, complete with subdivision and ideological groundwork, throws into relief the comparatively unproblematic, homogeneous certitudes open to the literary analogue in supernature.

To the empowered literary (hi)storyteller, standardly retrospective, the characters' actions and fortunes (including God's own concurrent agency, down to his forecasting) are all in the past by narration time: with little to choose in principle between the more remote (e.g., expository) and the more recent, between happenings anterior and posterior to that which "concludes the novel," between "lives" and afterlives, as well as between world-items (representables) touched and "not touched on in the book" generally. Relative to the characters' mobile Now alone does the told past subdivide in the telling/reading into virtual past, present, and future, with the appropriate, maneuverable sense of backward-looking vs. cotemporal vs. anticipatory reference, on which narrative's universal processes depend. All this happens by flexible imaginative self-projection onto another subject's time line, against the arrow of objective time, rather than by the genuine tripartite linear orientation of one's own living historical self.

So, what with God's real and difficult foreknowledge categorically granted here by Culler, the retrospective author's mimesis of it ensues a *fortiori*.<sup>45</sup> In fact, given a story about the past, one needn't even be omniscient for the purpose. As with the end itself, looking ahead to events

44. Here lies the deviance, not to say heresy, of the Christian doctrine that God's omniscience enables retribution for unactualized, contingent behavior: choices that would have been made *if* the agent had been a Christian. Thereby, divine all-knowledge extends to all possible acts, so that righteous polytheists are saved and the unrighteous damned according to the respective if . . . then's. The difference between these theologies—or their secular equivalents in the worldviews implied and operated by a God-like author—even widens when narrativized. Here I can only draw attention to its far-flung bearings: on narrative knowledge, time, modality, judgment, and rhetoric. (On the implications for the idea of eternity, see Borges 2000: esp. 133–35.) Of the two worldviews, evidently, the second presses for omniscient narration (as well as authorship) to establish the might-have-been scenarios, beginning with the character's interiority as cause; while the first, all other things being equal, can settle for the accomplished actions as observed from without. The varying priorities also illustrate the larger difference of "faith" vs. "works"—thematized in *Tom Jones*—and more generally yet, the inward turn heralded by Christianity.

45. So it does, if less simply, where the author opts for an imagined telling in the present or future tense. The author's omnitemporality persists, with the creative license and the communication after the narrated events, no matter how tensed in the discourse or how temporalized and experienced by any other knower, from narrator to characters to self-projecting reader. Inversely, a past-tense retrospect may also do duty for the prospection denied by Culler: see the novelistic examples from Austen to Fowles below.

that follow it is then looking backward on prenarration time. Any storied human delegate (or in historytelling, contemporary) of the author may equally well “foreknow” such antecedents: the aftermath of a marriage, say, or a world war.<sup>46</sup>

Whether he actually narrates them is again another matter, as is whether his narrating truly or fully reflects his cognition. The favorable analogy to the freedom-loving God, though, extends from the privileged author to our fellow human, regardless. And, when either does foretell according to the backknowledge already available, the analogy even invites a notable recasting in terms of logic.

This retrospective proleptic discourse then makes the exception to the rule current among philosophers: that propositions about events in the future—contingent by nature—are neither true nor false.<sup>47</sup> The philosopher’s rule might apply to the scenarios that characters imagine in dialogue or thought, projecting from their Now onto a shadowy future. Voiced by an omniscient narrator, however, scenarios are true or, if misleading, false (i.e., true-seeming, yet, in retrospect, deceptively unreliable), or, if ambiguous, both true and false (depending on how understood), for they actually concern the past.

The claim that the author in Muriel Spark’s novels is flaunted as God “through” the flashforwards that “prematurely reveal the ends of the characters” (Waugh 1984: 120) therefore makes a non sequitur: the effect alleged doesn’t follow logically (but rhetorically, comparatively, experientially) from the means. As “premature” retrospects cast in prospective grammar, they dechronologize the finished narrative *sujet*, rather than, like God, anticipating inside and ahead of the narrated, fabulaic chronology itself. Only due to human shortsightedness, the agents’ and ours, does the one feel like the other. As if it were not “illogical” enough for the narrator’s past reference to map itself onto the developing narrative present—against the way it always reads elsewhere, because against the given tense—here it comes to switch time directions into a virtual future. In truth as in temporal value, however, past it nevertheless remains.

More generally yet, as with every other factual statement made by that narrator, he cannot deny or invert or ignore his foretelling without contradiction and pressure for resolution. As always, again, whoever resolves it

46. “Growing old . . . has this compensation . . . that sometimes it gives you the opportunity of seeing what was the outcome of certain events [here, of a forced marriage] that you had witnessed long ago” (Maugham 1964: 327).

47. Exceptional another way are the law’s if-plots: their very utterance by the law-maker changes the world that they direct henceforth, in imposing on it the represented scenario (see my 2007, especially the last section).

may appeal to aesthetic license (e.g., a narratorial trap, with surprise in view) or to hidden limited viewpoint (e.g., a free indirect report of a character's wishful thinking) or to genetic lapse (e.g., of memory, or betraying a change of mind).<sup>48</sup> So may be the case with the limited knower's foretellings after the fact. Except that, strictly, these essentially waver between truth and falsity: between the plus of actual backreference from the Now's vantage point and the double minus of latent error (epistemic fallibility) and latent interest (with an eye to the narratee's permanent deception, or to self-deception, as well as to artful, temporary misdirection). At either epistemic extreme, however, truth remains the normal, if manipulable, value in foretelling practice before/behind objective time.

#### **4.1. Long-Range Prescience at Work: Some Forms and Functions**

Question-begging and (ana)logical unreason aside, Culler's statement above—as to God, novelist, their disanalogy—founders on its own inconsistencies in vital respects. Suddenly, our knowledge of God's omniscience is “presumed,” regardless of belief, not denied, though in the same breath enlisted not to affirm but, as earlier, to deny the novelist's analogous omniscience. Incompatible claims, both are made in the service of one anti-theistic end: negating the divine model, pushing for a Godless novel and culture. Suddenly, likewise, the “perfection” of God, and with it the threat to the openness of the future and so to human freedom, rises from its cavalier dismissal, as a matter for theology, to contrastive importance vis-à-vis the novelist. And suddenly, again, the novelist's own foreknowledge of how the end “turns out” (26, 337) stops short of the future “not touched on in the book.” Or rather, the partition within the future afflicts part of the storytelling family: it comes to hinder only some novelists' (or in Nelles, some postbiblical writers') foreknowledge, though we never learn which novelists, besides *Emma's*, why partly disprivileged among their mates, and how to tell them apart.<sup>49</sup> Culler apparently forgets that he has conceded full omniscience to the Bible's narrative model, then to novels “from George Eliot to Anthony Trollope.” So an Eliot can foresee the afterlife

48. Among the implications, consider how a (script)writer by installments, having once looked ahead with authority, almost irretrievably binds himself to driving the plot somehow toward a predetermined future.

49. To pursue the throwback to modernism, one recalls how critics deny roving or full or other-than-“selective” omniscience to Jamesian and post-Jamesian authors/narrators (e.g., *Expositional Modes*, Sternberg 1978: 281–82). But the imagined shrinkage of authority there at least bears on a determinate poetic tradition, which often manifests a consistently limited narrative surface. Still less do those modernists share Culler's extra partition at the receiving end—in terms of the interpreter's belief—or Nelles's more equivocal one, which associates disbelief with generic evolution, from the Bible to, say, Austen.

closed to an Austen—except as “ancillary anecdote”—perhaps by a special theistic dispensation granted to nineteenth-century “realism” amid an agonizing crisis in faith.

Here as elsewhere, finally, the empirical evidence bears out in force what the rationale of omniscience (prescience, above all) and the weakness of its inconsistent denials suggest. Narrative abounds in knowing anticipations, not of the emplotted ending alone, for or against suspense, but of scattered post-terminal developments that outreach it—comparable to long retrospections made in passing on bits of the past. Thus George Eliot, in *Adam Bede*, indeed looks ahead to the overzealous ministry of “Mr. Ryde, who came there twenty years afterwards, when Mr. Irwine had been gathered to his fathers” (chap. 17). But the long-distance prolepsis she executes recurrently and directly manifests itself in storytelling, from the Bible’s and Homer’s inspired history to the latest novelistic fiction. The repertoire’s diversity is as worth observing as the continuity that it enriches.

In this foretelling continuity, the dynamic interplay between God’s privilege and the God-like analogue’s newly shows; so does that between history and the history-like, and between omnipotence and omniscience—now in special correlation, moreover, with the future/past difference amid omnitemporality. Unlike knowledge of the past, however remote, a narrator’s prescience (especially if obtrusive and long-range) may suggest omnipotent control over the actualization of the future concerned. To insure against encroachment on divine monopoly, therefore, the biblical historian would rather leave such anticipation to the Lord of History himself: as with the promises of nationhood made to the fathers in Genesis, yet realized gradually in subsequent books and centuries along the grand chronology. (Apropos Culler, the promises guarantee not just “children” but a people-size descent.) Fictionists, however, generally share neither these ideological qualms, nor the authoritative figural supervoice that meets them or could otherwise substitute for the wanted narratorial glances ahead: to matters big or small, impending or far-off, even unborn yet, located between or beyond the covers of the novel. And they delegate the job accordingly on this entire front, including Culler’s alleged unknowables.

So, in the example above, George Eliot has her narrator anticipate by decades the new minister’s arrival. But here is Jane Austen’s own surrogate in passing lookahead. At an “interesting moment,” a character must suspend his report “to determine some disputable point; and his attention was so totally engaged in the business and afterwards by the course of the game as never to revert to what he had been saying before; and Emma, though suffering a good deal from curiosity, dared not remind him” (Austen 1974: 148–49; contrast Nelles 2006: 120–23). In turn, his nonreversion recalls

Austen outlining to her sister Cassandra the prospective development of this novel, itself left unfinished: “Mr Watson was soon to die; and Emma to become dependent for a home. . . . She was to decline an offer of marriage” (Austen 1974: 152).

Again, while describing the attractiveness of Mary, John Fowles jumps over a century to update it: “Mary’s great-great-granddaughter, who is twenty-two years old this month I write in, much resembles her [Victorian] ancestor; and her face is known over the entire world, for she is one of the more celebrated younger English actresses.” Or apropos the worry of Ernestina’s parents about her health: “Had they but been able to see into the future! For Ernestina was to outlive all her generation. She was born in 1846, and she died on the day Hitler invaded Poland” (Fowles 1970: 134–66).

Throughout, as notably, the tense/time interplay manifests a formal variety in foretelling unity. God’s promises, for example, correlate tensed with temporal futurity: “I will make a great nation of thee,” he tells Abraham, one that “will sojourn in a land not theirs, and will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years,” and then “they shall come back here” (Genesis 12:2, 15:13–16). In the narrator’s voice, speaking on its own authority rather than directly quoting an enacted omnitemporal, and in languages with a sequence-of-tense rule, a formal shift must ensue. Not uniformly, though. Often, and least surprising, the inset future “will . . . shall” then corresponds to the future past, backshifted relative to the agents’ already-lived (hi)story. Thus the “X would . . .” flashforwards central to Muriel Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, distributed along Edward Jones’s *The Known World*, and generally become the hallmark of follow-up developments or memories in the afterlife. But George Eliot’s foretelling assumes past-tense form with a future-directed adverbial (“came there twenty years afterwards”) and even turns pluperfect (“when Mr. Irwine had been gathered to his fathers”) in order to situate the foretold event vis-à-vis an antecedent and causative futurity. The difference isn’t at all in the time direction indicated by the respective verbal forms but in large, indeed subgeneric coordinates: the rhetoric of all-round divine mastery, say, and of empirical history-likeness.<sup>50</sup> In turn, Austen’s “as never to revert” avoids, by elision, any surface tense. Whereas Fowles modulates among three tenses: the storytelling present (“is . . . this month I write

50. Or, in the intermediate future past variant, divinity-like mastery, even wielded in the interests of fictional truth. Thus Edward Jones: “I, as the ‘god’ of the people in the book, could see their first days and their last days and all that was in between,” as they never could, and exploit it for temporal cross-referencing, beyond their memory yet part of the “truth” of their lives (from an interview appended to his 2004).

in . . . is . . . is”), the openly predictive past (“was to outlive”), and the factual-looking, retrospective past (“was born . . . died . . . invaded”) that adheres to the tale’s history-like form—with any future “will/would” conspicuously absent. Yet the variants being all relative to the storied characters’ (“Ernestina’s parents”) fixed location in the past, they too all read as manifesting the omnitemporal’s ability (and correspondingly, the human inability) “to see into the future!”

Another impressive measure, these, of how discourse lives by a protean art of relations, down to the tiniest units. Specifically, this functional equivalence among formal variants goes to widen yet further the range of authoritative prospection, against Culler’s wholesale denial. A massive addition consists in all the valedictory or updating postscripts favored by traditional endings, and easily underread, from temporal to normative to closural bearing. The sequel recollected there in laconic tranquility, all lived and emplotted passion spent, not only doubles as a prospective glance, often even as an afterplot in embryo. It may also give a twist to what has gone before: a deepening of unease, a jarring note, a seed of trouble, in the longer run. Thus, among Austenian windings-up, the *de facto* postscript to her “light and bright and sparkling” novel. Martin Amis, for one, senses its double-edgedness: “Calling on her privilege as the local omniscient, Jane Austen consigns Lydia’s marriage to the communal grave (‘His affection for her soon sunk into indifference; hers lasted a little longer’), underlining her exclusion from the circumambient happy ending” (2001: 438–39). The laconic post-ending, with its double trajectory of deterioration, outruns and counterpoints the focal stability of the happily married. At any rate, these terminal notes join the retrospects that in effect interchange with “Character X will/would . . .” to broaden the scope of foretelling—regardless of the given tense and even time. What makes them both true and interchangeable across the surface forms, or against them, is exactly the narrator’s omnitemporality.

You will no doubt supply your own examples of glancing long prospection for irony, recurrence, afterthought, counterpoint, enlargement. The simplest ending postscripts, of course, will adumbrate futures—not least offspring—that reach beyond the work’s business and closure proper, if only to imply that life rolls on and there’s always another story.

That story does in turn materialize at choice. The post-ending glances ahead find a continuous and large-scale embodiment in (possibly serialized) sequels: to a book of Scripture, to the war on Troy, to Richard II’s forced abdication, to an affair within Balzac’s *Human Comedy*, to the first mystery unraveled by Sherlock Holmes, to a Yoknapatawpha tale, to a novelistic best seller or Hollywood gold mine. . . . And among sequels, a

distinct variety concentrates on the second generation, as in Shakespeare's history plays, Trollope's *The Duke's Children*, or the popular "Son/Daughter of . . . ."

Needless to say, any attempt at disqualifying all these shows of post-ending knowledge, on the ground that they do manifest themselves, and so fail to demonstrate omniscience of the afterlife "not touched on in the book," would be theoretically outrageous. To begin with, it would multiply the partitions in future knowledge among works and authors, including different works by the same author and with an otherwise similar narrator. Discounting the similarity, the partitioner would insist on subgrouping their foreknowledge by the forecasts they actually voice. If one doesn't look ahead, then one can't at all; if one does, then one can only look ahead *to* what one does. This untenable *does/can* equation would also argue in a circle, proof against any empirical testing and refutation. Even so, it would still contradict itself. By the same preemptive circular argument, God himself—just "presumed" clairvoyant—foreknows nothing beyond what he foretells. Indeed, nobody would then know anything left untold in so many words.

### 5. The Perspectival Feature as a Network of Differences

But this futile *does/can* union is what Culler in effect proceeds to attempt nevertheless, on a much larger, all-inclusive epistemic scale. Now, generalizing about every kind of information and about the narrator as well as the author, he would have us equate what they know with what they tell—access with givens, the cognized with the communicated, power with performance—so that omniscience would necessarily become a matter of more and less, rather than either/or. The foregoing case of the (distant) future, allegedly as unknowable to the storyteller as to the characters, now in effect heralds the rule imposed across the board: partial superknowledge, if any.

