Contents

Preface

Some of us are born storytellers, some of us acquire the storytelling habit, and some of us have it thrust upon us. But for almost all of us living and telling are inextricably connected: we make sense of our experiences through the stories we tell about them, even as those stories influence our future experiences. What's more, most of us are almost as interested in other people's stories (or at least some other people's stories) as they are. My interest in other people's stories, in the ways their living gets converted into their telling, has led me to this investigation of how such stories—as distinct from those in which the storyteller is not a character—create their effects. This interest has also led me to choose both fictional and nonfictional narratives as part of my investigation: how, if at all, does the telling of a fictional character about his experience work differently from the telling of a real person about hers, even acknowledging that such telling is constructed through the same textual devices as the fictive teller's? Furthermore, my interest in the effects of these stories focuses on three main dimensions, which are themselves inextricably connected: the cognitive (what do we understand and how do we understand it?); the emotive (what do we feel and how do those feelings come about?); and the ethical (what are we asked to value in these stories, how do these judgments come about, and how do we respond to being invited to take on these values and make these judgments?). My hope is that, by answering these questions as they apply to a range of rich narratives, I can offer some insight into the workings of the pervasive and fascinating phenomenon of living and telling.

Narrative theory has long distinguished between narratives in which

the narrator is also the protagonist and those in which the narrator and the protagonist are distinct figures. Even traditional taxonomies of point of view based on grammatical person distinguish not only between "first-person" and "third-person" narration but also between "first-person-protagonist" and "first-person-observer" narration. Gérard Genette's more precise taxonomy, which separates vision (who perceives) from voice (who speaks) and recognizes that any narrator can employ the first person, distinguishes between heterodiegetic narration, in which the narrator cannot directly interact with the characters, and homodiegetic narration, in which the narrator has (or, in retrospective narration, once had) the ability to interact with the characters. Genette's taxonomy goes on to mark off that subset of homodiegetic narration in which the narrator is the protagonist and to label it autodiegetic narration. I follow these taxonomies in making the major division between narration by a character and narration by a figure other than a character, but I am less concerned with refining taxonomies than with identifying and exploring a range of effects that follow from narration by a character.

As it turns out, almost all of my examples involve narratives in which the narrator is also the protagonist, but I believe that the rhetorical principles I deduce from these examples also apply to narratives in which the narrator is a secondary character. In the epilogue I take up the question of what might be distinctive about character narration by a character other than a protagonist. As it also turns out, my examples are all narratives written in English in the twentieth century, and all but one are narratives written in the United States. Again I believe that the rhetorical principles are applicable beyond these examples, though I do not have the hubris to claim that they apply across all time periods and all cultures.

More generally, this book is an exercise in what Peter J. Rabinowitz and I have called "theorypractice" (see the introduction to *Understanding Narrative*). The term describes a critical inquiry that has both a theoretical and a practical dimension and that develops a feedback loop between those two dimensions. Theory helps illuminate narrative texts even as elements of those texts challenge theory and lead to its extension or revision. My goal is to offer a set of theoretical principles that can account for the complex phenomenon of living and telling, even as I offer a set of extended engagements with striking examples of that phenomenon. The principles can of course be tested against other narratives, just as the engagements can be tested against those of other readers. And

where the principles or the engagements are found wanting, they can be revised. Narrative theory and interpretation are both collective enterprises.

A few initial notes on terminology. First, given past taxonomies of narration, I want to explain why I use the term "character narration" rather than the more common "first-person narration" or narratology's more specialized "homodiegetic narration." "First-person narration" is, as Genette points out, insufficiently precise because any narrator, regardless of the grammatical person used to refer to the protagonist, can say "I." But Genette's more precise terms have not caught on beyond the field of narratology; they have simply proven to be infelicitous coinages for most other contemporary critics in the United States. Indeed, experience has taught me that these terms have the unfortunate effect of making the eyes of non-narratologists glaze over—or, if used in combination with other narratological neologisms ("there's a paralipsis in the proleptic homodiegesis"), making some think they should call 911. I have adopted "character narration" and "noncharacter narration" as a way to combine Genette's greater precision with a more user-friendly set of terms. At the same time, I realize that my term "character narration" can be seen as including a set of narratives that I have defined as outside the scope of this book: those in which the protagonist, the narrator, and the narratee are all the same figure and in which the narrator addresses himself with the second-person pronoun. Although I believe that some of the principles I articulate here are relevant to such narratives, I also believe that the effects of such narratives are different enough from the character narration I analyze here to deserve their own study.

