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Narrative Voice, Omniscience, and Metafiction: an analysis of Michael Cunningham's *Day*

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Day is the latest novel by American fiction writer Michael Cunningham, author of eight novels and numerous short stories and winner of the 1999 Pulitzer Prize and PEN/Faulkner Award for *The Hours*, who now teaches Creative Writing at Yale University ("The Hours, by Michael Cunningham (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)"; "Past Award Winners & Finalists | The PEN/Faulkner Foundation"; "Michael Cunningham | English"). In this thesis I will study *Day* from a narratological perspective with a particular focus on narrative voice and metafiction, and I will make two broad claims: first, that Cunningham's novel is an instance of contemporary omniscient narration, and second, that it uses, somewhat paradoxically, metafiction (specifically, *mise en abyme*) to emotionally connect with readers. The first part of this thesis is dedicated to the study of *Day*'s narrator and to the complexities of his narrative voice and textual presence, while the second part focuses on the use of metafiction and of *mise en abyme* in the novel[1].

I will begin the first part by outlining the major theoretical debates around the concept of narrative voice and focalization, starting with the classical narratological categories of Gérard Genette and Franz K. Stanzel and continuing to illustrate the more recent opposition between supporters of the "dual voice" theory and those of the "optional narrator" theory. I will then apply some of the concepts delineated in ch. 3 (e.g., Genette's categories of narrative voice and focalization and Dorrit Cohn's techniques for the representation of figural consciousness) to investigate the figure of the narrator in *Day* and how his presence can be felt on a textual level, despite its covertness. For this purpose, I will concentrate on the use of *free indirect*

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[1] Though no mention is made of the narrator's gender in the novel, I will address him in the masculine form throughout this thesis for two main reasons: first, because I intend to personalize him as an "anthropomorphic narrative instance" (Gebauer 35) following the classical and dual voice theory conception of the narrator (the neutral pronoun *it* being too impersonal for this purpose), and secondly, because I follow Susan Lanser's claim (*Fictions of Authority*, 1992) that omniscient narratives invite readers to "equate the narrator with the author" due to their implicitly becoming the narratee (Dawson 58-9).

discourse (also known as FID) in Cunningham's novel, as well as on the presence of expressive stylistic features and organizing agency that betray the audibility of the narrator, drawing extensively on Dorrit Cohn's *Transparent Minds* (1978) and on Richard Aczel's notion of "stylistic expressivity" presented in "Hearing Voices in Narrative Texts" (1998), along with Paul Dawson's research contained in *The Return of the Omniscient Narrator* (2013). The study of these features of narratorial presence in *Day* are accompanied by detailed close readings of numerous examples, which are numbered and mostly grouped under the subchapters "Textual Examples."

In chapter 5, I will connect the results of this first analysis of *Day*'s narrator with Paul Dawson's study of contemporary omniscience, illustrating his categorization of omniscient narration "modes" and his discursive approach to narratology before applying some of his categories to the study of *Day*. Based on his definition of narrative omniscience, which is grounded on aspects such as "intrusiveness" and zero focalization, I argue that *Day*'s narrator can be classified as *omniscient* in the contemporary sense that Dawson illustrates in his book (i.e., an omniscience that reflects knowledge of postmodern techniques but that employs them for post-postmodern "humanist" purposes), and I will demonstrate this by studying textual examples of the narrator's intrusive commentary, superior knowledge (e.g., prolepses and analepses), distinctive speech style, and control over the focalization in the novel. The final section of this part will investigate the extent to which Dawson's theory of contemporary omniscient narration can explain the narration of Cunningham's novel: I will compare his "modes" with Monika Fludernik's "new type of nonnatural narration" outlined in "New Wine in Old Bottles?" (2001), and raise the question of whether *Day* might not be a unique expression of contemporary omniscience altogether, different from all the theorizations considered until now.

The second part of this thesis seeks to study the way metafiction is used in the novel, specifically how it connects to the narrator's voice and to the character of Wolfe and the possible purpose behind its employment. My argument for the presence of metafiction in *Day* relies on a re-conceptualization of the story's narrative structure that posits the first chapter as a prologue, anticipating and setting the "tone" for the rest of the story, and the actual story to begin on the second chapter. This claim will be supported by an in-depth analysis of the opening chapter, after which I will proceed to illustrate the figure of Wolfe in the novel, a unique character who, though introduced as "less real" than the other characters (he is a fictional creation of the siblings Isabel and Robbie), exerts a tangible presence in the storyworld as well as on the narrative structure of the book.