A backswing, this, to the "limited" or "selective omniscience" of Norman Friedman (1955) et al., only with the outdated logical monster enthroned in revival: generalized by Culler to the point of excluding the nonselective option, or at best marginalizing it. In the process, however, he not only compounds all the difficulties incurred above—in fresh or freshly expanded shapes—with direct misreference to my work. Making confusion worse confounded, he would saddle me with it, first as its alleged perpetrator, then as inconsistent or recanting sharer of his own counter-view. This is much like the package dealer of narrative features up in arms

against their “obfuscation.” Getting the record straight will again help to bring out the genuine issues.

### **5.1. God, Olympians, and the Line Between**

In quarreling with the “[either] ordinary human limitations or else omniscience” choice, Culler pits the early Sternberg, declared guilty of this binarism, against the later Sternberg, who has happily outgrown it. The former self is allegedly represented by a quotation from *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering* (1978: 295): “Not being one of the fictive agents, such a narrator may safely share the infallible awareness of the all-knowing immortals, in terms of whose superior nature alone his superhuman attributes can indeed be conceived at all” (25). The “immortals,” Culler observes, makes “a strange expression [because paganish in ontic emphasis and plural number] for a devoted analyst of the Hebrew Bible to use.” And in afterthought, the Sternberg of *Biblical Poetics* (1985) indeed “significantly revises the views I have quoted. Instead of citing as a known quantity ‘the infallible awareness of the all-knowing immortals,’” this later theorizing self has learnt better than to valorize (and mix) the binary “Hebraic” at the expense of the “Homeric” model of divinity. Rather, he duly opposes gods to God, as follows: “Homer’s gods, like the corresponding Near Eastern pantheons, certainly have access to a wider range of information than the normal run of humanity, but their knowledge still falls well short of omniscience, concerning the past as well as the future” (26; from *Poetics* [1985]: 88). Now, Culler triumphantly concludes, “What happened to the idea that superhuman knowledge of any sort entails full omniscience? But the later Sternberg is right: the Greek gods display various sorts of special knowledge” but less than everything knowable; and so do the host of “uncanny” knowers in narrative, “obscured by the ideology of omniscience” (26).

Nice though it is to see oneself described as a theorist capable of changing his mind, and for the better, this eventful mental biography turns on a plain misreading. The two-faced phrase “the all-knowing immortals” in *Expositional Modes*, about which such an ado is made, does not belong to my own discourse and metalanguage there, but alludes verbatim to a statement by Henry James, quoted one paragraph before and now transparently echoed in free indirect explication of his poetics. Hard to believe, this misreading, but look and see.

On the contrary, my chapters on the *Odyssey* there already reveal Homer’s “immortals” to be other than “all-knowing,” and from the very opening assembly scene on Olympus.<sup>51</sup> None of the assembled gods fore-

51. This also contradicts the ground on which Aristotle would limit the recourse to the “deus ex machina” in art. It should be used to narrate “events beyond human knowledge

knows that they will vote for Odysseus's homecoming, while Poseidon, who would block the decision, remains unaware of it in absentia, even after the event, and finds out too late. No prevision, no omnipresence, no special hindsight, even, unmediated by report or eyewitnessing: the list only gathers further minuses and variants as the epic unrolls. To the extent that immortality favors epistemology, the Homeric gods enjoy an advantage over mortals in having been much longer around. Time-bound, this relative epistemic plus does figure in Greek culture and literature—as in the universal scaling of old age vs. youth among humans<sup>52</sup>—but never rivals the difference in kind, or even in scope or versatility, made by God's boundless omniscience. The gods' having a memory beyond mortal range, and without any predictive or present-time equivalent, too, never compares with omnitemporality on its own. Indeed, the Bible's epistemological revolution quietly subsumes, inter alia, this minor old disparity: that God boasts immortality and has been longest around, prior to creation itself, now goes without saying. "Where were *you* when I laid the foundation of the earth"? So God asks Job (38:4), relegating his own prehistorical superpresence and superagency, hence super-backsight, to a subordinate time clause, as a term of comparison.

My later book, then, takes up the concept as defined in the earlier, notably the polarity between absolute superhuman knowledge and the relative human kind, or more than human, that we'll revisit below. The strange mixture of polarities (ontic "immortal" with epistemic "all-knowing," Hellenic with Hebraic epistemology) is all James's, though neither originating nor dying with him (e.g., the still current "Olympian" for the properly omniscient narrator). And the tale of my binary, sometimes inconsistent conception happily outgrown at last is all Culler's.

### **5.2. Constructing Narrative (All-)Knowledge: Seven Factors**

As already indicated by his shadowboxing, on top of his previous examples, the general criticisms and counterclaims he now presents usually mark a regress with a vengeance in narrative theorizing. (So, geared to a single writer and with some compensation regarding the practice involved, do Jaffe on Dickens and Nelles on Austen.) They echo the state of the art whose inadequacy I exposed at the time and repaired via a number of distinctions that have gained currency since, even among former opponents.

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or subsequent events requiring prediction," for "we ascribe to the gods the capacity to see all things" (*Poetics*, chap. 15; translated by Stephen Halliwell). The artists didn't ascribe the privilege to them—beginning with his favorite, "inspired" Homer—much less by our rigorous, biblical criteria.

52. Among its infinite variations, "si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait" manifests itself in the experiencing vs. narrating self. For the effect on temporal reach, see note 46 above.

Worse, the old blurs and misconceptions now recur with misunderstandings of their very correctives. And far from confined to omniscience, the loss threatened bears on how point of view operates within the discourse as a whole.

Equally involved are the other discursive privileges—omnipotence, reliability, self-consciousness, in particular, likewise analogous to divinity—their own respective unprivileged antipoles, and how all the polar features correlate and interact to form the perspectival networks that we encounter. Culler's assorted package deals, themselves typical, even in their wavering, only underline such wider implications. What would become of each polarity and the entire perspectival complex if the literary storyteller's knowledge were to be modeled on humanity rather than God or freely divided between the two, any which way? By reference to what exactly would they get either theorized or (re)constructed in actual telling/reading processes—failing anything like a well-defined, coherent schema with which to approach point of view?

Thus, the “selective omniscience” which Culler would newly circulate, as the literary norm, too, is a contradiction in terms referable to nothing in heaven *or* earth that would integrate it as a handy perspectival operator. “Selective” and “omniscience” cannot integrate into well-formedness, as must any would-be all-purpose schema, a fortiori normative schema, even if by a rationale other than naturalistic or person-like. Itself demanding integration, this self-divided concept is anything but encodable as a reference point for the logically coherent extremes that flank it—boundless vs. earthbound ken—or for the perspectival epistemic crisscross of a narrative, let alone of narrative in general. Likewise too incoherent for a rule of patterning (here, perspective-making) would be the concept of selective omnipotence, but not selective reliability, familiar to every discourser and accordingly ever-available in setting or solving the text's problems. The mind, wonderfully versatile and adaptable, yet needs a baseline: if only to render novelties or complications perceptible (hence explorable, appreciable, accountable, meaningful, estranging) as well as to register standard practice.

By the same token, though, these old-new issues are well worth revisiting. They belong to a sevenfold set of oppositions that I proposed for defining any narrative power, with a special, but readily generalized, focus on the exemplary cases of omniscience (1978: 254–305) and, later, omnipotence as well (1985: 46–185).<sup>53</sup> In a nutshell, this septet of distinctions runs along the following lines:

53. Compare also the recent follow-up on self-consciousness in Sternberg 2005.

- (1) Qualitative, hence indivisible, vs. quantitative and divisible or gradable power (privilege, license, feature);
- (2) likewise with each of the branches or subsets into which the power concerned may ramify (e.g., knowledge of space and time and mind, factual and ideological and artistic reliability, control of nature and history and psyche);
- (3) author's definitional vs. narrator's (and generally, mediator's) delegated, hence contingent and variable, power;
- (4) power vs. performance, in which the delegate may exercise the relevant power either to (and if restrictively empowered, even beyond) the limit or to a chosen, self-limited extent. Thus, the performer's full vs. selective communicativeness applies to all-knowledge, as explicit vs. silent judgment does to reliability, and open interference with the world vs. apparent *laissez-faire* does to omnipotence;
- (5) the performance's variable exercise as against its invariable reflection of the latent power, notably through deduction from a qualitative (e.g., superknowing, commanding, self-conscious) manifest reflex;
- (6) aesthetic (more generally still, communicative or discursive) vs. mimetic motivation of power, performance, and their interplay;
- (7) finally, cutting across all of these opposites, logical and analogical and theological model vs. discourse-teleological rationale.

Traditional approaches neglected this set of oppositions — as a sevenfold set, most obviously — with the result that conflation went beyond that of discrete perspectival axes: of, say, indivisible omniscience with reliability (divisible into artistic vs. ethical vs. epistemic). As though the package dealing of independent features were not bad enough, it repeated itself within each feature's seven-part manifold. The pivotal one of knowledge especially suffered, and therefore best illustrates what lies at stake and the need for a dynamic reorientation. In a nutshell, again, omniscience thus emerges as:

- (1) a qualitative power, giving its beneficiary access to an unlimited range of knowledge in the hard, factive sense: to what counts, within the discourse, as the whole objective truth about the represented (e.g., portrayed, narrated) world;
- (2) having equally indivisible subpowers, on the subranges of omnitemporality, omnipresence, omnimentality, and omnilinkage;
- (3) attached to inspired or fictional authorship by some divine association (metonymy, analogy, theology), and delegable to mediators along the line of transmission, beginning with the global speaker/narrator;
- (4) distinct (like all powers, each of them flexibly exercised), but deduc-

- ible wholesale (as an absolute power), from the manifest superknowing performance;
- (5) the latter performance accordingly ranging at will between omniconmunicative and deliberately suppressive representation or, specific to our genre, narration. Within this genre, the perspectival contrast in how the narrator stands to the reader uniquely involves (or maps itself on) one in temporal strategy: how the two generic processes of happening and telling/reading interrelate. Here the extremes stand opposed according to the deployment of the narrated event-sequence along the narrative's own sequence: the performer's telling in vs. out of chronological time, with the dominant interest (suspense vs. curiosity and surprise) changing to match;
- (6) entailing in turn a well-defined composite motivation for those two opposed junctures of perspective and temporality, so that the range of latent power open to both and the why's behind the variant performances make sense together. In either case, the narrator's omniscient access gets motivated in terms that are mimetic, because God-like or even God-inspired, though otherworldly ("unrealistic," to some "fantastic") and nowadays conventionalized. The mimetic image and sense, though, not only overlie but implement, "realize," an aesthetic (rhetorical, discursive) motivation. The narrator's patterning on divinity enables the author a firm control, as well as a free release, of information throughout the narrative process desired—and unavailable to earthlings by nature. Made by the author in the same divine image, however, why do the respective narrators turn their all-knowledge to such variant, even diametric account, as omniconmunication vs. suppression? If equally privileged, why so unlike in selectional, combinatory, transmissional practice? That operative unlikeness is no longer always explicable in the shared mimetic terms of God-likeness (the less so because a God needn't communicate at all, as when transcendent) but only by reference to a shared authorlikeness with divergent ends in view. Here exactly the motivator changes rationales, all the way from superworld epistemology to discourse teleology, from power to its purposive wielding. Indeed, either of the supercognizer's opposed performances, the omniconmunicative/orderly vs. suppressive/disorderly, finds its aesthetic grounding in the strategy chosen: lucid *or* ambiguous telling, reader elevated above the characters *or* humanized, suspenseful prospection *or* curiosity-driven retrospection and belated, surprising recognition, and so on, to the last narrative finesse;

- (7) a power, finally, whose (theo)logical rationale is itself always amenable in discourse to goal-oriented, teleological variations and adjustments, not excluding serviceable discordances: always subject to the Proteus Principle, in brief, which expresses the never-ending interplay of textual forms with contextual functions. It would take too long to recapitulate the bearings on point of view, or even knowledge, traced in my earlier work and related studies.<sup>54</sup> But we have already encountered this Proteus Principle in the unpacking of the multifold divine image into flexible correlations of omniscience with other supernaturalisms and with omnicompetence at large. Below I'll proceed to show it at work within omniscience itself, to the limit whereby the very apartness from the human extreme can be relativized ad hoc for a purpose.

Now, in late antitheistic reaction to the idea of omniscience, Culler denies, blurs (e.g., overextends, overgeneralizes), misstates these differences, or just ignores them, as with (6)–(7). Here, again, he isn't alone, except in scale. For instance, some analysts have mishandled the oppositions, individually or as a set, even in accepting them; others adhere to the old indiscriminate taxonomies or more recent ones; and others still, like Genette (1988), combine the two. Such variants are best mentioned where they intersect with the wider front opened by Culler.

## 6. Power and Performance

### **6.1. Omniscience Indivisible, Hence Inferable, across Storytelling Variations**

Understandably, the qualitateness of omniscience vis-à-vis any limited access bears the brunt of Culler's attack: in identifying it as the heart of the matter, narrative logic and antireligious zeal for once point the same way. Upon it hinge most of the other polarities outlined above—or those he cites—so that undermining it promises to start a chain reaction. In setting up his target, Culler accordingly reports without comment the distinction whereby “the necessarily omniscient author may or may not invest the narrator with omniscience” (24). Narrators so empowered, he as correctly proceeds to summarize, themselves vary in their readiness to share with us their unlimited author-like knowledge: Trollope's “omnicommunicative” as against Fielding's “deliberately suppressive” tellers, for example. Singled out for critique, instead, and with less accuracy, is the basic polarity:

54. For example: apart from the two books (1978, 1985) at issue, a short list would include my 1982a, 1983, 1991, 1992, 1998, 2001a, 2001b, 2005, 2007, forthcoming; Yacobi 1981, 1987b, 2001; Jahn 1997.

Sternberg goes a step further to argue—a highly original claim fully consonant with the presumption of originary omniscience with which he begins—that accounts of narrators with limited knowledge [rather, limited manifest knowledge] confuse what the narrator chooses to tell with what the narrator knows. He rejects what he calls the presumption that when the narrator “fails to communicate something, it necessarily follows that he doesn’t know it” (282). Claims of partial omniscience, he writes, “fail to take into account that omniscience, being a superhuman privilege, is logically not a quantitative but a qualitative and indivisible attribute; if a narrator authoritatively shows himself to be able to penetrate the mind of one of his characters and report all his secret activities—something none of us can do in daily life—then he has thus decisively established his ability to do so as regards the others as well” (282).

This is a radical claim: an author or narrator who reports [more exactly, authoritatively reports] the thoughts of one character must by definition be treated as knowing those of the others. You can’t have selective omniscience, only selective communicativeness. (24)

But the singling out of this target by no means ends here, nor the scale of inaccuracy. Thus, the misattribution to me of the “all-knowing immortals” as a cross of Hebraism and Hellenism, with the attendant tale of my wavering or happily modified concept, aims at the same epistemic binarism. So largely do the objections and the “alternatives” raised throughout the sequel, always with the same overall end in view. Shake the “radical claim” about the indivisibility of the privileged narrator’s knowledge, and far-reaching consequences would hopefully ensue. These hopes include throwing doubt (a) upon the very “presumption of originary omniscience” about the God-like author, who “may or may not” transmit it to the narrator; (b) upon the deliberate, rather than forced or unwitting, suppressiveness of both the Fieldingesque and the Jamesian narrator (though not, you’ll recall, upon the omniconnunicative, and admittedly omniscient, Trollopian counterpart); (c) upon the deducibility amid distinctiveness of epistemic power from performance, regarding all narrative viewpoints; and (d) upon the applicability to literary storytelling (“the novel”) of the divine model as a whole, if not upon the perfection of the model itself into the bargain. All these doubts once sown, the bad good old modernist “selective omniscience” might get a new lease on life as a counterclaim in the service of a latter-day agenda.

As just exemplified apropos Trollope, however, Culler never reconciles his dissent from this basic “radical” premise with his own scattered admissions to the contrary. So, within the same epistemic range, omniconnunication remains possible, or possible to some all-knowers, while free suppressiveness becomes allegedly impossible. Or rather, impossible

outside the Bible, “the true model of omniscient narration,” and novelistic “realism.” In turn, God as established by or since that model would know everything, about the future at least, and accordingly enjoy the liberty to shuttle between all-telling performance and withholding from a position of power; but his storied analogues wouldn’t—except for those acknowledged by Culler to be especially God-like. (Compare Nelles’s respective divorces of Austen from the Bible.) The zigzags already traced at the other end, on the issue of readerly faith or knowledge, pale beside these advances and retreats concerning the transmitter. Instead of offering a countertheory, unified, reasoned, applicable, and testable, such dissent from the theory would at best leave us with arbitrary partition within partition within partition. . . .