Second, I have found it desirable, for the sake of precision and for ease of reference, to employ a cadre of other technical terms. Some of these are from narratology, some are from my previous efforts in the rhetorical analysis of narrative, and some are fresh coinages for this effort. When I have found it necessary to devise a new term, I have tried to make it both descriptive and user-friendly. But I remain aware of the paradox of a specialized vocabulary: even as it makes possible precise and efficient discussion among those who already share or easily adopt it, such a vocabulary runs the risk of shutting others, especially newcomers, out of the conversation. In order to counter this risk, I have included a glossary of key terms at the end of the book.

During the many years that I have been living with this book, I have done a lot of telling about it, and I have benefited greatly from responses to that telling. I am grateful to lecture audiences at Northern Illinois

University, the University of Louisville, the University of Maryland, Hamilton College, the University of Toronto, and the College English Associations of Indiana and of Ohio for good-spirited questions and comments that have made me think harder about my theoretical constructs and my engagements with the narratives. I am indebted to audiences at the annual Society for the Study of Narrative Literature conferences, and especially to the participants in the Contemporary Narratology seminars, for their numerous helpful questions and comments. I have learned greatly from conversations with students in graduate seminars at Ohio State University and the University of Toronto, and from working with Elizabeth Preston as she did her dissertation on "homodiegesis." My research assistants, Molly Youngkin and James Weaver, have been consistently conscientious and good-humored regardless of the task I assigned them, and James deserves most of the credit for the index. I have had helpful conversations about parts of the book with more individuals than I can mention here, but I want to single out Brian McHale, David Richter, David Herman, Wayne Booth, James Battersby, Brian Corman, Melba Cuddy-Keane, Linda Hutcheon, and especially Harry Shaw for their willingness to listen and support my various tellings about it. My creative writing colleagues, Michelle Herman and Lee Martin, offered helpful readings of chapters 2 and 4 respectively. Another creative writer, Kyoko Mori, has given perceptive feedback on many of my ideas about both the fictional and nonfictional narratives I discuss. Emma Kafalenos helped me formulate the distinction between disclosure functions and narrator functions. Leigh Gilmore productively engaged with my analysis of *The Kiss*. Mary Pat Martin, who taught *The Remains of the Day* at the same time as I did, engaged me in a weeks-long conversation in person and via e-mail about the novel that we eventually transformed into a major section of chapter 1 and that remains a highlight of my teaching career. Peter J. Rabinowitz has listened to more of my telling about this book than anyone else, and he has always responded with generosity, trenchant questions, helpful disagreements, and specific suggestions. Peter embodies the ideal of rhetorical reading.

Finally, as a small recognition of my great good fortune to live and tell—and observe and listen and love—in their company, I dedicate this book to my wife, Betty Menaghan, and to my children, Katie and Michael.

Earlier versions of certain chapters have previously appeared in print, and though I have often made substantial revisions in this material, I am grateful for permission from the publishers to draw on it here.

"Charlie Marlow, Character-Narrator, Discourses on 'Youth.'" *College English* 59 (1997): 569–75. Copyright 1997 by the National Council of Teachers of English. Reprinted with permission.

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"Redundant Telling, Preserving the Mimetic, and the Functions of Character Narration." *Narrative* 9 (2001): 210–16. Reprinted by permission of the Ohio State University Press.

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Living to Tell about It

Was I right to lie to the Intended? I still don't know how to answer that question; all I know is that at that moment I couldn't tell her the truth. When you get a suspicious character—a *toujours déjà* suspicious character—telling a story in which he's not fully aware of or fully in control of the ethical judgments, you'll have the kind of controversies we have about *Heart of Darkness*.

"Once again I've gone on too long. Next time I promise to shut up and listen to one of you. Pass the whiskey."

We nodded, each thinking our own thoughts about our own suspicious narrations, and each, I'm sure, sufficiently suspicious of Marlow's not to believe his last promise.