The character of Wolfe is strongly connected to social media and to the narrator's voice (especially in the transcription of his Instagram posts), and I argue, following my previous claim regarding the opening chapter, that he frames the story of *Day* (i.e., he opens and closes it) and thus contributes to the establishment of a *mise en abyme* of fiction writing in the novel. Due to his intimate connection with Instagram, I argue that Wolfe acts as a spatio-temporal gate connecting readers with the fictional storyworld and making them reflect on the artificial nature of Cunningham's novel, as well as of social media. As Patricia Waugh theorizes in *Metafiction* (1984), metafiction wants to "explore the relationship between the world *of* the fiction and the world *outside* the fiction" (3): I argue that Michael Cunningham wants to draw attention to the artificiality of fiction writing in order to make readers reflect on contemporary U.S. society and way of living, characterized by the ubiquitous presence of modern communication technologies, fragmenting human communication across multiple media, and of social media blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction and allowing for fictitious versions of people to exist alongside real ones, in much the same way Robbie exists alongside Wolfe.

The influence of communication technologies in the novel is exemplified by the frequent insertion (preponderant in Part Two) of different media in the narration (e.g., letters, emails, text messages, notebook entries, phone calls, etc.) and reflects the contemporary trend of the "medialization of narrative fiction" (Gebauer 314), first theorized by Ansgar Nünning and Jan Rupp in 2011 (*Medialisierung des Erzählens*). Furthermore, Gebauer's *Making Time* (2022) will prove central in identifying Michael Cunningham's *Day* as a contemporary present-tense novel, both for its use of the fictional present as the dominant tense of narration, as well as for its reflection of contemporary society's cultural landscape shaped by the new media and communication technologies and characterized by a simultaneous understanding of time (Gebauer 311-17).

2. Book Overview

Before proceeding with the research outlined in the Introduction, I will make some observations on the general structure of the book and on the plot of the story which will provide the base for my subsequent analysis of Michael Cunningham's novel.

Day is a relatively short work of fiction, counting 278 pages, experimental in its structure: the story is divided into three main parts, each denoting a specific year in the life of the characters, and seventy-two untitled "chapters" which can be identified only because they start on a fresh page, a few inches from the top. The novel follows the life of a modern-day New York family through three years of their life (specifically, 2019, 2020, and 2021) and the changes they have to endure during the Covid-19 pandemic, a central event in the lives of the characters which, however, is never explicitly referred to in the text—one can infer that the characters are living through the pandemic only from contextual clues and from situations (such as isolation and forced seclusion in one's own home) every reader who experienced it can relate to[2] (Crain). The story unfolds on two independent but coexisting temporal planes: the first is tied to a single day, April 5 (divided into morning, afternoon, and evening), while the second temporal plane covers the years from 2019 through 2021. *Day* is thus divided into "April 5, 2019: Morning" (pre-pandemic), "April 5, 2020: Afternoon" (mid-pandemic), and "April 5, 2021: Evening" (post-pandemic)[3], so that by the end of the story one has followed one single day as well as three whole years in the characters' life.

To facilitate the analysis of Cunningham's novel, I decided to refer to the various untitled subsections as numbered "chapters" and to specify their page numbers (e.g., "chapter 9, 43-49"). It is important to keep in mind, however, that the author did not provide any type

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[2] The author himself was interrupted in his writing of *Day* by the global outbreak of Covid-19 and decided to include the experience of the pandemic in the novel (Clark).

[3] I will refer to these sections as "Part One," "Part Two," and "Part Three" in my thesis.

of heading or distinguishing titles in the novel other than "April 5, 2019: Morning" (covering ch. 1 through ch. 25), "April 5, 2020: Afternoon" (ch. 26 through ch. 52), and "April 5, 2021: Evening" (ch. 53 through ch. 72), and that therefore he did not intend for readers to be able to easily orient themselves on the page and in the story. On the contrary, I argue that Cunningham's aim is to create a fast-paced reading experience and to make readers feel as if everything they read happens almost simultaneously (a feeling strengthened by the use of the present tense and of techniques such as quoted interior monologues).