Nor does Culler squarely face this “radical claim.” He thus omits to mention the evidence I’ve adduced, let alone the further parallels adducible, in its support from overt narratorial self-reference. These refute Culler’s denial of absolute knowledge even by way of metacommentary, as well as of specific comments like Fowles’s omnitemporal aside on Ernestina. Take, for example, the rhetorical question asked by Thackeray’s deputy in *Vanity Fair* about omnipresence cum omnimentality: “If a few pages back, the present writer claimed the privilege of peeping into Amelia Sedley’s bedroom, and understanding with the omniscience of the novelist all the gentle pains and passions which were tossing upon that innocent pillow, why should he not declare himself Rebecca’s confidant, too, master of her secrets, and seal keeper of that young woman’s conscience?” (chap. 15).<sup>55</sup> If one unearthly mind-reading, why not a second, a third, to the nth figural psyche? The same rationale expresses itself in Thackerayan and other discourse about outer epistemic subaxes. Why obtrude upon this private meeting, why jump backward or forward to this time, or, laterally, to this arena or, compoundly, to this spacetime, why expound this law of reality— and not that?

As the question posed by the notoriously roving teller flaunts the all-knower’s unlimited range, so does the answer in effect provided by a fellow rover, Clement in Mann’s *The Holy Sinner*. “The spirit of story-telling, which I embody, is a shrewd and waggish soul who knows his business and does not straightway gratify every curiosity.” Or, to advance from temporary to permanent gaps: “The spirit of story-telling is a communicative spirit, gratified to lead his readers and listeners everywhere, even into the

55. “If we are given access to the mother’s point of view, why not the father’s too?” (Lodge 1992: 28) sounds like an allusive echo-question by a modern novelist. So does Booth 1961: 254.

solitude of the characters. . . . Still he knows how to be silent too, and sparingly to leave out what to make present would seem all too mistaken to him” (Mann 1951: 71, 204–5). Another answer, yet with the same flaunting and intentness, manifests itself in the opposite camp, given by such an enemy to willful perspectival hopping as the encoder of narration consistently self-restricted (hence otherwise suppressive than in Thackeray or Mann). Here is Henry James’s surrogate explaining, in *The Tragic Muse*, the abstention from an inside view of the heroine, Miriam, thereby leaving her and her conduct enigmatic.

That mystery [her recurrent visits to Nick’s studio] would be cleared up only if it were open to us to regard this young lady through some other medium than the minds of her friends. We have chosen, as it happens, for some of the advantages it carries with it, the indirect [“friends”-mediated] vision; and it fails as yet to tell us . . . why a young person crowned with success should have taken it into her head that there was something for her in so blighted a spot. (Chap. 25)

Or in the voice of the Prefaces, motivating the single reflector followed throughout *The Ambassadors*:

Other persons in no small number were to people the scene, and each with his or her axe to grind, his or her situation to treat, his or her coherency not to fail of, his or her relation to my leading motive, in a word, to establish and carry on. But Strether’s sense of these things, and Strether’s only, should avail me for showing them; I should know them but through his more or less groping knowledge of them, since his very gropings would figure among his most interesting motions, and a full observance of the rich rigour I speak of would give more of the effect I should be most “after” [i.e., “economy . . . unity . . . intensity . . . difficulty”] than all other possible observances together. (James 1962 [1934]: 317–18)

All other questions, therefore, “paled” beside “the major propriety . . . of employing but one centre and keeping it all within my hero’s compass” (ibid.).

Or, for a change, how the scenic method adopted in *The Awkward Age* bars the disclosure of anyone’s inner life:

As Mr Van himself could not have expressed, at any subsequent time, to any interested friend, the particular effect upon him of the tone of these words, his chronicler takes advantage of the fact not to pretend to a greater intelligence — to limit himself, on the contrary, to the simple statement that they produced in Mr Van’s cheek a just discernible flush. “Fear of what?” (James 1966 [1899]: 163)

The riddling strategy “chosen” is detailed in my chapter on James (1978: esp. 281ff., also 1984; cf. Yacobi 1985, 2006) and a complementary one on

its surprise-driven precursor in Jane Austen (1978: 129–58). But the gist of the matter, from the perspectival license to the purposive limit set to it, breaks surface here. In effect, we find Thackeray’s rhetorical question treated as if it were genuine: Given omniscience, why not exercise it freely, the old way, and/or to the full, in omniconnunicative style? The Jamesian answer appeals to the “advantages carried” and “effect” yielded by all-knowing narration self-restricted on a certain method—with the sequence gapped accordingly, possibly forever—relative to those gained or lost by any unsystematic counterpart.<sup>56</sup>

To be sure, Trollope the omniteller may view the balance of loss and gain differently, as may Fielding in explaining his strategy of “opening by small degrees” or in pretending ignorance as to whether Tom will hang or survive or in his recurrent “I don’t know’s” for “I won’t tell.”<sup>57</sup> Again, Mann’s Clement, less informative than the one, less playful than the other, strikes his own balance. Yet the different motivations all remain essentially functional, and the performances suited to them, because the narrator’s power remains qualitative throughout. Whether the whole gets actually told or not, and regardless of how and when and why it does or doesn’t, the capacity to tell it is always deducible from the given superknowing part. The “radical claim” thus surfaces in metanarrative, especially metanovelistic commentary, across assorted representables and periods and poetics, encompassing among them the gamut of omniscient narration.

This firm consensus among the artistic parties involved, otherwise so unlike-minded, has never elicited a response from our dissenters; nor has my larger conceptualization of the key issue or its application since in more than one field. Some even proclaim what others assume, that the matter has been settled as desired, once for all. “Narratologists have easily demonstrated that the so-called omniscient narrators did not know everything, never claimed to, and in fact often admitted ignorance or doubt”

56. Such metacommentary abounds in James’s Prefaces, Notebooks, essays, and letters. Taken together, these remarks evidently anticipate the neo-modernist theory of focalization, while avoiding some of its weaknesses. Even in the few excerpts above, we encounter the tendency toward the suppressive pole, the distinction of narrator (“we,” “I,” “this chronicler”) from perceiver (“mind,” “sense of things,” and elsewhere, “vessel” or “reflector”), and some major subcategories. The crucial difference resides not in the lesser specificity of the emphasis on focal unity but in the Jamesian goal-directedness vis-à-vis the Genettian typological formalism. This in turn affects the relative clear-sightedness of the available modalities themselves.

57. The useful remarks Füger (2004) makes on the effect produced by “the feint of narratorial ignorance” in *Joseph Andrews* therefore contradict his conclusion that “there is no such thing as a fully omniscient narrator” in Fielding and that “this concept may well turn out to have been a misnomer from the start” (ibid.: 287–88). One can’t feign ignorance, much less for a purpose, without knowing. The self-contradiction yet sharpens with respect to the author behind the ignorance-feigning narrator.

(Showalter 1991: 355). No references given, alas, or the gist of the demonstration. Still other negators devise ingenious makeshifts in face of awkward corpora. Hillis Miller on *The Awkward Age* (2005: 124–26, 134) is unable for once to reduce the narrator to an earthly “collective consciousness,” in the absence of any dramatized figural mind; still, he will not concede the Jamesian shift here from internal to external self-limitation amid equal unearthly privilege. Rather, Miller pairs apparently incompatible claims: the novel’s objective presentation eschews “the omniscient narrator,” yet “the reader senses that the narrator knows all that is going on in the characters’ minds and could reveal it if he would.” He would rather perform acrobatics than call it omniscience without omniconmunicativeness, freely varying among suppressive modalities. Nelles (2006) appears likewise oblivious to my theorizing of the underlying principle, and merely tries to except Jane Austen regardless, via the old splitting or a new quantifying of the absolute. He not only conflates afresh what narrators know and tell about the various dimensions of the world. Concerning knowledge in Austen herself, he levels it down at one extreme, up at the other. That is, he both relativizes and minimizes the narrator’s power, virtually to the loss of omniscience, while overstating the characters’.

For a refutation before the fact, contrast my analysis of Austen’s poetics (1978: 129–58). It shows why and how Austen dramatizes the qualitative epistemic line between the two, the full and freely self-limiting vs. the limited and fallible knower. The most conclusive evidence for this impassable line is the frequency and dominance of surprise in the characters’ experience of the world, running parallel to our twisted course, yet saliently and invidiously opposed to the Austenian manipulator of both. Prior to each turning point in knowledge, big or small, they don’t even know that they don’t know, any more than we readers do when overtaken by the unexpected. And their ever-vulnerable ignorance—underlined through the shocks of belated discovery, analogized to our own trial by dynamics of surprise—is the Austenian narrator’s plot and theme of the human condition.

Culler takes the opposite way of reviving the same unworkable ideas. As usual, he would rather dispute the omniscient/limited and knowing/telling polarity on abstract grounds, theoretical or logical. So he begins with an argument *ad hominem* by alleged deduction, which would hopefully undermine the epistemic principle from within. “If you can’t have selective omniscience, only selective communicativeness,” then “why not say . . . that *all* narrators are omniscient and that some of them just choose to tell the story from various limited perspectives?” (24–25).

This alleged follow-up echoes Audrey Jaffe, who claims in all seriousness that “omniscience . . . transcends particular narrative modes, break-

ing down distinctions between first and third person” or “personified and disembodied narrators” (1991: 17, 21). Compare also the description of Pechorin in Lermontov’s *A Hero of Our Time* as exemplifying “a *novelistic protagonist* and a *first-person omniscient narrator*” rolled into one (Goldfarb 1996: 69–70). Within narratology itself, we have seen Rimmon-Kenan (1983: 94–96) imposing omniscience on the entire range of “extradiegetic” narration, so as to equate the homodiegetic (or autodiegetic) Pip, who “knows ‘everything’ about his story,” with the heterodiegetic voice in Fielding. Though demonstrably false, all these appear to affirm outright what Culler’s “why not say . . .” tries to infer from my account. Except that, for Culler, such cross-person, cross-world equality in superknowledge, if taken at face value, would universalize the anathema. Instead of leveling up figural voices and tellers, he aims at pushing the superknower down to their level—the way Nelles demotes Austen—or mixing the epistemic levels. Only so can he hope to reverse the supposed deduction “all narrators are omniscient” into the wanted antitheism “no narrators are omniscient.” Such a move, he also hopes, would force the consequences on me, by logical necessity, as it were. “Sternberg does not himself seem to take this line, but his model of omniscience and his separation of what is known from the evidence of what is told open the door for it” (24–25).

Of course I don’t take this line, nor do I open the door to it by inference, because the conclusion alleged does not at all follow from the premised “If you can’t have selective omniscience, only selective communicativeness . . .”<sup>58</sup> “Selective communicativeness” never entails, or even remotely implies, “that *all* narrators are omniscient”—on pain of confusing afresh performance with power, the very distinction at issue—but only entails that any narrator may communicate less than he, or she, knows. Omniscient *or* otherwise, all of them may choose, as “some of them” in fact do, “to tell the story from various limited perspectives,” selectively and downright suppressively—always with the result of gapping the event-sequence to dynamize the universals of narrative. Thus Fielding’s playful shuttling

58. For much the same jump from this known/told distinction at the superknowing pole to all tellers and all “focalized narratives,” see already Genette 1988: 78n8. He would even extend to them all the option of omniconmunicativeness, as well as of suppressiveness, though he does not dispute the omniscient/limited contrast and genuinely accepts the one in performance (not just for the sake of the argument, like Culler). Also, Genette overgeneralizes my position, much as Culler does in the two inaccuracies noted in the excerpt quoted above. There, applying the telling/knowing distinction to “narrators with limited knowledge” (rather than to narrators who manifest such knowledge) and to “an author or narrator who reports the thoughts of one character” (instead of one who authoritatively reports them, as in the foregoing sentence) makes it easier to allege the deduction that conveniently levels down the narrators involved. On this parallel misreading, see next note.

between knowledge revealed and concealed; James's, or less methodically, Austen's, self-limiting to a reflector who doubles as focus of narration and interest; Conan Doyle's recourse to a limited narrator, Watson, who limits himself in turn to the experiencing self's order of discovery, as against Christie's equivalent in *Roger Ackroyd*, Dr. Sheppard, intent on misleading suppressiveness; Ford Madox Ford combining generally human with personal shortfalls in Dowell, himself baffled to the end in face of the permanent gaps; and so on.

Amid the crossnarratorial option of performing below one's power, however, the opposed powers at the two extremes make a manifold difference in kind between the respective storytelling performances. We needn't rehearse how easily (too easily, if anything) the epistemic binaries link up with other (dis)empowerments. Concerning knowledge proper, three differences stand out, two in the range of choice and one in its rationale.

### **6.2. Omniconmunication: Unconditional vs. Contingent**

Unlike selective communicativeness, omniconmunicativeness *ad lib* is, strictly, reserved for the omniscient pole. Hence, Trollope always delegates his all-knowledge to the narrator, in the interests of his cooperative, reader-equalizing poetics of lucidity. His practice, as well as his manifesto in *Barchester Towers* and less famous metacommentary I've discussed (1978: 183–203, 258ff., 1990: 934–38), sound like a narrativized anticipation of Paul Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle. "Our doctrine is that the author and the reader should move along together in full confidence with each other"—the communicator sharing his knowledge, via all-telling, and the audience relying on his word. The whole of anything is never told, of course, nor conceivably tellable, because the world's plenitude remains inexhaustible *and* because every discourse needs to establish its scale of interest via unequal coverage (Sternberg 1978: 14–34; Yacobi 1985, 2006). Even omniconmunication tells, not literally everything, but everything deemed pertinent, exclusive of gaps rather than blanks.<sup>59</sup> However, to tell everything pertinent *at will*—in full and in timely sequence and regard-

59. Given the context-boundness of the distinction, one text's or one reader's or one reading's immaterial blank may be another's pregnant gap, and vice versa, with the narrator (re)constructed to suit and possibly the author's design as well. Which of the readings makes better sense isn't a question for narrative theory as such, whose business is rather to accommodate either. On any reading, however, "omniconmunicative" doesn't mean "giving the reader all the information one has" (in Genette's [1988: 78n8] paraphrase, whereby he extends the term to unprivileged narrators) but all the relevant information. For a nonomniscient's most cooperative informational sharing will normally leave gaps as well as blanks. The disparity recurs in this section and the next.

less of any human constraints that blind or bewilder the characters themselves—one must know everything about the told world.

At will, I emphasize, because the limited narrator may here and there count as omniconnunicative for practical purposes, but contingently alone and predictably rarely in artistic or extensive storytelling. This possibility would require special epistemic opportunities, likelihoods, discountings, shortcuts, frameworks—in brief, special enabling and blanking “motivations”—all of them irrelevant to an omniscient. For example, the *de facto* complete tale tellable by a limited mediator would need to dispense throughout with all the omni-knowledge privileges—apropos minds or times, say—or else risk overreaching itself, in violation of the postulated epistemic bounds, warrant, reliability. No wonder that unprivileged narrators (biographers, memoirists, historians at large, or their fictional parallels) would rather admit and tentatively address holes in information than descend to such flat completeness. The old language teacher narrating Joseph Conrad’s *Under Western Eyes*, for example, “is not only limited and prejudiced but pretends to neither omniscience nor omniconnunicativeness” (Kermode 1983: 141). Without the former attribute, there as elsewhere, making good the pretence to the latter would incur a simple tale, generally below the literary standard, and always vulnerable to challenge in principle, even so, failing any absolute imprimatur. Think of minimal forms like the news flash or the piece of gossip. Unconditional and contingent omniconnunicativeness are therefore anything but interchangeable.

### 6.3. *Suppressiveness: Free vs. Forced*

Within partial or “selective” communicativeness itself, an equivalent gulf yawns between the human narrator’s forced and the omniscient’s altogether free suppression, between inherent limits and purely intentional self-limiting. As meaningful difference hinges on choice, the question here is always, Could the teller do otherwise than undertell, that is, leave gaps in what we need to know for smooth, unbroken, Trollope-like intelligibility all along? And the answer is no and yes, respectively.