Glossary

This glossary seeks to define, with clarity and concision, the set of terms and concepts fundamental to my conception of narrative as rhetoric in general and to my ideas about character narration in particular. In most cases, there are fuller discussions of these concepts in the preceding chapters, though in a few cases those discussions presume an understanding of the definitions offered here. My definitions of narratological terms such as *paralipsis* and *paralepsis* are inflected by my commitment to the rhetorical approach; for more formal narratological definitions, see Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*. For fuller discussions of many of the terms and their related concepts, see the forthcoming *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, edited by David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan.

addressee The audience to whom an utterance is directed. When the source of the utterance is the narrator, the addressee is the narratee; when the source is the implied author, the addressee is the implied reader or authorial audience; when the source is the flesh-and-blood author, the addressee is the flesh-and-blood audience.

authorial audience The hypothetical, ideal audience for whom the implied author constructs the text and who understands it perfectly. The authorial audience of fiction, unlike the narrative audience (defined below), operates with the tacit knowledge that the characters and events are synthetic constructs rather than real people and historical happenings.

authorial intention The meaning and purpose of an utterance as designed by its implied author. It is much easier to define the term than to identify all the different stances critics and theorists have taken toward the concept.

autodiegetic narration The telling of a story by its protagonist. See also *character narration; homodiegetic narration; heterodiegetic narration.*

axes of communication A metaphor designed to indicate that implied authors and narrators typically make three distinct kinds of communication to their respective audiences, each of which corresponds to one of the narrator's three main functions: (1) the axis of facts, characters, and events, which corresponds to the reporting function; (2) the axis of perception or understanding, which corresponds to the reading (or interpreting) function; and (3) the axis of ethics and evaluation, which corresponds to the regarding (or evaluating) function.

character An element of narrative that has three simultaneous components—the *mimetic* (character is like a person); the *thematic* (any character is representative of one or more groups and functions in one way or another to advance the narrative's thematic concerns); the *synthetic* (character plays a specific role in the construction of narrative as made object).

character narration Narration in fiction or nonfiction by a participant in the story events.

coduction The production of interpretation or evaluation through conversation with other readers.

cultural narrative A story that circulates frequently and widely among the members of a culture; its author, rather than being a clearly identified individual, is a larger collective entity, at least some significant subgroup of society. Cultural narratives typically become formulas that underlie specific narratives whose authors we can identify, and these narratives can vary across a spectrum from totally conforming to the formula to totally inverting it.

dialogism The presence of multiple voices within a narrative and the relationships among them. See also *double-voicing*.

dimensions and **functions** The attributes of a character that create the potential for signification within the progression are dimensions. The realization of that potential creates functions. On the mimetic level, an attribute is a trait; when one trait combines with others to form a portrait of a possible person, that mimetic dimension is participating in a mimetic function. On the thematic level, an attribute is a trait considered as representative (e.g., a character's race) or as an idea (e.g., a character's belief in the supernatural); when the progression turns in some way on the presence of this trait, then it is being thematized, or, more formally, the thematic dimension becomes a thematic function. On the synthetic level, dimensions are always functions because dimensions are always already parts of the construction of the narrative. The synthetic functions can, however, be more or less foregrounded; in realistic narrative, they tend to remain in the background; in metafictional narrative, they tend to move to the foreground.

disclosure functions and **narrator functions** The two *telling functions* available to the implied author, each identifying a different track of communication. Disclosure functions refer to the communication along the track from the narrator to the authorial audience, while narrator functions refer to the communication along the track from the narrator to the narratee. Character narration is an art of indirection because the implied author must use the narrator to communicate with the authorial audience and the narrator is unaware of that audience. This situation occasionally leads to conflicts between the disclosure and the narrator functions, and in such conflicts the disclosure functions will typically take precedence over the narrator functions.

discourse The set of devices for telling a story, including vision or focalization (who perceives), voice (who speaks), duration (how long it takes something to be told), frequency (whether something is told in singulative or iterative manner), and speed (how much story time is covered by a stretch of discourse). In structuralist narratology, discourse is regarded as the "how" of narrative, distinct from the "what"—character, event, and setting.