The family portrayed in *Day* counts eight members in total: Isabel and Dan with their two kids, Nathan and Violet, could be seen the traditional familial "nucleus," which then expands to include Isabel's brother Robbie and Dan's brother Garth, along with Garth's newborn son Odin and Chess, Odin's biological mother. Isabel Walker is a senior photo editor at a declining magazine who, at the beginning of the story, is going through a crisis both about her job and her motherhood, while her husband Dan Byrne is a recovering drug-addict and former rockstar who is striving to make a comeback in the music industry. Nathan and Violet are ten and five years old, respectively, and they are portrayed in the novel as they face the challenges of growing up during the pandemic and dealing with personal loss. Isabel's brother Robbie has a very intimate relationship with the Walker-Byrne family, often taking care of the children while the adults are at work: he is a thirty-seven-year-old sixth-grade teacher who lives in his sister's attic in Brooklyn, and who recently broke up with his last boyfriend, but who is ready to take some steps towards changing his life. Dan's brother Garth, on the other hand, is an experimental sculptor aspiring for fame and with a complicated relationship with his friend Chess, a university literature professor who recently gave birth to his child, named Odin, through artificial insemination.

One of the most important themes explored by Cunningham in this novel is the complexity of human and family relationships, specifically those between parents and children

and those between siblings. These relationships are represented in their unique combination of love and hate, loyalty and envy, a mixture of opposing emotions that is visible in Isabel's relationship with Robbie, Dan's relationship with Garth, and Nathan's relationship with Violet. Conflicting parent-child relations are exemplified by Violet and Nathan's relationship with Isabel and Dan, as well as by the quick glimpses of the Walker and Byrne siblings' relationships with their parents, while the implications of motherhood are explored in Chess' and Isabel's reflections about their children. Feelings of loneliness and isolation (especially during the pandemic), self-doubt, and the pain of dealing with the loss of a loved one (i.e., Robbie, who will succumb to the virus while isolated in Iceland) are also themes which feature prominently in the novel, and which all the characters must deal with in their own way.

In *Day*, the reader has access to each character's deepest thoughts and feelings, doubts and desires, in such a way that, coupled with an apparently effaced narrator, produces the impression of the novel being governed by internal focalization (i.e., with narrative information restricted to each character's limited point of view). Each chapter roughly coincides with a specific character's focalization, portraying their personal thoughts and events of the story from their perspective, although the novel also features a significant number of instances in which this seemingly regular patters is broken. All the characters' perspectives are represented in *Day*, though not all in equal measure: in fact, it could be said that Isabel and Robbie's consciousnesses and related events feature more prominently than the other characters' and that they represent the driving force of the whole story. In Part One (i.e., April 5, 2019), Robbie's perspective is represented so often that it creates the illusion he might be the narrator of the story (it is from his recounting of events that readers learn of the Walker-Byrne family history and of the different characters' idiosyncrasies), while the story from Part Two will increasingly focus on Isabel's thoughts and be influenced by her decisions in life (e.g., divorcing from Dan, moving to the country side, etc.). The Walker siblings could be said to be the protagonists of

Day's story, who are bound to each other by a strong love that will survive even after death, as well as by a secret imaginary friend called Wolfe. Wolfe is Isabel and Robbie's childhood imaginary friend who they recreated on Instagram through a decoupage of other people's photos: he is often described as being "not real" and fictitious, yet with time his presence becomes tangible in the characters' lives as he helps them to rationalize and overcome difficulties (e.g., Robbie's breakup with Oliver, his isolation in Iceland, or Isabel's grief over the loss of her brother).

During the course of the story, all the characters evolve and go through significant changes in their lives: Robbie will move to his aunt Zara's mountain cabin Iceland (where he will remain during the pandemic) with the intention of going back to medical school when he returns to the U.S., but he will die there of Covid-19, an event all the characters will deal with in Part Three of the novel. Isabel, who initially felt "trapped" by her family life, her marriage, and her profession, will decide to move to the countryside after her brother's death and to divorce Dan, who does not experience the musical comeback he so intensely desired, starts teaching music, and ultimately falls back into his addiction after the separation from Isabel. Nathan and Violet both grow up and start reflecting, each in their own way, on their lives and their personal relationships: towards the end of the story, Nathan is experiencing the first signs of puberty alongside feelings of guilt and depression in response to Dan and Violet's getting sick and Robbie's death, while Violet becomes more introspective and seems to develop a sensibility to supernatural forces and beings. Chess will have to manage raising Odin in the confinement of her home, while also teaching her students online and having to deal with Garth's desire to become part of their "family": the novel ends with Chess reflecting on her relationship with the men in her life and on the difficulty of escaping "the marriage narrative" (Cunningham 86) while Garth, who in Part Three will become famous for his *Hamlet* sculpture, expresses his love for her and his desire to create a family with her and Odin.