In regard to the human performers, the negative answer is not for their want of trying. It equally overtakes those who do their best to enlighten us, the most cooperative reconstructors of a drama undergone or observed by the former self. An example would be the imperial narrator of Robert Graves’s panoramic novel of Rome, *I, Claudius*. Born into the ruling family and observant by nature, Claudius combines the advantages of an educated viewpoint and inside information. A historian by profession, and of the no-nonsense school, he also brings his expertise to the recording of his life and times. Claudius thus dismisses the Homeric literary trick of jump-

ing *in medias res* in favor of the unadorned Roman chronological deployment, which “misses nothing,” and apologizes for any suspense that may arise along the orderly progress. So he appears to be a Trollope in the mimetic shape of inquirer, eyewitness, autobiographer, rolled into one—except that there are limits to *his* communication, essentially shared with all his earthbound mates. Even when eager to spare us the experiencing self’s own bewilderment at the time by disclosing (if necessary, anticipating) all the knowledge available to him in retrospect, the limited narrator as such cannot but keep open (“withhold”) the things yet unknown after the event, a fortiori humanly unknowable, that a self-limited omniscient might always tell if and when he would. The unknowns willy-nilly left for our resolution may belong to any of the epistemic axes; and their open state may range from undesired to unsuspected ambiguities, from gapping to guesswork, from inferential to imaginative attempts at closure. Yet, across such variables, the holes that expose the limited knower’s blind spots in and through the narration implement the self-limited all-knower’s deliberate strategy of narration—whether Fieldingesque or Jamesian or some mixed perspectivizing of what happened to some different end.

For the visible tip of the iceberg, contrast the respective gestures made toward gap-filling. A reader-friendly *histor* like Herodotus will often suggest alternative closures of an enigmatic occurrence; so may his history-like fictional parallel, such as the teller-investigator of Nabokov’s *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. But their closural gestures, however sincere and astute, polarize with the tantalizingly tentative multiple hypotheses voiced by Fielding’s or Balzac’s or Thackeray’s omniscient, who knows the answer and could provide it instead at will. The contrastive rule equally holds for silences, permanent ones, above all. Forced vs. altogether free suppressiveness, then, operates by the same logic as contingent vs. unconditional omniconmunicativeness: telling hinges on knowing, as performance does on power in general.

The logic shared and sharpened by these two subpolarities disables not only Culler’s attempted deduction about “all narrators” and the rest of his telling/knowing mixtures; nor only Genette’s (1988:78n8 and notes 58, 59 above) earlier extension of my omniconmunicative/suppressive polarity from “omniscient” to “focalized narrators (see *Roger Ackroyd*).” It also widens or deepens the problems in Genette’s theory of focalization, with its assorted variants since. You will recall the weaknesses already shown: the privileging of disprivilege, narrow (i.e., epistemic) univalence, ontic indiscriminateness, deviationist formalism. Now reconsider the theory’s basis: “focalized” knowledge as “a restriction of ‘field’ . . . a selection of narrative information with respect to what was traditionally called *omniscience*” and

marks the pole of “*nonfocalized* narrative, or narrative with *zero focalization*” (ibid.: 74, 1980: 189ff.).

Suppose there were such an absolute perspectival negative. By Genette’s own acceptance of my polarity, this zero-point should be omniconnunicativeness, rather than “omniscience,” since his “perspective” concerns not (un)limited epistemic power but (un)limited performance; not accessible, relayable but actual, regulated information. So omniconnunication alone constitutes his polar “nonfocalized” discourse, while omniscient discourse may equally opt for the suppressive antipole, and thus restrict, elide, focalize. Why, then, does Genette (at least in the 1988 revisit of the theory) fail to substitute all-telling for all-knowing as reference point? (Witness the substitution in the overview of Jahn [1996], or in Fludernik’s [2001: 102] alternative approach.) Presumably because he nevertheless wants to reserve all-telling to “voice” or “speaking” as against “perspective” or “seeing.” Caught between evils, he thus sacrifices one consistency to another. Even so, within “voice,” Genette having overdrawn the polarity to run across kinds of knowledge—to couple, say, *Roger Ackroyd* with *Tom Jones*—“omniconnunicativeness” and “focalized narrative” make a contradiction in terms: the one would now subsume the focalized other, where itself supposedly omniconnunicative, and now oppose it, where restricted by nature and/or suppressive. Whether or not aware of the internal inconsistencies at stake, Genette retains the wrong term, “omniscience,” as zero-point where he should know better.

This just exchanges one illogic for another, if only because the focalizations that arise, and count as deviant by reference to such “omniscience,” themselves mostly involve an omniscient discourse that is suppressive along some line. Thus the focalizings called “internal,” whether “fixed” (*The Ambassadors*), “variable” (*Madame Bovary*), or “multiple” (*Rashomon*), and “external” (Hammett’s *The Glass Key*): all typically exhibit an all-knowing (mind reading, omnitemporality, omnipresence) that keeps the given “focalized” information short of what its power makes accessible and might reveal at will to the last “nonfocalized” detail. Throughout, instead of a “zero focalization” operating to measure various “focalized” deviations from it, as claimed, the theory presents various manifestations of omniscience referred to a general, unactualized (“unperformed”) omniscience: it accordingly serves as their umbrella and condition of possibility, rather than as a measure of deviance. After all, it likewise embraces and empowers omniconnunication, undeviant by any epistemic standard. In brief, you can oppose different orders (e.g., high vs. low) of the same power *or* different power/performance interplays, not a power workable either way to performances. Failing a unitary might-have-been polar term

of comparison, what would the latter differ from, together or apart? No ground, no figure.

But then—even regardless of the inconsistency with “voice”—nor would shifting the zero-point from “omniscience” to omniconmunicativeness in my original, Trollopian sense improve matters. For example, that zero-point wouldn’t apply, any more than would the displaced “omniscience,” to the vast range of low mimetic (historical and otherwise empirical) narrative. Inversely, the power/performance divide, of which the “omniscience/free omniconmunicativeness *or* suppressiveness” is only the super-privileged variant, would then need to run through the focalizations themselves. Even a “focal character” (Strether, Emma) can unself-consciously divulge more or less of what it knows and we need to know. Its focalizing performance must therefore be judged both against its own potential full communicativeness, such as it might have been, and against that of whoever transmits its focalized discourse—possibly another nonomniscient suppressor, “focalized” in turn, like Pip vis-à-vis his experiencing self—as well as against the “nonfocalized” omniconmunication at the zero-point, if any. How would the reductive “nonfocalized/focalized” contrast accommodate this multifold, multiphase variability?

Without going into further inadequacies, the theory proves untenable as is and irreparable by appeal to the missing distinction between the terms correlated all along the transmissional chain. From the authorized narrator down, to repeat, telling (or, for that matter, “seeing”) hinges on knowing, as performance (audience-oriented or unself-conscious) does on power in general, and makes sense accordingly.

This also conceptualizes the evidence brought above from metacommentary in Fielding, Thackeray, James, Mann, Fowles. The otherwise divergent novelistic self-references quoted, and the corresponding avowals of limited access voiced by humans, all meet here. More reticent, the Bible already dramatizes the lesson, with self-reflexive implications, as early as its first dialogue scenes. There, God opens the exchange with questions that bespeak ignorance of Adam and Eve’s sin of disobedience—regarding the Tree of Knowledge, to maximize the thematic irony—then of Cain’s fratricide. “Where art thou?” and later, “Where is Abel thy brother?” (Genesis 3:9, 4:9). We readers, having witnessed God’s omnipresence in his bird’s-eye overview of the created universe—“saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good” (1:31)—possibly still need to internalize or absolutize the supercognition exhibited there and unprecedented in pagan theography. What has been driven home thus far in the narrative is God’s omnipotence as Creator, not his omniscience, or not quite.

At this early phase, therefore, we ourselves may still wonder how to read his ambiguous dialogic gambit. From God's previous feat of worldwide vision, does it follow that he is aware of the addressee's recent offense and present whereabouts? Once omnipresent, always omnipresent? So why ask, if he knows the answer? But his interlocutors doubtless take the pretense of ignorance at face value—as Culler would in face of unactualized, self-restrained omniscience in general—only to learn better the hard way, and we with them, once for all. Any all-knower may shuttle at will between full and partial, skewed, even false communication, depending on purpose alone.

Within biblical narrative itself, the flexibility remarkably shows in the different balances of communicativeness and suppressiveness practiced by its two omniscients. The narrator maneuvers between the whole truth and the truth to face us with a gapped yet dependable story of history, while God's addresses to his creatures push the suppressive option, if not to untruth, to less than truth or what registers as such at the other end. God never lies, but, in withholding, he may go so far as to equivocate—always with a definite end in view, rather than (the way of Delphic oracles and false prophets) in order to hedge his bets and sound knowing under epistemic constraint.

This equivocal extreme itself can run not just to a misleading impression, as above, but to downright ambiguity about the world. Which may in turn run from openly branching possibilities, devised for suspense or backward-looking curiosity, to those artfully camouflaged as a univocality to produce a surprise gap in belated forking or replacement: the omniscient manipulator then chooses to keep the audience ignorant at the time even of their ignorance of the relevant alternative past, present, or future. This the Bible likewise brings home early. Consider the divine punishment threatened for violating the Tree of Knowledge, “On the day that thou eatest of it, thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17). Apparently a prospective death sentence to follow hard on the eating, it turns out after the event (3:17–24) to mean humanity's self-denial of everlasting life, a fall under the rule of mortality.

In fact, the same principle—omniscience's incomparably maneuverable knowing/telling ratio—applies to Culler's own example *ad loc*, “The Killers” by Hemingway. He cites it to illustrate his overdrawn deduction from my power/performance antithesis and the weaknesses incurred by Barbara Olson's analysis of the narrative in such terms. By my logic, he argues, one must conclude that “‘The Killers,’ which is often cited as the very model of a limited, camera-eye narrative, has an omniscient narrator”

(25). This happens to be true—except that, revealingly, the case is beside the point here in the first instance.<sup>60</sup> To exemplify the supposed deduction that “*all* narrators are omniscient” and some “just choose to tell the story from various limited perspectives,” he should have adduced a narrative told by a flesh-and-blood character, not by a disembodied voice (“camera eye”) that restricts itself to externals and manifests the supernatural power of omnipresence, at least, in telling them.

Nor is his switch to the wrong teller accidental. In face of any enigma comparable to those posed by “The Killers,” the requisite dramatized narrator must admit or betray epistemic limitations fatal to Culler’s argument, since they would at once disprove the putative inferred rule that “*all* narrators are omniscient.” Thus self-exposed, this limited knower could not pursue (but only enact and mediate in ignorance) an overall strategy of deliberate withholding, any more than he could one of gapless omniconmunication. In telling “The Killers” itself, he might thus deliberately suppress information that any retrospective telling-I would know (e.g., the killers’ names, before they address each other) but not what must remain unknown forever to a mere human observer on the scene (e.g., the antecedents of the planned killing). Inversely, how would this observer attend scenes outside the lunchroom, the dialogue between Nick and Anderson in particular? As a result, he would have to tell less than happened—or even less than we actually encounter in the given tale—not “choose to tell” less than he knew.

Indeed, Jaffe’s comparable privileging of every narrator with all-knowledge (as cited above) breaks down wherever characters perform the role. Thus, if Esther Summerson offers such a detailed record that “for much of her narrative . . . Esther might as well be omniscient,” then how can it be that Esther’s “narrative always knows more than she does,” so that the reader gains “a sense of omniscience with respect to her” (Jaffe 1991: 130, 151)? The two statements, obviously inconsistent, and both also literally untrue, again exemplify that the term “omniscience” can’t be loosened (qualified, humanized) with impunity.

It is to avoid such trouble that Culler (mis)illustrates from another order of telling than an Esther’s, one rather elevated by disembodiment and ubiquity. But just as an evidently common limited narrator would boomerang on his sweeping generalization, “all narrators are omniscient,” so

60. So, within it, is the fuss made about whether the occurrence of the epithet “nigger” betrays “human limitations in judgment.” Like Olson herself, Culler just mixes up afresh knowledge with reliability. (And contrast his own mimesis/morality disjunction on pp. 27–28). Satan, or a racist, might in principle boast narrative omniscience where a saint merely gropes his way toward the limit of human enlightenment.

does the appeal to the omnipresent camera eye in “The Killers” offer no support for it.

Or, rather, less than none. For the so-called camera eye occasionally roves along time as well as over space, distributing *back*references to invisibilia, with pluperfect tense markers and in an ascending order of unobservable knowledge. “Henry’s had been made over from a saloon to a lunch counter,” then “[Nick] had never had a towel in his mouth before,” then “Ole Anderson . . . had been a heavyweight prize-fighter” (1938: 380, 384, 385). The omnipresent teller harks back at will to double as omnitemporal.<sup>61</sup> If he would, therefore, he presumably could likewise resolve, even anticipate, the two expositional gaps at issue: tell us both the killers’ names and why they came to kill Ole Anderson. This “could” follows by simple logical extension (much simpler than it was to the audience of the Bible’s opening scenes, which drove home the then unfamiliar logic, millennia before) from his actual ranging over time and space elsewhere. There likewise follows, in turn, the capacity of mind reading that he never actualizes (or not as directly, or perceptibly, for our mental gap-fillings are still his certitudes) and his all-knowledge at large.

“The Killers” thus newly validates the principled reasoning behind high-epistemic construction, against the would-be challenger and his (mis)reference to the tale. For absolute liberty of performance between givens and gaps, one needs supernatural empowerment; or in readerly terms, given supernatural disclosures that would appear authorized, we confidently infer the discloser’s power to communicate the whole, hence the deliberateness of the gaps left, with the author’s blessing. Thus exemplified from an omniscient, in short, the attempted *reductio ad absurdum* that opens with Culler’s false deduction (“If . . .”) recoils upon itself again.

#### **6.4. Motivation: Mimetic vs. Discursive, Authorial vs. Narratorial**

The difference in kind between the two orders of narrator stretches to the rationale, or “motivation,” underlying the respective powers, performances, and their interplay. How these make sense, especially together, pulls the extremes yet further apart by explaining the apartness.

61. Joined into omni-spatiotemporality, these objective privileges also militate against the attribution of the viewpoint to an anonymous eyewitness-like townsman (Fowler 1977: 52–54; Lanser 1981: 162–63, 264–76). Chatman (1990: 120–21), debatably, even locates some inside views in the tale. With or without them, the low-mimetic perspectival reading doesn’t account for the givens. Most instructively so in Lanser, who echoes my divide between power and performance: she rightly describes their relation here as “a nonconcurrency” (1981: 269) but gets the performance qualitatively wrong, as though altogether low-mimeticized out of superhuman power. Which in turn goes to show again that the example wouldn’t serve Culler’s purpose on such a reading.

As we recall, the omniscient narrator's access gets motivated in terms that are essentially mimetic, though of course otherworldly ("unrealistic," "fantastic") and nowadays conventionalized: a God-like, or even God-inspired, knower. Here the motivational difference from the humanly restricted narrator (Pip, Watson, Dowell, Claudius, Humbert, Sheppard) already amounts to one between supernature and nature, highest and low mimesis. Where the respective motivations polarize beyond verisimilitude, however, is apropos the actual narrating. For the low-mimetic narrator's disclosures and delays, temporary and permanent gaps, all again enact a mimesis of narration within the represented world: always at a (typically ironic) distance from the author and the authorial art that they serve unawares, even in misnarrating. The communicative sequence then becomes as dramatized as the one communicated, and epistemically as otherwise: in all that regards the assignment of mimetic why's to the narrator's own imparting, postponing, distributing, suppressing, timing of whatever limited information he now commands. Thus Claudius adheres to the chronology of events as a professional historian; Pip dechronologizes in subjective retracing of his ordeal, and Dowell for lack of control. Or, all of them leave gaps because they are ignorant, or their earlier selves were; Sheppard, because he wants to mislead others. And so forth.