distance The relation between the norms of an implied author and those of a narrator. Distance will always be greater in unreliable narration than in reliable narration. In some autobiography, there is no distance and, consequently, some theorists say that in such narratives the implied author and the narrator are identical. I believe, however, that the distinction between the implied author and the narrator is worth maintaining even in such cases because it allows us to differentiate between the agent who designs the entire text, including the narrator, and the agent who reports, interprets, and evaluates the events of the narrative.

double-voicing The presence of (at least) two voices in one utterance. In unreliable narration, for example, we hear both the narrator's voice and the implied author's voice undermining the narrator's.

dual focalization A narrative situation in which the perceptions of two agents are communicated simultaneously; the most relevant situation for character narration involves a narrator perceiving his former self's perceptions.

elliptical narration A narrator's report that leaves a gap that the narrator and the implied author expect their audiences to fill. Elliptical narration can be either reliable or unreliable.

fabula The what of narrative before it is rendered in discourse; the sequence of events in chronological order.

focalization The answer to the question "who is perceiving?" in narrative discourse. Genette noted that the term "point of view" conflated two distinct aspects of narrative discourse: voice (the answer to the question "who is speaking?") and vision or focalization. Since Genette's identification of the concept, narratologists have been debating how best to describe it and account for its effects.

heterodiegetic Genette's term for what I call noncharacter narration—narration in which the narrator exists at a different level of existence from the characters.

homodiegetic Genette's term for what I call character narration—narration in which the narrator exists at the same level of existence as the characters. When the character narrator is also the protagonist, homodiegetic narration can be further specified as autodiegetic. All nonfiction narration is homodiegetic.

ideal narrative audience The hypothetical, ideal audience for whom the narrator is telling the story. See also *narratee; narrative audience.*

implied author The streamlined version of the real author, an actual or purported subset of the real author's traits and abilities. The implied author is responsible for the choices that create the narrative text as "these words in this order" and that imbue the text with his or her values. One important activity of rhetorical reading is constructing a sense of the implied author.

implied reader The audience for whom the implied author writes; synonymous with the authorial audience.

instabilities and **tensions** Unstable situations upon which narrative progressions are built. Narrative moves by the generation, complication, and (sometimes) resolution of instabilities and tensions. An instability is an unstable situation within the story: it may be between or among characters; between a character and his or her world; or within a single character. A tension is an unstable situation within the discourse, consisting typically of a discrepancy in knowledge, judgments, values, or beliefs between narrator and authorial audience or between implied author and authorial audience.

lyricality That which makes a given text a lyric. The rhetorical approach identifies two aspects of lyricality: a textual and a readerly dynamics. It further identifies two main kinds of textual dynamics: (1) somebody telling somebody else on some occasion for some purpose that something is—a situation, an emotion, a perception, an attitude, a belief; (2) somebody telling somebody else on some occasion about his or her meditations on something. The most important part of the readerly dynamics is that the authorial audience participates in the speaker's perspective rather than observing it from the outside and judging it.

mask narration Character narration in which the character narrator is not only a reliable spokesperson for the implied author but also serves as an effective means for conveying the implied author's views along the axes of perception/understanding or of ethics/evaluation.

mimetic/mimesis Mimetic refers, first, to that component of character directed to its imitation of a possible person. It refers, second, to that component of fictional narrative concerned with imitating the world beyond the fiction, what we typically call "reality." Mimesis refers to the process by which the mimetic effect is produced, the set of conventions, which change over time, by which imitations are judged to be more or less adequate.

narratee The audience directly addressed by the narrator; the narratee may or may not coincide with the ideal narrative audience.

narrative In rhetorical terms, the act of somebody telling somebody else on a particular occasion for some purpose that something happened.

narrative audience The observer role within the world of the fiction, taken on by the flesh-and-blood reader in that part of his or her consciousness which treats the fictional action as real. The narrative audience position, like the narratee position, is subsumed within the authorial audience position.

narrativity That which makes a text a narrative. The rhetorical approach identifies two aspects of narrativity, a textual and a readerly dynamics. The textual dynamics involves the representation of a sequence of related events during which the characters and/or their situations undergo some *change.* The readerly dynamics involves the authorial audience's role as observer and judge of the characters and events in that sequence.