3. Narrative Voice and Focalization

3.1 Classical and Postclassical Narratology

The concept of narrative voice is one of the most debated concepts in the field of narratology, the branch of literary studies dedicated to the study of narrative that developed in the 1960s and '70s from the encounter of the Anglo-American critical tradition with European formalist and structuralist approaches to literary theory, and is also the starting point for this thesis' study of *Day*'s narratorial presence (Dawson 44; Britannica, Narratology). The end of the twentieth century, characterized by the development of new narratological schools of thought, has brought about a confusion around the term "voice" which contributes to the current scholarly debates on the role and functions of narrative—specifically narratorial—voice in fictional texts. In this chapter I will outline the historical development of the study of narrative voice and of its relationship to the concept of "focalization," from its structuralist origins to the current debate between "dual voice theory" and "optional narrator theory," and lay the theoretical and terminological basis necessary to my subsequent study of *Day*'s narrative voice.

The first scholar to have written about the concept of "voice" in narrative texts is Gérard Genette, a French literary critic who is considered one of the "founding fathers" of narratology and who inspired much of the research around this topic of the following decades. Genette is a representative, along with scholars such as Tzvetan Todorov, Roland Barthes, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, of literary structuralism, a movement that stems from the linguistic conceptualization of language as "a system of signs and signification, the elements of which are understandable only in relation to each other and to the system." When applied to the study of literary texts, structuralism denies the idea that literature reflects reality and instead views texts as a system of "linguistic conventions" that are "situated among other texts" ("Structuralism"). The influence of "structuralist linguistics" on narratology is reflected, as Paul Dawson writes in *The*

Return of the Omniscient Narrator (2013), in narratology's desire to "identify a grammar of narrative fiction of which novels are particular manifestations" (44).

Genette discusses the characteristics of narrative voice in his *Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method*, one of the most influential books for the development of narratology, originally published in French as *Discours du récit* (1972) and translated in English in 1980 by Jane E. Lewin. As he wrote in the "Preface" to his work, the purpose of *Narrative Discourse* is to study the intricacies of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* and to propose a "method of analysis" that adopts the grammatical categories of verbs to study narratives (Genette 23). *Narrative*, for Genette, specifically refers to the "signifier" of a text (the "statement, discourse or narrative text itself"), while the *story* is the "signified" (the "narrative content") and the *narrating* is the "producing narrative action" (and "by extension, the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place") (27). He considers *story* and *narrating* only as intermediaries of the *narrative* and wants to study the relationship between them: "Analysis of narrative discourse will thus be for me, essentially, a study of the relationships between narrative and story, between narrative and narrating, and (to the extent that they are inscribed in the narrative discourse) between story and narrating" (29).

Genette's *Narrative Discourse* was innovative in the development of narratology for two main reasons: first, he separated the author (the writing instance) from the narrator ("the narrating instance"), and second, he distinguished between "voice" and "focalization" [4] (Dawson 44). The book is divided into three main parts: one studying "tense" (any temporal relation between "narrative and story"), which comprises the chapters "Order," "Duration," and "Frequency," another studying "mood" (i.e., the "modalities [forms and degrees] of narrative 'representation'"), and the last one studying "voice" (i.e., ("the way in which the

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[4] In Genette's words, between "mood" and "voice," or, "more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*". (186)

narrating itself is implicated in the narrative"). In the fifth and last chapter Genette defines

voice by adapting Vendryès' definition of the grammatical category (i.e., "Mode of action of

the verb in its relations with the subject"), featured in *Petit Robert* dictionary (31), to narratives,

and connects it to "the generating instance of narrative discourse, an instance for which we

have reserved the parallel term *narrating*" (213). In this chapter he analyzes different aspects

of narrative voice and identifies three main "categories" to study it in narrative texts: the time

of narrating, the level of narrating, and the person. In "Time of the Narrating" he distinguishes

between "four types of narrating": *subsequent*, *prior*, *simultaneous*, and *interpolated* (217); in

"Narrative Levels" he identifies three levels, the *extradiegetic* (outside the *diegesis*, i.e., the

story), the *intradiegetic* (inside the *diegesis*), and the *metadiegetic* (the level of "second-degree"

narratives, which are "inserted" into the first narrative), from which the narrating instance

narrates (228-29); in "Person" he distinguishes between *heterodiegetic* (when the narrator is

"absent from the story he tells") and *homodiegetic* narrators (when he is "present as a character

in the story he tells"), the latter including the subcategory of *autodiegetic* (i.e., when the

narrator is "the hero of his narrative" and not a secondary character) (244-45)[5].