The very automatism of packaging restrictedness with unreliability, and confining unreliability in turn to the informational axis, testifies all too literally to the strength of this mimesis. It just overanalogizes the performance of an ostensible fellow human, "one of us," with our own constant self-interested or unconscious maneuvers (between disclosure and ellipsis, among whole truth, truth, half truth, and sheer falsity) in daily storytelling to ourselves and to others, who reciprocate amid shared blind spots. Such conflation of living with lifelike narrative, however fictional, only drives the family resemblance to an extreme.

At the opposite, all-knowing narratorial extreme, however, the rationale behind corresponding givens and gaps shifts poles from world-like to author-like resources, designs, interests, processes.<sup>62</sup> Free of human constraint, the information as sequenced invites aesthetic or generally discursive explanation, latent in the narrative as a teleological whole: thereby its deployment will all cohere as a means to some operative end in view—beginning with the genre's universal time effects and the chosen dominant among them. Here, to resume my earlier shorthand, either of the oppo-

62. Author-like, I again emphasize, not or no longer necessarily God-like: a transcendent deity may know without communicating his knowledge to humans, fully *or* suppressively, the way the Bible's God does.

site superknowing performances, the omniconnunicative/orderly vs. suppressive/disorderly, finds its immediate artistic motivation in the strategy chosen: lucid *or* ambiguous telling; reader elevated above the characters *or* co-humanized; suspenseful prospection *or* curiosity-driven retrospection and belated, surprising recognition; balanced, stable imaging of the objects (acts, figures, arenas) narrated *or* eventful dynamics of primacy/recency effects; and so on, to the last narrative finesse.

Ultimately, of course, all choices in art have an artistic motivation, by reference to the author behind the scenes. In limited telling, however, all those choices assume a mimetic guise—including not just the told world but both the teller's power and performance on the told—at one or more removes from the authorial frame. At the lifelike extreme diametric to that frame, we encounter the antipolar mediator: Jason in *The Sound and the Fury* or, in a comic key, Bridget Jones the diarist. They stand opposed to the authorial normative viewpoint in knowledge as well as in reliability, artfulness, even self-consciousness vis-à-vis us frame-sharers. A polarized overall transmission results: each mediator plays the all-fallible, as it were, to the author's omniscient. At a lesser remove, and with a sharper focus on knowledge, Watson's self-limiting to the order of *his* discovery indeed realizes (and to this extent, parallels) the generic art of mystery, but it comes with the discoverer's subjective (perceptual, inferential) limitations relative to everyone else: to ourselves as the human norm, to Holmes as exceptional sleuth, and to Conan Doyle as superknower, in an ascending order of irony. And so with others of our order, at narrower or wider, more or less compounded distances from the reference point. Short of omniscience, the mimesis of deficient cognition-hence-transmission persists across endless variations. Accordingly, if you reconsider the opposed pairs of authorial strategies mentioned above—for example, lucid *or* ambiguous telling—the first choice now always becomes harder, the second easier, to implement by restricted, low-mimetic proxy.

In the omniscient counterpart, that perspectival mimetic guise shrinks to the teller's power, as distinct from performance. And the empowerment involves not only a high but also a thin guise, even so, because it embodies (if the word applies to a disincarnated voice) the author's own supernatural knowledge: the narrator is constructed in God's image to perform the required discourse job with authority, epistemic at least.<sup>63</sup> A strategic opposition in (im)mediacy therefore ensues between narratives communicated by an unprivileged and by a privileged authorial surrogate.

63. And in principle, epistemic alone, unless and until constructively extended further: against the inverse automatism to that of splicing restrictedness with unreliability.

In this light, the conclusions that Culler would generalize from “The Killers” example about the motivational problems incurred by the concept of omniscient narrator also turn out groundless, if at all intelligible:

Since omniscience is said quite logically to be indivisible, even the slimmest indication of unusual knowledge<sup>64</sup> provokes the idea of a narrator who knows everything, and then the critic finds herself obliged to explain why the omniscient narrator declines to tell us all the relevant things he must know—including the real names and full past histories of Al and Max. Imagining motivations for this refusal yields strange contortions, because such choices are properly explained as choices made by the author for artistic reasons. They are decisions about crafting the text, not selections of which bits of prior knowledge to relate. Obviously the author could have chosen to include more information about Al and Max but chose this camera-eye strategy to achieve the literary effects that have made the story notorious. The presumption of omniscience gives us, instead of Hemingway deciding whether to invent pasts for Al and Max, a scenario of an imagined narrator knowing all about them and deciding whether to reveal their pasts. The artistic choices are obfuscated when transformed into decisions of an imagined narrator. (25)

In an earlier dispute about motivation as an explanatory principle, I could at least figure out what Culler actually substitutes for it (see “Mimesis and Motivation,” 1983: esp. 162–66, on *Structuralist Poetics*, Culler 1975: 131–60). Here, with the focus on omniscience, his counterargument makes no sense even in its own terms. Regarding the key question—how to explain the gappy, selectively communicative discourse?—the passage above multiplies incongruities.

First, having before distinguished the author (or “novelist”) from the narrator, whether “homodiegetic” or “extradiegetic-heterodiegetic,” Culler now suddenly dispenses with the latter, as if the mediator had a discourse to voice and a role to play and a goal to serve in personal, “homodiegetic” narration alone. (Contrast his own thesis of impersonal narrative “performativity.”) He deplors any appeal to the omniscient teller for why’s, rather than straight to the author. But, considering the author’s definitional silence, how else would a tale like “The Killers” get told, if not by some vocal or writing mediator cum motivator? How else to account for the words’ occurrence on the page in a certain order? Would the official discourser entailed select and combine them with no purpose (form, meaning, effect) in view? Or elsewhere, couldn’t that discourser perform with a purpose, as well as with nonepistemic powers, opposed

64. More exactly, again, authorized (i.e., unempirical, unproblematic, unironized) unusual knowledge.

yet serviceable to the author's, at a fictional remove? In brief, couldn't he present an ironic mirror image even amid epistemic equality? Failing the motivational resource of such an in-between speaker—one author-like yet variably short of identity—what would become of a discourse where the information reads as authorized, even complete, and the evaluation as unreliable? Would this hard-earned possibility of the wrong-thinking or ill-composing omniscient—illustrated among our bolder protean options—need to be excluded again a priori, as traditionally done, only to reintroduce the undefensible narrator/author merger?<sup>65</sup> Would the same fate befall all narrating that is granted omniscience without omnicompetence, from the Bible's history teller to the history-like teller in Jamesian fiction to Clement's retelling of tradition in *The Holy Sinner*? And so forth.

Throughout, instead of the ugly-sounding “obfuscated,” the “artistic choices” are mediated (embodied, transmitted, more or less distanced by or camouflaged into a façade of reality-likeness) via the high narrating agent interposed between artist and audience. As such, those choices perform operate at second hand, just the way they do with the low-mimetic “I,” obviously undeniable, because fallible (inter alia) in knowledge itself: the façade of autonomous communicator only thickens with a Watson, never mind a Jason. The exigency of mediacy, hence of narratorial and otherwise perspectivized motivation, cuts across narrative.

Second, the narrator's abrupt disappearance at this price yields Culler nothing in return, even so. Instead, the undesirable omniscience, along with the suppressiveness, persists in the author, who “obviously could have chosen to include more information about Al and Max.” Likewise persistent in the same figure of authority is the need to motivate the discrepancy between God-like power and selective performance. “The critic” still “finds herself obliged to explain why the omniscient [if not narrator, then author] declines to tell us all the relevant things he must know—including the real names and full past histories of Al and Max.”

In turn, therefore, if “imagining motivations for this refusal yields strange contortions,” then we are doomed to such motivational contortions no matter who the refuser—teller *or* author—and no matter what verbal acrobatics Culler himself executes in occluding the point. He just calls motivation names when bearing on the narrator, while replacing it with various honorific terms for the very same explanatory activity in the

65. As in Walsh 1997, which Culler approvingly cites (30). Apropos “The Killers” itself, he might cite its grouping in Chatman 1978: 159 as “nonnarrated.” Contrast Booth (1961: 151–52), who finds Hemingway's narrator indistinguishable from the author, because undramatized, yet warns “the inexperienced reader” against “the mistake of thinking that the story comes to him unmediated.” Chatman (1990) has meanwhile recanted, by the way.

authorial context. Even “strange,” elsewhere the poetic ideal for him, turns pejorative once applied to the undesirable omniscient mediator. The more conspicuous, this juggling with words, because Culler avoids all reference to the mimetic perspectival guise thinly supplied by the narrator’s God-likeness, thus maximizing his author-likeness (and inversely, the author’s narrator-likeness). As the motivation for the all-knower’s refusing us available data is now aesthetic alone, what else do we do, if not motivate such refusals, when “properly” explaining them as “choices made by the author for artistic reasons” or “to achieve the literary effects that have made this story notorious”? What are “selections of which bits of prior knowledge to relate,” if not “decisions about crafting the text” with an eye to these aesthetic reasons and effects? Everything would then remain the same, just pushed one step back to leave a hole in the chain of transmission. The attempt to eliminate the intermediate omniscient narrator on motivational grounds, then, only worsens the already prohibitive balance of loss and gain.

## **7. Priorities of Discourse Construction: Teleologic above (Theo)Logic**

### ***7.1. Narrative Omniscience Integrated and/or Divided for a Purpose***

So we come to the last polarity on my list, the most general and determinative of the seven enumerated. Author, reader, and narrator, we have seen, constitute a network of inference. Given the variety of latent poetics, strategies, (re)constructions, motivations, communicative setups—each with a claim to being “implied”—there is always more than one kind of teller interposable between the silent discourse partners. In theory, a narrative has as many possible intermediacies as it has possible readings, each with its bearings on the implied communicators themselves. What, then, ultimately determines the choice? The mediator constructed (e.g., as omniscient or otherwise, in God’s image or humanity’s, as narrating or quoting, as plain dealer or suppressor or ironist) hinges on which construct best mediates (fits, motivates, organizes) the discourse. Or best mediates it, at least, in a given processor’s eye, with or without reference to the producer’s.

So formal bows, and where necessary, bends, to functional reason and reasoning. Like every other activity and choice, however unreflective or egocentric or “wild,” reading is goal-directed; and reading for perspective hardly an exception. There, the communicative viewpoints (authorial, narratorial, dialogic) are themselves goal-directed, mindful of someone’s reading. Whether the respective goals meet or diverge in the process, to

reconstructive or freely constructive effect, leaves the principle unaffected, so that we'll keep using the second as umbrella term. In either case, the goals that inform our reading will ultimately determine the forms of transmission mapped onto the narrative surface, rather than vice versa. Like that of the narrated world, the narrator's construction is, *above all*, a matter of suiting parts to implicit whole, means to inferred end, as best one can in context at the time—always provisionally and correctibly, until the last word—not of assimilating elements to prefabricated schemata: deductive mechanisms (logically), established models (analogically, theologically), fixed groupings (typologically), internalized cognitive routines (psychologically).

"Above all," I emphasized, since discourse for the most part coordinates these two structuring lines—no reading without ready-made constructive equipment—but functionality neutralizes or adjusts sheer form whenever they pull different ways. As aesthetic governs mimetic motivation, so, at a higher level yet, with teleologic vis-à-vis any rival logic: it overrides whatever it can't enlist and subsume.

Under extreme (con)textual pressure, this order of priorities will have us discoursers surrender formal logic's very rudiment, the Law of the Excluded Middle. With it may even go other surrenders that don't come easily: of existential belief, say, of object/subject opposition, of typological dichotomy, or of the desire for stable univocality in general. A notorious example will indicate how far the poetic motivator goes, if necessary, against such a line of most resistance. By most of the frameworks that we bring to discourse—reason, outlook, genre—a world is either supernatural or natural. Yet James's *The Turn of the Screw* would appear to make the best sense as a conjunction of the two readings, forced by the unresolvable ambiguity in reality key: between an abnormal, ghost-haunted world told by a normal governess and a normal world abnormalized by a governess who projects upon it her secret ghosts. She does see real apparitions, and she doesn't. Impossible by possible-world's law, this twinning of binaries is yet the most integrative in Jamesian context. Either binary reading, on its own, leaves much of the tale uncovered, ill-fitting, or counterproductive in implying the opposite told/teller synthesis. By a poetic paradox, imagining an irreducibly dual world mediated through an irreducibly dual viewpoint alone unifies, as well as optimally estranges and enriches, the discourse there. Two breaches compose an intricate new whole, or rather three, counting discourse typology. By its criteria, the *nouvelle's* literary kind tensely bifurcates to suit, for the ghost story doubles as psychodrama in turn. From existential to perspectival to generic logic, the well-defined,

ready-made either/or choices prove unequal to the discourse, while the forked both/and contradictories shape it into an overall art of ambiguity, an effective, well-motivated, if strange gestalt.

Here enters again the discourse law known as the Proteus Principle, first stated with particular reference to omniscience and applied since on a wide front, by others as well. “Whatever logic or theology may lead us to expect, there are no package-deals in narration” (Sternberg 1978: 256). This programmatic statement, with its demonstrated implications and follow-ups, has been lost on Culler et al. He misses the polarity argued, and certainly its overriding goal-directed term, so as to monopolize the sheer (theo)logical antipole and in effect reverse my priorities. The antipole takes over in his own name or mine or both. Thus, for all Culler’s short way with theology, we have seen him yoking together divine or divinity-like attributes—omniscience, omnipotence, creativeness, heterodiegesis, normative reliability—according to certain set models of God. He fails to appreciate the principled independence of those attributes, and against his own interests at that: narration needn’t follow religion, as such gratuitous packaging would have it do. Nor does he appreciate the free delegability or divestment of those features in authorial practice, which originates at the biblical source: a narrator omniscient yet glorifying the Lord of history, for whom the omnipotence effect is duly reserved.

When it comes to all-knowledge itself, Culler usually<sup>66</sup> shifts extradiscursive reference points—from theology to logic—but still without recognizing their subordination to teleology’s discourse forces. “Omniscience is said quite logically to be indivisible” (26), he agrees, and small wonder. For logicians, any epistemic failure would count not as an exception or limit to the power of omniscience but as a disproof of the very concept. It is either all superknowledge or none, and thought experiments have been devised accordingly (e.g., Castañeda 1967, Grim 1985, with earlier references).

66. Usually, because he occasionally shifts back to theology here, for obvious polemical reasons. Consider this abrupt, if perhaps unobvious, swerve from the main “deductive” line of pp. 24–26: “The only justification of the claim that a narrator who can report [again, more precisely, authoritatively report] the thoughts of one character must have full omniscience is the belief that an omniscient God is the only alternative to a human’s partial knowledge” (26). A moment’s thought will establish, however, that the logic of omniscience stands in no dependency relation to its theological counterpart: the one is neither entailed by nor entails the other, but only finds in its God the obvious, longtime exemplar of the omniscience concept. Any imaginable omniscient existent (e.g., Sartre’s idealized perfect biographer) would boast the same wholeness, or “fullness,” and enforce the same whole/part, part/whole deduction. Nor does theology, as a matter of faith and fiat, necessarily depend on or bear on logical reasoning, though it may adopt it. Essentially, the two extradiscursive rationales themselves elude automatic connection, just like their targets and products. Hence my “logic or theology” in the “no package deals” key quote above.

Compare this epistemo-logic, specifically theo-logic, with the modal logic of possibility and necessity. By the disciplinary either/or rationale, the unitary supernatural perspective has an expected counterpart in the unitary objective reality on which it looks out. As the discipline's "possible world" takes fantasy in its stride but abhors inconsistency anywhere—which threatens to make that world impossible—so does a possible absolute epistemic viewpoint. Its division spells contradiction. The wonder is rather that Culler would turn this logical indivisibility against narrative omniscience—in disregard for both its coherent and its contingent workings, always under the higher, Protean law of the best means-end interplay.