narratology The theoretical movement, rooted in structuralism, whose initial goal was to define the essence of narrative as a mode of discourse, to describe its fundamental structure, and to delineate the nature of its particular elements—author, narrator, narratee, character, event, setting, and so on. Over time these goals have been modified as narratology has interacted with other developments in critical theory including feminism, psychoanalysis, and rhetorical approaches.

narrator The teller of the story.

narrator functions See *disclosure functions* and *narrator functions.*

observer narration Narration by a character narrator other than the protagonist.

paralepsis A device in which a narrator's discourse reflects a greater knowledge than he or she could presumably have—in other words, a device in which the narrator tells more than he or she knows.

paralipsis A device in which a narrator's discourse does not reflect his or her full relevant knowledge—in other words, a device in which the narrator tells less than he or she knows.

portraiture That which makes a text a character sketch. The rhetorical approach identifies two aspects to portraiture, a textual and a readerly dynamics. The textual dynamics is most clearly seen in one kind of dramatic monologue, where the speaker's telling progresses according to the logic of the dramatic situation, while the audience's understanding progresses toward a deeper knowledge and understanding of the speaker. The readerly dynamics involves the audience in the role of external observer of the speaker, but that role involves comprehending and contemplating the character rather than judging him or her.

progression The movement of a narrative from beginning to end, and the principles governing that movement. Progression exists along two si-

multaneous axes: the internal logic of the narrative text and the set of responses that logic generates in the authorial audience as it reads from beginning to end. Though this description focuses on the movement of narrative through time from beginning to end, a concern with progression is more than a concern with narrative as a linear process, precisely because it recognizes the dynamic, recursive relationships among the authorial audience's understanding of beginning, middle, and end.

redundant telling A narrator's apparently unmotivated report of information to a narratee that the narratee already possesses. The motivation for redundant telling typically resides in the implied author's need to communicate information to the audience, and so it can also be described with the longer phrase *redundant telling, necessary disclosure.* In redundant telling, the disclosure functions take precedence over the narrator functions of the narration.

reliable narration Reliable narration is that in which the narrator's reporting, reading (or interpreting), and regarding (or evaluating) are in accord with the perspective and norms of the implied author.

restricted narration A technique marked by an implied author's limiting a narrator to only one function or axis of communication—reporting, reading, or regarding—while requiring the authorial audience to make inferences about communication along at least one of the other axes as well. Restricted narration may be either reliable or unreliable.

serial narration The use of multiple narrators, each taking turns, to tell the tale.

sjuzhet The fabula rendered in a specific narrative discourse; the synthesis of story and discourse.

story The what of narrative: character, events, and setting are parts of story; the events in chronological order constitute the story abstracted from the discourse.

suppressed narration The omission of significant information that the narrative itself otherwise indicates is relevant to the character, situation, or event being reported on, thereby creating either a gap in the text that cannot be filled or a discrepancy between what is reported in one place and not reported in another.

synthetic That component of character directed to its role as artificial construct in the larger construction of the text; more generally, the constructedness of a text as an object.

telling functions The communicative functions between the teller(s) and the receiver(s) of narrative. There are two kinds of telling functions, one referring to the communicative track between the narrator and the narratee called narrator functions, and the other referring to the track between the implied author and the authorial audience called disclosure functions. Sometimes the functions reinforce each other, but occasionally they conflict. See also *disclosure functions* and *narrator functions.*

thematic That component of character directed to its representative or ideational function; more generally, that component of a narrative text concerned with making statements, taking ideological positions, teaching readers truths.

unreliable narration Narration in which the narrator's reporting, reading (or interpreting), and/or regarding (or evaluating) are not in accord with the implied author's. There are six main types of unreliable narration: misreporting, misreading, and misregarding; underreporting, underreading, and underregarding. The two main groups can be differentiated by the activity they require on the part of the authorial audience: with the first group—misreporting, misreading, and misregarding—the audience must reject the narrator's words and reconstruct an alternative; with the second group—underreporting, underreading, and underregarding—the audience must supplement the narrator's view.

voice (1) in structuralist narratology, the answer to the question "who is speaking?" in narrative discourse; (2) in a rhetorical approach, the term also can refer to the synthesis of a speaker's style, tone, and values.

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Index