To summarize, Genette understands narrative voice in terms of "where (level) and when

(the time of narrating) in relation to the story the narrator (person) is narrating from" (Dawson

49). One aspect that is important to underline is the fact that Genette explicitly adheres to the

linguistic communicational model[6], which presupposes the presence of an "addresser" sending

a message to an "addressee" (Dawson 223), and applies it to written texts. He believes that

narrative discourse "can only be such to the extent that it tells a story, without which it would

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[5] In the field of narratology, *homodiegetic* is often used to describe the narrator of first-person narratives, while *heterodiegetic* describes the narrator of third-person narratives.
[6] The linguistic model of verbal communication was first theorized by Roman Jakobsen in 1960, in the "Closing statements" of Thomas A. Sebeok's *Style in Language*. Narrative theory adopted this communicational model and "incorporated Genette's narrator, Gerald Prince's narratee, and Booth's implied author and the reader he "makes" (named by Iser as the implied reader) to facilitate the study of narrative communication." The narrative communicational model that derived is best represented by Seymour Chatman's 1978 diagram from *Story and Discourse* (Dawson 223).

not be narrative … and to the extent that it is uttered by someone, without which … it would not in itself be a discourse" (Genette 29). This is why Genette, according to Monika Fludernik in "'New Wine in Old Bottles?'" tends to assume the presence of a narrator in the text, and, when the speaker function is not clear, conflates him with the author. Fludernik, as I will explain more in detail in ch. 3.3, considers the "application of the communicational model to narrative *texts*" to be inherently limiting to the study of narrative and criticizes Genette's understanding of narrative voice as, ultimately, a reflection of "the voice of the *author*, the actual transmitter of the narrative *qua* message" (622). The narrator, as Dawson points out, is seen as an "instrument" to convey the author's intentions regarding the narrative (198), but nevertheless occupies a central place in Genette's conceptualization of narrative communication as the "generating instance" of narrative discourse (Genette 231).

As was mentioned earlier, one of Genette's main contributions to the development of narrative studies is the distinction between "voice" and "focalization," i.e., between who *speaks* and who *sees*. While voice is more connected to the "identity of the narrator" (186), focalization is defined in the chapter "Mood" (under "Perspective") as a "mode of regulating [narrative] information" corresponding to Cleanth Brooks and Robert P. Warren's "focus of narration,"[7] a term he prefers to the "too specifically visual connotations of the terms *vision*, *field*, and *point of view*" (189). In the sub-chapter "Focalizations," Genette describes the three conventionally accepted modes of restricting information and assigns them new names: *nonfocalized* or *zero focalization* refers to narratives with an omniscient narrator ("where the narrator knows more than the character, or more exactly *says* more than any of the characters knows") typical of "the classical narrative"; *internal focalization* refers to narratives in which the information is restricted to the knowledge of one specific character (it can vary between *fixed*, *variable*, or

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[7] The term appears in *Understanding Fiction* (1943, New York: Crofts) (Genette 271).

multiple), and *external focalization* refers to narratives in which the narrator "says less than the character knows" (i.e., "the 'objective' or 'behaviorist' narrative'") (189).

Genette's theory of focalization was most famously revisited by the Dutch scholar and artist Mieke Bal who, as she writes in her article "The Narrating and the Focalizing: A Theory of the Agents in Narrative,"[8] identified some "problems" in it (246). First, as Dorrit Cohn points out in "The Encirclement of Narrative," Bal argues that Genette's zero focalization should be subsumed under external focalization since they only differ in terms of their "object" (i.e., the ability to know the mind of the characters) and not their "subject" (175; c.f. Bal 243-45), and secondly, she declares the "theoretical necessity" to further distinguish between "the focalizer (the subject of perception) and the focalized (the object of perception)" (Dawson 46). Bal's "focalizer," as Dawson writes, "can be attached to a narrator who is external to the storyworld, or to a character who is within the story world," and focalization can either be "from without, centering on observable action, or from within, centering on character's thoughts" (46).