To exemplify the former oversight—that of coherent working, even below and through a troubled narrative surface—recall that the above quote from Culler (26) assents to omniscience's logical indivisibility only in the hope of wholesale riddance. The assent prefaces an attempt to discredit, as "strange contortions," all the motivations that in fact explain the text's own strangeness, notably its apparent internal discord, by reference to a God-like storyteller at work. What, for example, are we to make of the inconsistency between the unlimited knowledge exhibited here (on some point or axis) and the limited view given there? In a variant like "The Killers," one of many, this clash in informativeness resolves itself into the omniscient narrator's self-limited art of gapping for definite purposes, beginning with the suspense/curiosity/surprise universals. A twofold outcome ensues: rational coherence established, rationale for apparent unreason provided. Far from "obfuscated," the uneven (whether Hemingwayan, or Fieldingesque, Austenian, Jamesian) performance is then illuminated as well as made whole by appeal to the unity of power behind it. In the metacommentary we cited, this very line of integration breaks surface on a wide front. And inversely with the minuses incurred in taking the unevenness at face value, as exposing a narratorial, if not authorial, ken divided against itself, between supernature (omnipresent camera-eye, access to a reflector's mind) and the common lot. The divide is then left unresolved altogether, no more explained than healed. The superhuman withholder therefore proves the superior narrative construct all round.

Inference always proceeds from the known to the unknown, relative to the inferrer, but here it advances along a line not just probabilistic but deductive and constructive at once: from known (because manifest) to unknown (yet both integral and integrating) superknowledge. Though normally the case, however, such alliance of (theo)logical with teleological coherence, deduction with motivation, remains in principle contingent on the stronger term. Deducing potential omnitemporality from the narrator's manifest omnipresence, say, depends on the respective gaps and

givens composing into a narrative strategy that works best under omniscient auspices (the way Hemingway's does). The same applies to the inference of latent omnimentality from the authorized knowledge of a single other mind—Amelia's in Thackeray, the heroine's in Austen, the reflector's in James—and of high epistemic wholeness from its parts generally. Throughout, negating or even suspending this deduction, so as to localize and fragment the narrator's power, isolate the given licensed height from the rest of the performance, mix superhuman with human ken, quantify the absolute, is an expensive business. And its expense compounds purely (theo)logical with the decisive teleological minuses. The negator would ignore Occam's razor (at the extra cost of artistic and processing economy); offend against reason (hence against coherence, let alone the divine model as gestalt); mar the otherwise well-motivated (at times, we've seen, overtly voiced) narrative strategy; divorce omniconnunicative all-knowledge from the omniscient's suppressive options; and all to no apparent, far less commensurate, purpose.

But the reverse also holds. For the Proteus Principle always outranks in discourse the Law of the Excluded Middle itself—a fortiori, any conventional, theistic, holistic, reality-like, prototypical schema—whether to the effect of affirming or of breaking the underling. Just as logic stands by its dovetailing with the operative teleology, so may it fall by their parting ways—now regardless of surface inconsistency and therefore more saliently. (An equivalent would be the divergence of these rationales on the ontic front: the unitary possible world enjoined by philosophy and common sense loses out to the impossible yet artfully effective dualism of *The Turn of the Screw*. Possible-worlds logic is a mere option and servant, always freely violable by viable contradiction in life's and art's world-making, to the chagrin of armchair theory.) Except that Culler misses the principled contingency even then.

Reconsider the conclusions to which he jumps from the misreading of “all-knowing immortals” in *Expositional Modes* vis-à-vis my later statement that “Homer's gods . . . certainly have access to a wider range of information than the normal run of humanity, but their knowledge still falls well short of omniscience, concerning the past as well as the future.” This coupling of ill-sorted quotes thereupon meets with the jubilant rhetorical question, “What happened to the idea that superhuman knowledge of any sort entails full omniscience?” (25–26). Nothing happened to it, of course, since the Homeric breach of the entailment only confirms the higher, operative principle, as I already argued at the time, in the immediate sequel (*Poetics* [1985]: 88).

Note that “entails” is a term of purely logical, deductive reasoning and,

by its standard, the partial superknowledge of Homer's gods indeed makes a contradiction in terms. But Homer cheerfully sacrifices their epistemic integrity—never his own, mind you—to his varying artistic exigencies. As early as the *Odyssey's* opening scene, he exploits this inconsistency to launch the plot movement: Athena passes a resolution in favor of Odysseus's homecoming behind the back of Poseidon, who would veto it were he (omni)present. "The only perfect omniscience is Homer's own, and it reaches perfection only because exempted from the constraints imposed on his Olympians" (ibid.). Similarly with the Oriental pantheon. The very gods named in Ashurbanipal's library catalogue, as inspirers of this work or that, usefully betray states of ignorance elsewhere as narrative agents, while the inspired narrator continues omniscient throughout. Within the Bible's epistemological revolution, by contrast, such inconsistency perpetrated on God at will or need would offend against an article of monotheistic faith: the tale must instead ring all the changes on his knowledge to bring home its unprecedented superhuman wholeness. Homer-style discordance on Olympus therefore reverses into the juncture of logical-turned-ideological with teleological (e.g., persuasive) coherence. Either way, the epic's or Scripture's, whatever any exterior clustering "may lead us to expect, there are no package deals in narration," but ever-shifting alignments and uncouplings of cognitive powers according to desired ends: to whatever best suits the text in context, reading context included.

Therefore, moreover, Culler's imagined counterexamples of epistemic division force an open door:

we can imagine many versions of superior knowingness, from the ability infallibly to predict the weather to the capacity to read the minds of animals, to telepathic sympathy for the old and infirm. One could have knowledge of all past actions but not of anyone's thoughts; one could know the future as well as the past or only the future. Why not imagine a narrator who can authoritatively describe the thoughts of men but not of women? We can also imagine all sorts of recording or reporting devices, from the camera's eye to the tape recorder to the "radio receiver" of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai, whose head is full of voices. (26)

Not only does my theory, by the same Proteus Principle, accommodate these imagined possibilities of uneven superknowledge<sup>67</sup> and leave the door open to many others. It has instanced an assortment of actual variants. One lies in the Homeric and Oriental gods themselves. The unregular "superior knowingness" of either pantheon even springs into relief against

67. Unless impossible from within, because *self*-contradictory, hence inconceivable and literally untellable, like the fourth on the list (see below).

the perfect omniscience of the tellers and their otherworldly inspirers. So, in the Bible, does the bearer of the thematically equivocal name, “man of God.” Elisha’s occult intelligence, for example, so thwarts Syria’s warlike moves that he is described to the Syrian king as the prophet “who tells the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber”; yet on another occasion, when learning that the child born to his benefactress through his intercession has suddenly died, Elisha comments, “the Lord has hidden it from me, and has not told me” (II Kings 6:12, 4:27). *Man of God* indeed: the epistemic oxymoron coheres in terms of God’s selective transmission of privilege to his man. The prophet’s ad hoc, mission-bound omniscience, coming and going at his master’s pleasure, stands opposed to the alliance of invariable all-knowers: the (hi)storyteller who owes and in turn dedicates his privilege to God, or God’s, the author of everything.<sup>68</sup> Likewise, against the respective privileged backgrounds, with a Tiresias, on earth and in Hades, with the dreamer (e.g., Penelope) or interpreter of dreams (e.g., Joseph) as/and authorized omens, or with any short-term beneficiary of divine revelation. Either ancient masterpiece, then, already has Proteus cut both ways—the sporadic, “oxymoronic,” and the holistic, the partial and the perfect endowment with superknowledge—after its own fashion, to its own ends.

Equivalents and further variants have manifested themselves ever since. In historical order, examples range from the flashes of occult knowledge read into biblical dialogue by Rabbinic and early Christian (“figurative”) exegetes; to the authoritatively foretelling dreams of medieval literature; to the editor and characters of *Don Quixote* impugning the epistemic reliability of the privileged teller, Cid Hamet Benengeli, as a Moor, hence a liar, especially concerning Christian glory; to Tristram reporting scenes or thoughts to which he couldn’t be privy; to the supernatural optic and voyeuristic equipment dramatized by eighteenth-century French fiction

68. For more on this epistemic oxymoron and opposition, see my 1985: 93–98, 499–515. Especially relevant to our point is the reason argued there for why the Bible is so concerned to hammer home (if necessary, through unflattering exposure) the prophet’s dependence on inspiration from above. Faced with his acts of supernatural knowledge, observers, possibly including some readers, are all too liable to jump to the *logical* conclusion that he is perfectly and inherently all-knowing: that the “man of God” equals God himself. This threat to the Bible’s foundational divine/human polarity must be quashed at any cost, via recurrent disclosures and demonstrations of the truth: scenes of the middleman elected, empowered, enlightened by God; authoritative narratorial inside information or views regarding him; or shows and confessions of ignorance, like Elisha’s. All go to establish prophetic superknowledge as God-given, contingent, piecemeal, now delegated, now withheld, never intrinsic or self-inspired. So the countermeasures newly testify to both the absoluteness of the epistemic polarity and the strength of the logical part-to-whole deduction from it, which must be invalidated for once by hard narrative (“empirical”) evidence to the contrary.

(e.g., Lesage in *Le Diable boiteux*); to *Madame Bovary*'s abrupt shift of epistemic gears from the opening narrated by a schoolfellow of Charles to the omniscient sequel; to the townsmen whose narration mixes observables or rumors with inaccessible in Dostoevsky's *The Devils* and *The Brothers Karamazov*; to the painting of the green mare that surveys generations of boisterous peasant life in Marcel Aymé's *The Green Mare*; to King David, on his deathbed, making (fore)references to the Bible and Milton and Shelley, to Einstein and the Jewish American princess, in Joseph Heller's *God Knows*.<sup>69</sup> Not the least unsettling cross of narrative models arises from incompatible self-projections of the author onto the telling. So John Fowles thematically alternates between selves, the licensed authorial persona as God-like Victorian novelist and the limited historical person of the 1960s. The one's abstention from elucidating the heroine is thus justified in terms of the other's personal blind spots. "These characters I create never existed outside my own mind," but "modern women like Sarah exist and I have never understood them" (Fowles 1970: 80).<sup>70</sup> Innovative-looking to the point of rupture, this duality is in fact a (post)modernist version of an old (pre)novelistic topos.

The teleologic-first principle governing the epistemic oxymoron (and viewpoint typology generally) even extends to knowers beyond art, along diverse lines again, as shown throughout "Factives and Perspectives" (2001b). By institutional empowerment, for example, a lawyer speaks as if privy to the client's deeds, thoughts, and intentions, dispensing with maybe's in narrating them.<sup>71</sup> More remarkable and wide-ranging still is the linguistic encoding whereby factive discourse can aspire to omniscience pro tem. Factive verbs, headed by their and our thematic "know," are cognitive or emotive predicates that approvingly introduce a nondirect quotation. Their use accordingly signals the factivizer's both offering and objectifying an inside view of the factivized subject's mind. When I say, "She knew that Gogol was born on All Fools' Day" (meaning "She strongly believed that . . . and she was right"), the "knew" commits me not only to the truth of the that-statement, but also to the quotee's thinking it and

69. Or, as seriocomic fictional relief from a vertiginous inquiry into recursivity, Achilles and the Tortoise discussing Escher and Bach (e.g., Hofstadter 1980: 29–32). A time paradox, worthy of Zeno, comes with an epistemic twist, reminiscent of Heller.

70. Contrast this profession of ignorance about motive to the normal suppression by the knowing artist: even "if one does not explain it—and it may be artistically bad to explain too much—then a writer should know why his characters behave as they do and should be able to answer this question to himself" (Highsmith 1983: 137). Recall also the metacommentary and backstories discussed.

71. On omniscience in the law system, its human impossibility there, and comparisons with God as legislator or enforcer/judge, see further details in my "If-Plots" (2008: passim).

strong belief in it. Language thus provides for insets of omniscient discourse by a mere human. In reception, further, the twofold claim to knowledge, objective *and* subjective, often goes unchallenged, as if I were a mind reader cum walking encyclopedia in ordinary life—though I may next face a challenge on another issue.<sup>72</sup> What's more, the subjective license is taken, and often accepted, in all mental quoting verbs (e.g., the nonfactive “believe” or “think” or “feel”). A larger conclusion follows. “Narratorial omniscience . . . is . . . unavailable to real narrators in natural interaction” (Fludernik 1996: 167): true, except where made available by language or a discourse code.

## **7.2. Epistemic Oxymorons and the Realities of Storytelling:**

### ***How Exceptions Prove the Rule***

Even so, it is of the utmost importance to understand that all these (and related jarring variants I've studied over the years) are not counterexamples or “alternatives” but exceptions or marked infractions; and exceptions by more than the empirical criterion of low frequency. Not only do they conform to Protean law. They prove the ground rule of omniscience itself, complete with the divine model, in the fullest sense of the word.

Were it not for factive and other mind-quoting (or other-mind quoting) in everyday discourse, they would even become statistically negligible—rather than just infrequent—relative to the binary norm operative over the millennia since the Bible's epistemological revolution. But then, those factive inside views underscore the exceptionality in another sense. Miniature, usually sentence-length, they drive to the limit both the inset status and the modest proportions typical of the entire minority group: contrast the ostensible autonomy and sheer extent of the average omniscient tale. In delegating the overall narrative, a long one at that, to a problematic superknower, the Cervantes or Dostoevsky or Heller novels represent an exception to the exceptional framed brevities.

Further, compounding the hard evidence of numbers and magnitude and embeddedness, there is the ground vs. figure interplay, the reference point for what makes or mars a difference. The uneasy exceptions keep estranging, hence presupposing and proving, the rule: as already do those (e.g., prophecy) that enter into the network of perspectival relations woven within the Bible itself to serve its rhetoric of heavenly omniscience vis-à-vis human groping. In the very breach, early or modern, in this variant or that, the infringements/estrangements look to the common observance

72. On whether and how the factivizer's truth claim survives under negation, see *ibid.*: 226–37. Contrast the elementary mistakes in Füger 2004: esp. 280–82 on negated knowledge in fiction.

and the (theo)logic behind it for their sense of deviance: their markedness, significance, felt experientiality, otherness, in brief.

Next, these revealing exceptional facts themselves call for explanation. Why their low frequency? Why the typical brevity and enclosure? Why the felt deviance, especially since the breach's reference to the norm falls short of a rigorous condition of possibility? After all, one might (and the ancients did) imagine partial superknowledge, like Tiresias's, without as well as with reference to a God or any other perfect divine model. Inversely, apropos imagining, why are Culler's "we-can-imagine" scenarios (discounting the questionable Rushdie) all left unexemplified?

The answers, I would argue, go to show the extent to which the (theo)logic of omniscience will persist even where vanished or violated on the surface. They not only reinforce the model's primacy in all the senses already indicated but establish it even in teleological terms: from sheer artistic expediency upward. Negatively speaking, think of its displacement. How to relativize or quantify occult knowledge at a tolerable cost, let alone with profit? The basic conceivable options amount to two, either suspending or subverting the absolute reference point ("baseline"); and neither augurs well in operational terms. By the economy of narrative, even within art, they show an unhealthy balance sheet, directly proportioned to their extremism.

Suspension is a theoretical possibility but a nonstarter in practice. It would require an enormous expense of spirit: try to imagine a partial superknower without appealing to God or to consistency as a normative measure. Anyone today capable of the necessary suspension of both theology and logic, not to mention a lifetime of telling/reading anchored in them, is a prodigy of self-induced cognitive amnesia. The ancients could somehow do it (e.g., facing Homer's Olympians or Tiresias or their own dreams) in the absence of this measure, but we would need to wipe our minds clean of what has meanwhile been internalized as second nature for so long all over culture. Such deep pattern-making habits die hard; harder yet in face of a one-off exigency, after which they would need to revive for all other occasions. And that a modern case in point is hard to find, even on avant-garde record, indicates that the result of the experiment in anachronistic epistemology hasn't been deemed worth the trouble of unlearning fundamentals. One cannot therefore take seriously Culler's proposal that we abandon "the Judeo-Christian concept of omniscience" for a model of "uncanny knowledge" based on the Greek pantheon (2007: 190; already implicit in 2004: 26). Easier preached than practiced.

To lessen the attraction further, suspending this theo-logical model and measure would also forfeit the highway to such a privileged value (for

Culler, *inter alia*) as estrangement, by nature a countervalue. The more well-defined the opposition to habit, the sharper its effect. Recall how it duly operates, *against* the either/or rule, in all our instances of omniscience less than perfect, from the Bible onward. No making strange without a norm to estrange; and here a norm that is itself strange, because otherworldly, in the first place, hence also open to multiform re-estrangement. Unpackaging, quantifying, foregrounding, thematizing, ironizing, self-limiting, omnitelling, or circling back to some variant thereof grown unfamiliar: suspending the high mimetic logic, in favor of an encoded piece-meal (in)sight, would neutralize this entire deautomatizing repertoire. Small wonder the history of narrative has gone the other way of otherworldly narration, in the wake of Israel's strong and strange God, rather than the unstable and squabbling Olympians, all too heimlich, in a sense.<sup>73</sup> Nor are the grounds ideological alone; quite the contrary, at times, given the diversity of practitioners and practices on either side of the discourse. Atheism, agnosticism, indifferentism haven't made a difference to the strategic (re)constructive choice; they have themselves rather been suspended in effect for the purpose, usually as a matter of course. Even Royle, amid his violent abuse of the divine model behind narrative omniscience, admits, with Freud, that it qualifies for his supreme honorific: "Doubtless there is something potentially uncanny [or 'magical'] about the notion of author (or narrator) as godlike" (2003: 273n4).

If not suspension, clean out of reference to the baseline, how about subversion into dissonant reference? A possible choice, again, and more feasible this time, indeed boasting manifest oxymoronic variations, as already exemplified, with estranging (counter)value at that. Yet it significantly and understandably remains exceptional nevertheless, so much so that it isn't likely to change status. At either end of discourse, it takes a very good reason for us to offend against reason: to break the (theo)logical model, along with the power, flexibility, coherence, and differential inference supplied thereby regarding knowledge. (Power, as distinct from performance, because the narrator's self-limitation à la Austen, James, or Hemingway—and the author's own to a limited performer—constitutes no such breach.) One must have an even stronger reason to break this model, with its advantages, on a work-length scale or on a regular basis. For the subverter, as for the common implementer, the question is always, Does it pay, pay enough, pay best, pay in this form, magnitude, context, incidence . . . ? Here, the answer is usually a clear and, given the realities of discourse, predictable negative.

73. Again, dead against Culler's favoring of the latter as the lesser theistic evil.

In weighing theoretical alternatives, just as I've kept history's workings, precedents, and lessons in view throughout, so I deliberately keep using the language of number and magnitude, payoff and balance sheet. Artists and audiences have generally never lost touch with such basic communicative realities, and it is high time for theory to follow suit. The oversight of them or, worse, studied ignorance, has gone much too far in some circles, including narratologies with universalist pretensions. Typically, the issue of omniscience has suffered no less from the assorted unrealities projected on it by wishful zeal than from sheer analytic misconception. I for one like epistemic oxymorons, among other games of art, both as a reader and a student. But liking and licensing them is one thing, idealizing and idolizing them, or their fellows in rupture, is quite another. So much so that Culler's proposals for what I call epistemic suspension and subversion mirror image their opposite numbers in religion. To wish on narrative, or at least narratology, a wholesale (re)turn from the Judeo-Christian omniscience concept to the broken knowledge of the Greek pantheon sounds like an inverted monotheistic theology. Similarly, the list of hypothetical subversive options now pressed on the writer, unexemplified, is akin to the distinctions among cherubim, seraphim, and the rest within the angelic order. The extremes meet in their dogmatism, but also in their esotericism, academic in the pejorative sense: the fiats needn't correspond to anything other than the theorist's faith and fantasy. (Cf. note 30 on metastereotypes.) Instead, let us see again how the possibilities enabled in theory by the Proteus Principle fare under the test of the reality principle.

The ad hoc, makeshift reasons for "selective" omniscience, like those motivating our above examples, have seldom been deemed compensation enough for the operational losses in narrative power, mobility, coherence, and so on. This balance sheet's allure even generally decreases in the ascent from local to strategic choices, from breach to breakdown, from one-off experimentation to repeated, let alone encoded application. Thus, the sheer estrangement of playing havoc with the canonical knowledge paradigm would not appear sufficient payoff—despite or because of its radical unsettling effect—to the chagrin of a Roland Barthes. His call in *S/Z* (1974 [1970]) for endless "plurality" and "instability" and "reversibility" may attract some would-be deconstructors of viewpoint: Jaffe (1991: 1) overtly applies it to "narrative omniscience," which Barthes himself already attacked in *Writing Zero Degree*. Yet Barthes's general call has no counterpart on record, as he frankly admits, so that he needs to fabricate one by counterreading Balzac into the desired atomistic indeterminacy. Nor has the call's application to storied knowledge (inter alia) established a reading, much less a writing practice, not even among sympathizers (or

not outside hypertext). For a multiple chasm separates the Barthes of *S/Z* from most expert, a fortiori common practices: that between rereader and reader; that between doctrinal, here doctrinally playful, analyst and receptive experiencer and sense-maker; and that between one-time and daily performance. Generically, these translate into the antinarrativist vis-à-vis the narrative player. (Jaffe herself or, we'll soon find, Culler never runs to Barthesian lengths.) The discontinuity with the realities of narrative art only widens from the author's side—leaping to the eye in the rewriting of Balzac, viewpoint and all. It grows wider yet considering the resistance put up by narrativity itself in the fight for survival against wholesale Barthesian decomposition. If nevertheless overcome—a genuine if—the victory turns pyrrhic (Sternberg 2006: 175–96).

Briefly, deconstructing a (short) tale's meaning by *S/Z* license is easy, far easier than its construction in the telling, let alone its reconstruction in the processing; and easiest of all when executed for once, just to shock the academic bourgeoisie, rather than as a standing practice in one's own readerly life, Barthes's own included. The exercise in fragmentation can then override every craving, constraint, counterforce, from the storied interest, memory, mimesis, integrity upward. With sense-making patterns operative across tales, however, it is such deconstruction that becomes harder, instead, and hardest of all when performed on, or against, universal, generic, chrono-logical, and otherwise logical constructive mechanisms. So hard that Barthes never quite succeeds in disintegrating the narrative genre's bedrock chrono-logic, for all the violence he unleashes on it as the archenemy to plurality, invertibility, liberty of movement in semantic space (*ibid.*). In perspective as in plot, there is a limit to going against the grain of narrativity, a fortiori discursivity: the "writerly" text exists only in an iconoclastic armchair theorist's utopia, a communicator's dystopia.

Culler's own imagined epistemic divides, quoted above, almost never go so far: weather prediction only, insight into animals or oldsters, knowledge of past but not mind, of future with or without past, of men as distinct from women, of the visible rather than audible world or vice versa. But, unlike my attested cases in point, nor do they (any more than the proposed return to the pantheon) go beyond wishful speculations, even so, and little wonder. Storytellers avoid such gratuitous brand-new curiosities—unless their subversive unreason answers a need or finds a use—though experimenters may yet decide otherwise for one-off novelty value. Even so, along with more traditional writers, the innovator will frustrate rather than fulfill Culler's antitheistic cum deconstructive drive. For a subverter obliquely reaffirms the norm that the suspender would have us forget. Working against the God-like model still entails and prolongs its ongoing

schematic, baseline currency: the very wishful forms imagined by Culler function counter to ideopolitical desire, like other arguments before. And that they invoke the model as a ground to their strange epistemic figures—always regardless of belief, at either discourse end—renders it impervious to the zealous unbeliever.<sup>74</sup> The quest for a Godless novel, culture, reading, theorizing must turn elsewhere, to an arena as distant as possible from the one that has the supercognizer built into the cognitive equipment with which we approach and apprehend its play of knowledge.

But there is play and play, with differences in the ratio of price to payoff, cognitively speaking or otherwise; and the economy of narrative further discourages such novel oxymoronic experiments. They cost more than sheer (theo)logical violence, extra mental effort, and, even where these count as gains, the sacrifice of the manifold operational advantages offered by omniscience unlimited yet self-limitable into a range of gapping performances. They would likewise abandon the gamut of broken omniscience already tried along narrative history, and, where found workable, developed into a means/end repertoire parallel to God-likeness: unorthodox, oppositional, contrapuntal, secondary, but grounded in determinate teleologies of otherness, all the same. Among the options for unconventional set-ups and workings of knowledge provided by this repertoire, quite a few manifest themselves in the examples already given, ranging from ancient to medieval to contemporary practice and, within the novel itself, from Cervantes, say, to Joseph Heller. Rejecting this minority as well as the mainstream traditions means starting afresh at the basis of perspective, reinventing epistemology on a ground that will justify the venture. Brand-new forms of unreason, like most of Culler's scenarios, are therefore easier to dream up than to implement in discourse with viability, let alone to centralize and sustain.

For the practitioner, there would arise unprecedented exigencies of motivation, aesthetic and mimetic. Beyond the estranging impact, available, even surpassable (because, as indicated, focusable) at a lesser cost, how to justify aesthetically a selective omniscience that enables the narrator "infallibly to predict the weather," for example, or to know pasts alone, exclusive of minds? What would the oddly limited privilege yield in return?

74. Or, as already argued, to any cutoff of latter-day narrative from the schemata workable in the age of belief. On a similar ground, Porter Abbott responds to the thesis that, while Fielding could write "God novels," Ian McEwan cannot, though his *Atonement* yearns for a God who's no longer there (Vermeule 2004). An irreversible cognitive rupture, as it were, has intervened in literary history. "But all the equipment that grew up with the God novel," Abbott (2006: 719) counters, "still 'makes a lot of sense' in this one, helping us to make very sharp . . . assessments of McEwan's characters."

And suppose the return worked out, to the artist's own satisfaction at least, or the avant-garde reader's, how would it translate into a narrated world, albeit bizarre?

Leaving the perspectival oddity unmotivated (or worse, unmotivatable) in any reality-like terms—a minus that Culler is likely to favor, with anti-representationalists from Shklovsky to Barthes—entails the breakdown of mimetic coherence. What I called the virtual nonstarter of “suspension” pales by comparison: it “only” demands that we wipe our minds clean of our cognitive heritage—the binary ground rule—not that we renounce all cognitive sense-making, likelihood, and accountability, to the point of embracing nonsense. Thus, how *in* the world could a teller “have knowledge of all past actions but not of anyone's thoughts,” given that past actions must definitionally include the agents' thoughts leading to them? The irrational epistemic divide turns so inconceivable in any possible world as to become unnarratable. Not a “mere” ontic impossibility, this time (like *The Turn of the Screw's* bracketing of the natural/supernatural incompatibles), but a disabling contradiction in terms (like a square circle). Nor would it merely disable the teller's construction as a person (by itself, welcome to Culler and fellow would-be depersonalizers) but as a perspective imaginably half knowing the indivisible told whole.

On the other hand, a part-superknower like an infallible weather forecaster is representable, because amenable in theory to some ad hoc mimetic coverage. But it would take very special circumstances for an author to encumber reality and discourse alike with such a trivial freak of nature. Again, a tape recorder would perhaps avoid either difficulty, but can only mediate as an “informant” (Sternberg 2005) rather than a teller. Though tellable, the informative recording cannot by itself tell us anything without further, higher-level mediacy; and if mediated in turn, it simply falls under the rule of inset unself-conscious perspective. As such, it makes a vocal counterpart to the writing diarist or the thinking Jamesian reflector and Joycean interior monologist—each of them a private subject quoted, on the way to the page we read, by a narratee-minded (in the later cases, superhumanly knowing) discourser. For communication to us, the overheard voices on tape equally require a narrator: like the one in Lawrence Sanders's *The Anderson Tapes*, who confines his omniscience to audible events and perceptibly elides some of them, too, with narrative interest in view. All familiar from modernist “dramatic” art—except for the technology<sup>75</sup>—hence out

75. Indeed, David Lodge (1992: 47) figuratively casts the modernist realm in these mechanical terms apropos stream of consciousness: “For the reader, it's rather like wearing earphones plugged into someone's brain, and monitoring an endless tape-recording of the subject's impressions, reflections, questions, memories and fantasies, as they are triggered either

of place in any broken-knowledge repertoire. And so, proportionally, with the rest of the candidates fancied by Culler.

Last but not least, none of this lot would escape perfect omniscience, and with it the strongest divine model, in the ultimate communicative frame. Even assuming the narration delegated to a genuinely limited superknower—as the optimum construct, after all—the delegator remains a mediator-limiting artist. Inescapably so throughout fiction, because this type of narrator is another’s intermediate creature, like everyone and everything else. That peculiar fictive superknower must leave certain things untold or undertold or unreliably told—because out of his ken, the weather, say—or else he wouldn’t count as limited but as a canonical all-knower. And the discontinuous tale bespeaks an artful storytelling authority in the outermost frame, responsible for the whole invention. Every gap that we encounter in the processing, every closure that we figure out, every attempt to make better sense of or than the unevenly privileged data, to whatever narrative effect, refers us therefore to the highest discourse level of all: to the author, our opposite number, who could have the tale told otherwise (even, e.g., omniconmunicatively) but chose a strange underteller for a purpose. As the Bible’s God, author of the discourse as well as of its universe, retains and exploits his all-knowledge of history across the voices through which he speaks, so fictional mediation entails authorial supercognition, regardless. Omniscience kept for one narrative viewpoint is omniscience still—God-like model, freedom of choice, interpretive premises, and all—whether contrasting with exceptional, illogically limited or with standard, mimetically delimited narration. In brief, there’s no escape from the high, perfect epistemic ground distinctive of inspired or fictional (hi)storytelling.

## 8. Alternatives to Omniscience?

Culler’s four official “alternatives to omniscience” (26–32) hardly improve on his miscellany of fancied possibilities. One, numbered (4), even involves the concession of omniscience to the Realist novel. Two further alternatives, numbered (1) and (3), actually belong together. For they would

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by physical sensations or the association of ideas.” But Lodge’s figuration misvocalizes the self’s unspoken internal discourse, on which we supposedly eavesdrop. He also forgets in turn the omniscient mediator—here relaying to us the interior monologue—unless the figurative eavesdropping machinery counts as one. Some, denying the narrator’s mediation here outright (e.g., Genette 1980: 173; Cohn 1978: 217–65; Fludernik 1996: e.g., 47–48, 288, 234), would take this analogy literally, as if the reader were supernaturally equipped in effect for direct, im-mediate mind reading: a variant of “telepathy” à la Royle 2003 and Culler (28–30), on which more below.

replace omniscience with another absolute power (“[the] performative authoritativeness of many narrative declarations, which seem to bring into being what they describe”) and with the flaunting of this power (in a show of “godlike ability to determine how things turn out”). Obviously, (1) subsumes (3) as a variant, explicit form. The names by which Culler designates that power vary more widely yet: performative language, stipulation, declaring or deciding what will be the case, invention, or, most to our point, omnipotence. But a few things remain constant throughout. The assorted variants would all substitute ontic (world-making) for epistemic (world-knowing) license, omnipotence over the narrated for omniscience about it. Also, the claims made for the ontic substitute are extremely high: “The basic convention of literature . . . the constitutive convention of fiction . . . in Kantian terms, a transcendental principle of the comprehension or experience of literary narrative . . . a condition of possibility of literature” (27). Further, as a hallmark, this substitute would boast an equally wide coverage, ranging from the novelistic to the fictional to the literary domain. And the last common denominator—I would argue—is that the substitution associated with such ambitious claims invariably fails, on doctrinal and theoretical grounds alike.

Indeed, newly fails, since earlier weaknesses repeat themselves on either front. It is again ironic that an antitheist should urge us to abandon the theism of all-knowledge for another “godlike ability,” one as absolute, too, and belonging to the same divine model. In theoretical terms, the failure already ensues from that of Culler’s “orthodox” package dealing of the attributes interchanged here. For brevity, I’ll take its principled refutation in my opening (section 2) as read.<sup>76</sup> Let me, though, quickly outline the most direct and cumulative disproofs of the specific exchange.