Another scholar who greatly contributed to narrative studies and who is regarded as Genette's German counterpart is Franz Karl Stanzel, the author of *A Theory of Narrative* (1984, originally published as *Theorie des Erzählens* in 1982) and of the typological circle of narrative situations. Stanzel was criticized by Genette in *Narrative Discourse* as being among the scholars who confused voice (who speaks) with focalization (who sees), along with Norman Friedman, Wayne Booth, and Bertil Romberg (Genette 186–88), yet, according to Dorrit Cohn, he actually anticipated "some basic ideas on narrative discourse developed by the *Poétique* group over a decade later," including the distinction between "vision" (i.e., focalization) and voice (158).

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[8] This article first appeared as "Narration et focalisation" in the *1977 Narratologie: Essais sur la signification narrative dans quatre romans modernes*, and was later published in English as "The Narrating and the Focalizing: A Theory of the Agents in Narrative" in the 1983 spring issue of *Style* (Vol. 17, No. 2) (Bal 234).

In "The Encirclement of Narrative: On Franz Stanzel's Theorie des Erzählens," published in 1981 by *Poetics Today*, Cohn compares Genette's *Narrative Discourse* with Stanzel's *Theorie des Erzählens* in order to highlight the similarities underlying their seemingly opposite narrative models. Their aim, she argues, is the same: they both want to "explore narrative form (*sujet*, *discours*) in its relation to narrative content (*fabula*, *histoire*)" (159). Their approach, however, is different: while Genette is more "analytical" and tends to create categories and define "stable norms" (challenged, when they are not respected, by "transgressions"), Stanzel is more "synthetic" and his categories of "Mode," "Person," and "Perspective," with which he wants to "account for the different forms that 'mediacy of presentation' [narrative form] can take" (brackets original), are considered as "continuous ranges […] between contrastive poles" (159-161). Stanzel does not conceive of fixed and neatly separated categories, but rather of a "continuum" between "contrastive poles" which is embodied by his circular typology of narrative situations[9].

Despite their differences, Cohn argues that Stanzel's "typical narrative situations" correspond quite well to Genette's "norms" and that his separation of Mode from Perspective is "not fully justified in his system" (160). Stanzel's category of "Mode" corresponds to Genette's "Distance" and, even though the terminology is different (Stanzel identifies the "teller/reflector opposition," Stanzel 5), they both refer to Plato's ancient distinction between *mimesis* and *diegesis*, while the category of "Perspective" corresponds to Genette's "Focalization," the only difference being that Stanzel distinguishes between two instead of three types of focalization (similarly to Bal's theory of focalization, Stanzel identifies only *internal* and *external perspective*, the latter of which includes both Genette's external and zero

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[9] Stanzel's circular diagram is divided into six "sectors", three of which identify the three typical narrative situations—authorial, figural, and first-person. The other three sectors simply indicate the techniques or features that prevail in the three typical situations—free indirect speech, interior monologue, and peripheral narration, respectively. Each sector is then determined also by the Mode, Perspective, and Person boundaries (Cohn, "The Encirclement of Narrative" 162–63). A simplified version of Stanzel's circle is proposed by Dorrit Cohn in her article.

focalization). However, unlike Genette who conceives of focalization in broader terms, Stanzel's "Perspective" is limited to only two aspects of narrative, the presentation of "space" and the presentation of "consciousness," and his "perspectival approach to the presentation of consciousness" is seen by Cohn as problematic (175-79). Stanzel's category of "Person," on the other hand, conforms to Genette's in its division between *Ich-Erzählung* (i.e., first-person narration) and *Er-Erzählung* (i.e., third-person narration), Genette's *homodiegetic* and *heterodiegetic* narrators, to which he adds a further distinction between "embodied" narrators (*Ich mit Leib*), whose "voice" can be heard in first-person narration, and "disembodied" narrators, heard in authorial narration (Cohn, "The Encirclement of Narrative" 164).

Stanzel and Genette's studies of narrative forms and structures are representative of what is known as "classical narratology," the first instance of narrative studies that was born out of the structuralist and formalist schools of thought in the middle of the twentieth century. As was underlined earlier, Genette applies the linguistic communicational model to narrative texts, viewing "narrative texts as presenting a fictive communicative situation" and, as Carolin Gebauer writes in *Making Time*, presupposing "the existence of an anthropomorphic narrative instance, the narrator, addressing a fictive narratee to tell events he or she has either witnesses or experienced"[10] (35).