First, this alleged alternative incurs a wider common package deal, which has long bedeviled narrative and genre theory alike. Substituting ontology-directed omnipotence for the epistemology of omniscience, at the narrative level, conflates both with the narrated ontology: that is, misattaches omniscience (as such, or as omnipotence, or with omnipotence) to fiction and restrictedness (under the inverse guises) to historiography. By these (dis)privileges do the two kinds “radically differ,” Culler insists, again forgetting the Bible (“the true model of omniscient narration”) and much else. The God-inspired narrator, we recall, enjoys access to all the secrets of the narrated history without any title to its creation or control—hence unexchangeably—on pain of forfeiting his very truth claim and encroach-

76. Nor will I rehearse the weaknesses in the intersecting disjuncture: that of performative “mimesis” from entertainable maxim, vis-à-vis that of omniscience from reliability.

ing on the Omnipotent's privilege. To underline the difference, rather, he opens with God's most innovative and impressive show of superagency: the universe created *ex nihilo* by the performative word. In the Muse-inspired Homeric line, there is even no omnipotent deity on which to model oneself instead: in the absence of the very concept, how to enable, how to substitute almightiness, let alone "flaunt" its "godlike" empowerment, at whatever cost to the truth-claiming record of the past? Nor, on much the same ground, do these two narrative powers interchange regarding ad hoc figural omniscients within the history-bound world: from antiquity's prophet, oracle, dreamer, Tiresias, to the novelty of an all-observing/reporting, but otherwise as powerless, satellite eye under remote control. And if no interchange in the truth-claiming domain, then no "basic convention . . . transcendental principle . . . condition of possibility of literature" as a whole.

Second, concerning the part-superknowers, the bar to replacement with superpotence carries over to their fictional equivalents: down to those imagined by Culler, the tape recorder, most amusingly. These two "alternatives to omniscience" (replacing vs. relativizing epistemic privilege) being mutually exclusive, he can't have it both ways; and now the second of them contradicts the first, into the bargain. Against Culler's "basic . . . constitutive" rule, what the machine records counts as "true" within the fiction, neither because it originates in a "heterodiegetic narrator" nor because it "performatively" invents a world. On the contrary, the tape is homodiegetic, informative (because unself-conscious) rather than narrative, limited to the vocal domain, and reproductive of what has already supposedly happened there, regardless of the taping or its playing or our listening to its voices: the taped discourse gains factual status, within as without fiction, exactly from its fidelity to the objective past. On Culler's list of unregular superknowers, the infallible weatherman or the camera eye analogously testify against the fundamental rule of performativity alleged here. So does their shared locus of existence. Another package deal, of the discourse's truth with the discourser's transcendence, collapses in the process, then, as it already did at the opposite extreme: regarding the Bible's immanent, because storied and historicized, character-like, yet omniprivileged God.

Third, fiction often pursues the dignity and impact of history-likeness, which any show of narratorial omnipotence will similarly compromise. Recall Henry James's amazement at Trollope's "wanton" and "suicidal" flaunting of power over the plot, in disregard for the illusion of truth-telling essential to the novel.<sup>77</sup> Inversely, humanly limited knowledge there

77. By this illusionist poetics, the flaunting of control lost, as in the Coover 1970: 27 example, would be equally suicidal. Which shows again how the fictional narrator's license of fiction-

(e.g., the eyewitness narrator's) isn't replaceable by ontic limitation, either, any more than is the empirical historian's. Consider Pip, Watson, the governess, Dowell, Humbert, the butler in *Remains of the Day* . . . This fictive mimesis of factography, whatever its departures (e.g., in sequencing or in perspectival branching) from the genuine article, operates under the same twofold constraint vis-à-vis reality. In both these professed truth-tellings, moreover, the ontic constraint on creativity and control isn't (like its epistemic mate) just relative to the superhuman order, but grows absolute: on pain of undercutting the claim to empirical factuality, genuine or mimetic, and shifting toward the fictionalizer's pole. A difference in kind, literally, separates this narrator's bids for knowledge, even when eked out by open inference, from his breaches of impotence via open invention. He must always know something, but mustn't create anything out of nothing.

As ever, in short, power is again one thing, performance another, and their relation crucial. The former adheres to the world-making author by (here, ontic) definition, but gets delegated or denied at will to the narrating performer. If denied, as usual in fictional self- and other-telling by a character—Humbert, Watson—but not only there, the “narrative sentences” lose their “performative” force altogether in Culler's own terms, though he seems unaware of the yawning hole. (This force once lost, and with it the alleged “condition of possibility,” would a *Lolita* switch poles from novelistic history-likeness to nonliterary history? An absurd entailment, surely, with yet another deathblow to the whole idea.) And even if delegated to the narrating performer, that world-creating license may be boasted on the surface for the game of art or buried for reality-effect. In fiction itself, as well as in literature, Culler's “performative” therefore amounts to a variable of ontic power or performance, and its flaunted variant to a small minority. But omniscience runs across all fictional variations—whether or not extended from author to teller—with some precedents and counterparts in historical discourse.

Last, even where flaunted, omnipotence doesn't replace omniscience, since the two have distinct roles to play, different sets of choices to bring out, within the overall communicative process and product. Approaching them from the transmitter's (performative user's, stipulator's, inventor's) side, Culler misses this key difference, whose workings best emerge from the receiver's end. The replacement and the oversight being all too common, it would help if you think of how you actually make sense by appeal to either empowerment. In the simplest terms, the one privilege chiefly fore-

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alizing (comparable to, say, the prophet's wonder-working in history) may come and go, among other privileges delegable by another. And in practice, it is James, not Diderot or Trollope or Fowles, who represents the standard authorial choice.

grounds the narrated world, and the other the narrative discourse, against the respective might-have-beens open to fiction. On the one hand, given the world-maker's boundless ontic license here—so we ask—why opt for these of all possible events, characters, arenas, connections, interactions, geared to this reality key and developing along this line to this terminus? On the other hand, given the superknower's incomparable range of narrative strategies, why choose to disclose the world in this order, in this idiom or semiotic code, through this alternation or mixture of objective, immediate and figural, quoted (vocal, written, heard, interior) discourse, to omniconnunicative effect or to this of all suppressive gapping-effects? Anyone mindful of the reading process will appreciate the irreducible difference and dovetailing between the two sets of questions: they guide us toward motivating the *fabula* in the light of the *sujet*, and vice versa, with their dynamic correlations throughout.

If anything, the epistemic question arguably comes first, because we must (re)construct the narrated, fabulaic world from the narrative discourse. So we cannot determine and explain the ontology, “Why these of all possible events, characters, arenas” etc.? without determining the source and weight of the information given or gapped about them: authoritatively, when and where ascribed to a supercognizer, fallibly and perhaps correctly when taken as mediated by lower viewpoints. Either way, moreover, superknowledge at the transmitting end, if only the author's, goes to suggest the fictionality, hence the licensed choice, of the world and its existents in the first place. (Suggest, rather than establish, of course, keeping in mind the Bible's antipolar paradigm.)

Omniscience is, then, a twinnable but autonomous condition of possibility for our making sense of fiction. More generally yet, the condition holds for the appropriate epistemologies in narrative at large and beyond, wherever we encounter discourse about a world: from inspired history to the least reliable testimony in word and image, from the author's knowledge to the entire chain of mediacy launched and framed by it. Throughout, cognitive informs as well as attends ontic determination and motivation.

This leaves the properly epistemic alternative (2). Here, without recourse to omniscience, the narrative is said to disclose “inside knowledge of others that empirical individuals cannot attain” (26, 28–30). Of the two main cases adduced, one involves our access to the thought of a single character, “as in the focalized narratives practiced by Henry James,” where “we speak not of ‘omniscience’ but of ‘limited point of view’” (28). Modernist theory did indeed speak so—and Genettian “focalized” now echoes it—but only by another unreasonable power/performance conflation, which stands

exposed even in the Jamesian metacommentary on *The Tragic Muse* and *The Ambassadors* quoted above. The limited point of view there is the reflector's (Peter's, Strether's), as opposed to the narrator's, which quotes it from within, and a fortiori to the author's: both proving themselves omniscient no less than in Fielding—through the very mind-quoting license—they yet set limits to the reflector's access for the “advantages” yielded thereby. If the epistemic imperfection of any creature, humanly blind and/or occasionally, illogically superknowing, leaves the fictionist's power intact, then an authoritative, consistent, and motivated focus on a single groping observer entails the suppressive teller's own perfect knowledge as well. Obvious, really, by now.<sup>78</sup>

Without rehearsing the details, let me recall one further clincher. The narrator's performance there, however selective in information, literally generates the whole of the communication to us. We “posit a narrator,” not just in the absence of a reflector or focalizer, as Culler (28) alleges,<sup>79</sup> but precisely to mediate for us a reflector/focalizer leading a secret discursive existence, unaware of intruders and addressees. As with the tape recorder or filmic camera eye, Strether lacks self-consciousness on top of omniscience: a mere informant, his mind (“what goes on in [his] head”) cannot turn public unless a suitably knowing communicator relays to us the information from within. The difference in humanity between these two informants does not affect their sharing of the relevant disempowerment, whether epistemic or rhetorical.<sup>80</sup> So we perforce construct a narrator in the Jamesian “focalized” paradigm, because otherwise the narrative would remain unnarrated; and we construct the narrator as a self-limited omniscient, because otherwise the reflection of private thought would remain incongruous by every standard.

Indeed, Culler himself gives away as much. Note the passive-voice eva-

78. Culler (28) appeals for support to Booth (1961: 161), who actually contradicts him in the very quotes cited: modernist dramatic narratives, so-called, “postulate fully as much omniscience in the silent author as Fielding claims for himself . . . this method is omniscience with teeth in it.” Borges, unsurprisingly, also got it right: Henry James “knows more of what he's talking about” than we his readers do (1969: 75).

79. With variants in some other approaches: see note 75 above and the larger picture drawn by Sternberg 2005.

80. And inversely with empowered communicators. It is therefore in vain that Culler later appeals to Chatman's possibly nonhuman agent of narrative as a mere “presenter of signs” (30). The appeal is beside the point, for the presenter would still need to have access to the various data and domains presented, secret as otherwise. Indeed, even Chatman's opponent, David Bordwell (1985: 57ff.), who considers a narrator altogether too human-like for film, still adapts my theory of omniscience to cinematic “narration,” (un)self-consciousness included. Chatman's quarrel with Bordwell there simply doesn't affect the continuity in the privileged knowledge transmitted, or transmissible, to us by the respective narrative agencies.

sion of agency in “we are given access to the thought of one character” and the very ranging of the case under “inside knowledge of others that empirical individuals cannot attain” (28). Who is the inside knower that co-privileges us with access, if not the supra-empirical communicator?

The second case adduced under alternative (2) involves “telepathy.” Now, though Culler approvingly cites Royle 2003 on the subject, he guards against Royle’s wild telepathic excesses.<sup>81</sup> Both quarrel with the divine model and metalanguage as such, yet the one would bring their superhuman knowledge down to earth, and the other displace or fragment it, via telepathy.<sup>82</sup> Nor, by another canny avoidance, does Culler present telepathy as either an exclusive or a strategic substitute. He never attributes it to any overall authorized narrator “inhabiting” or “speaking as (or for) a character,” much less to intercommunication “between narrator and character” (ibid.: 259, 266, 267). Perhaps he discerns that an image of a narrator like Flaubert’s or Woolf’s reduced to performing long-distance, even transworld telepathy on (let alone with) fictional creatures is as inadequate as it is grotesque: on its own terms, it would at most cover omnimentality only, nothing of the rest of the superhuman access displayed there.<sup>83</sup>

Instead, lowering his sights to one-way telepathy between characters, Culler picks Marcel’s inside view of Bergotte on his deathbed and of Mlle. Vinteuil at Montjouvain (28–30). One must be desperate for examples to cite such notorious bones of contention, and unsupported by any contender at that (e.g., Genette 1980: 207–10; Cohn 1999: esp. 64–70). Equally suggestive, rather than being a telepath, Culler’s Marcel has his telepathic moments—along a narrative that otherwise adheres, on the whole, to the expected, standard low-mimetic epistemology. At best, then, these two examples would follow our rule of exceptions: infrequent, local, embedded, marked by reference to the norm, and so hardly a strategic alternative to omniscience. But, in fact, they are no alternative at all: incomparable even with a Tiresias or an angel or a dream in prenovelistic literature, whose occult knowledge has intrinsic or inspirational authority attached to it as a discourse premise. And a fortiori, wide asunder from the Bible’s model of divinity as a constant, definitional, proven seer “into the heart.”

To cut a long refutation short, “telepathy” presupposes *successful* (i.e.,

81. Some don’t, e.g., Hillis Miller (2005: 134): “Royle correctly identifies” all mind-penetrating omniscient narrative “as an uncanny species of telepathy” with the characters.

82. Amusingly, God is literature’s first and single constant telepath. “Man sees what meets the eye, and God sees into the heart” (I Samuel 16:7): his act of inside viewing there suits, hence demonstrates, the generalization. Again, one can’t escape the divine model in the very attempt to replace it.

83. Nelles (2006), who both adopts and globally applies the misnomer “telepathy,” at least reserves it to mind reading as one of several narrative privileges.

epistemically reliable) mind reading, and thus prejudices the issue by sheer verbal fiat.<sup>84</sup> Another circular argument ensues. For the most notable thing about attempts at telepathy in life and art is how often they fail, proverbially so. Why else has the mind's transparency been associated with superhuman (and, erroneously, reserved to fictional) license? Among humans, the misreading of other minds has generated numberless comedies and tragedies of error, and Marcel has his fair share of them. Therefore, when it comes to the two inside views at issue, performed on Bergotte and Mlle. Vinteuil, how do we know (if we ever do) that he knows those minds, for a change? *Knows*, rather than indulging in "speculative" or "imaginative" flights of fancy, open to every fallible human gap-filler and accordingly no example of anything like ad hoc supercognition. The problem is exactly *whether* these two count as (successful) acts of telepathy.

Instead of meeting or even raising the question, Culler begs it, thus leaving Marcel's "telepathic" representations of subjectivity in the air. He seems unaware that the only way to validate them as objective if arcane knowledge—as what really happened within others—is the way we validate everything transmitted in fiction: by appeal to the definitionally omniscient author, who implies the epistemic reliability *or* otherwise of the mediator's claims about the world.<sup>85</sup> The higher authority invoked never replaces but inevitably reactivates and reaffirms the divinity-like standard. Even a rule prevalidating telepathic insight would depend on the author's context. And failing such a rule, as in this novel, it's all a matter of contextual inference, with heavy empirical odds against the anomaly.

So, whatever we decide about Marcel here vis-à-vis the implied Proust, "telepathy" per se counts for nothing—except a fancy and unduly weighted label for the questionable, because nonomniscient, mind reading ubiquitous among characters within the narrative world. Across labels, what counts as fallible until proved otherwise by reference to God-like infallibility is in turn no alternative (or, indeed, mimetic analogue) to such infallibility on any knowledge axis, not even regarding bits and pieces of the secret life.

Finally, throughout the alleged alternatives, Culler never practices what he preaches against the offense of naturalization, supposedly the root of the trouble. The "idea" or "fantasy" of narrative omniscience, he would have

84. For good measure, Culler's reference to the disputed inside views piles factivity on telepathy. "These sentiments are supposed to be known to Marcel" (29): if known, then of course true by nominal presupposition.

85. Even those who reject the author, in favor of the "liberated" interpreter's construction, will appeal instead to their own reading of the world as an exterior normative yardstick for any mediator's version: the same thing here, in principle.

us believe, arises from “our habit of naturalizing the strange details and practices of narrative by making the consciousness of an individual their source, and then imagining a quasi-divine omniscient consciousness when human consciousness cannot fill that role” (32). But then, none of Culler’s four “alternatives,” such as they are, does otherwise: all involve, and most compound, the supposed bad habit of naturalization.

The omniscience conceded by him to the Realist novel evidently bows to that habit. The omnipotence wielded or flaunted would just exchange one “quasi-divine” power for another as the origin of literature’s “strange details and practices,” to which humanity proves unequal. And the arguments for the Jamesian reflector or Proust’s telepathic Marcel would again naturalize the strange by their own logic: they trace it to “the consciousness of an individual,” only refusing to acknowledge the “and then imagining . . .” follow-up. But there’s no stopping halfway, short of “a quasi-divine omniscient” to communicate and/or validate that individual mind. How else would we get to know that mind and the truth or falsity of its world-imagining? Ignored in vain, the authorized discourse frame cries out for repair and forces on us the second imaginative move in turn. *If* (super)naturalizing is an offense against narrative—rather than a stigma born of the old anti-representationalism crossed with antitheism and deconstructionism—then we are all hopeless offenders. Which, bias apart, amounts to our being versatile sense-makers, as adept at shuttling between mimetic (“natural”) and aesthetic construction as between the mimetics of plot and perspective, high or low.

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