This idea of the communicational structure of narrative embodied by the "classical narratological paradigm," however, began to be questioned during the second half of the twentieth century due to the rise of new philosophical schools of thought (such as post-structuralism and deconstruction), scholarly fields (such as cognitive science), and aesthetics (such as postmodernism and post-postmodernism). New narratological movements known as

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[10] As Gebauer goes on to explain, "structuralist approaches to narrative thus differentiate between two ontologically distinct communicative levels of narrative texts, which Seymour Chatman (1978) labels 'story' and 'discourse'"— one pertaining the content of the narrative, the "narrative plane" of the fictive characters and events (Genette's *story*, or *histoire*), and the other pertaining the act of "narrative transmission" (Genette's *narrative*, or *récit*).

"postclassical" evolved out of classical narratology and tried to challenge its principles, especially the idea that narrative is based on real-life communicational model presupposing the existence of a person (the narrator) addressing another person (the narratee) in a communicative act (Dawson 49). As Paul Dawson writes in *The Return*, much of postclassical narratology has been driven by the need to "demonstrate that narrative fiction need not possess a narrator," embodied by Chatman's concept of "non-narrated" narratives and by Ann Banfield's "narratoreless" narratives; this need, coupled with a critical "skepticism about voice as the stylistic expression of authorial identity" and the general "theoretical and critical orientation across literary studies and within narratology toward investigating the role of readers in the construction of narrative meaning" is why postclassical narratology has been more concerned with focalization than with voice (or, rather, with "the relation between voice and focalization in the broader context of narrative perspective and mediation") (47).

The rise of postclassical schools of thought has brought about the division of narratological scholarship into two main positions: one that supports the narrative communicational model, believing that every text has a narrator like every utterance has a speaker, and one that reflects a more grammatical, linguistic approach, believing that narrators are not assignable to every text and that narratives without narrators are possible. The first position is embodied by what is known as "dual voice theory" while the second position by the "optional narrator theory", two theories that engage with the figure of the narrator in narrative fiction but that nonetheless arrive at opposite conclusions, the most important notions of which I will illustrate in the next chapters.

3.2 Dual Voice Theory and Free Indirect Discourse (FID)

Dual voice theory aligns with the idea that narratives are based on real-life communicational models and, consequently, that they must always have a narrator, "an

anthropomorphic narrative instance … addressing a fictive narratee to tell events he or she has either witnesses or experienced" (Gebauer 35). This theory is intimately connected to narrative voice and to the development of FID or "free indirect discourse" in narrative fiction (the technique to represent figural consciousness that is generally described as a character's thoughts rendered in the narrator's language), a connection that is exemplified by its claim of identifying "two voices—that of narrator and that of character—in free indirect discourse" (Aczel 476). Though the technique of FID has been amply studied over the years, its study is still characterized by a "confusion" Paul Dawson ascribes to the fact that many scholars consider it "a feature of voice," and which he believes could be resolved by studying FID as "a question of focalization" (173).

One of the earliest studies of the use of FID in the novel is represented by *The Dual Voice* (1977), a book in which Roy Pascal defines the technique of free indirect discourse and in which he lays the basis for the subsequent development of dual voice theory. In this book, Pascal describes FID as "the 'dual voice' of narrator and character" (Dawson 173), as the "reproduction of the inner processes of the character, expressed in the same syntactical form as objective narrative and embedded firmly in the narratorial account, but evoking the vivacity, the tone and gesture, of the character" (Pascal 108, qtd. in Dawson 173). FID is a critical point of departure for studying the issue of narrative voice because it is a technique that, as Dawson writes, manifests the "analytic interdependence of voice and focalization" and collapses the distinction between the two (creating confusion about *who sees* and *who speaks*) (173).

Roy Pascal's study follows the research of earlier literary critic Percy Lubbock on the importance of point of view in fiction: Lubbock was one of the first scholars to study focalization or point of view in novels and his 1921 book *The Craft of Fiction* became essential in establishing a "poetics of fiction" grounded in the modernist aesthetic. Specifically, Lubbock was influenced by the "impulse toward 'dramatization'" embodied by Henry James' writings

that fostered the modernist move away from the Victorian omniscient narrator towards a more effaced narrator (Dawson 40).

Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* and Vernon Lee's earlier essay "On Literary Construction" (1895) were both central in theorizing the aesthetic change brought about by modernism, and Lubbock's praise of the method of "showing rather than telling" over the more traditional "telling rather than showing" directly contributed to the falling out of style and eventual abandon of Victorian omniscience in the early twentieth century. The development of the technique of FID in modernist literature (especially in Jane Austen's novels) gave way to "what Flaubert called a transparent style in which the author is 'everywhere felt, but never seen'" (Finch and Bowen 3), and which is characterized by the "elision of narrative authority" that histories of the novel consider "a key feature of the move away from the intrusive presence of the omniscient narrator in Victorian fiction to the effaced presence of the narrator in modernist fiction" (Dawson 168).

One of the most influential modern publications on FID is Dorrit Cohn's 1978 *Transparent Minds*, in which she sets out to identify the major techniques used by fiction writers to portray the consciousness of their characters. Her book is divided into "Consciousness in Third-Person Context" and "Consciousness in First-Person Texts," and for the purpose of this thesis' research I will focus only on the first part, as Michael Cunningham's *Day* is narrated in the third person. In the first part of her book, Cohn identifies three "basic techniques" for rendering the consciousness of characters in third-person narration: psycho-narration, "the narrator's discourse about a character's consciousness," quoted monologue, "a character's mental discourse" (rigorously in the first person and in present tense), and narrated monologue, "a character's mental discourse in the guise of the narrator's discourse" (Cohn

14)—what until now has been referred to as FID or free indirect discourse[11]. She defines narrated monologue as being "astride narration and quotation" and positions it between psycho-narration and quoted monologue, underlining the fact that they can interact with each other in different ways in every work of fiction. What is important to notice about narrated monologue is that, according to Cohn, it superimposes the two voices, that of the narrator and that of a character, that are usually kept distinct in the other techniques (105): it fuses "outer with inner reality" by omitting mental verbs and by using the same basic tense for "the narrator's reporting language and the character's reflecting language" (103). Cohn considers this technique "as the quintessence of figural narration, if not of narration itself: as the moment when the thought-thread of a character is most tightly woven into the texture of third-person narration" (111).

Another version of dual voice theory can also be found in Mikhail Bakhtin's "dialogic theory" and in his concept of "double-voiced discourse" (i.e., "discourse with an orientation toward someone else's discourse," Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 199), what Richard Aczel describes as a "self-avowedly *meta*linguistic approach to dual voice" in "Hearing Voices in Narrative Texts" (480). Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin was a Russian literary theorist and "philosopher of language" (Britannica) who viewed discourse as "dialogue and quotation, stratified with the registers and genres of heteroglossia" [12] (Aczel 480), and who, in the *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984, first published in Russian in 1963) theorized the concept of "double-voiced discourse" to refer to the author inserting his own "semantic intention" (i.e., his voice) into the already-existing discourse of the character (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 189).

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[11] To help visualize the difference between these three techniques Cohn provides the following examples in *Transparent Minds*: "(He thought:) I am late" (Q.M.) — "He was late" (N.M.) — "He knew he was late" (P.N.) (105).

[12] As Bakhtin writes in "Discourse in the Novel," "at any moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the coexistence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. These 'languages' of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying 'languages' […]" (676).

He identifies three "varieties" of double-voiced discourse (*unidirectional*, *vari-directional*, and *the active type*, 199) which differ from one another based on the kind semantic intention the discourse conceals (whether it respects or not the original discourse's intention). Words, for Bakhtin, already possess the "social intentions of others" ("Discourse in the Novel," 678) and he considers the novel to be the artistic genre in which words are organized by the writer to reflect his or her intentions: it is "a diversity of social speech types […] artistically organized" (674). Ultimately, Bakhtin considers narrative discourse to be a "quotational form" and views narrative voice as a "*composite* entity: a specific *configuration* of voices … [that is] *actively* configured, and it is precisely in the traces of its (artistic) organization that its identity resides" (Aczel 483).

One of the most important postclassical narratological movements supporting the notion that narratives are based on real-life communication is known as "rhetorical narratology" and on the idea that narratives are a rhetorical act, "a purposive communication of a certain kind" for which the presence of a narrator addressing a narratee is necessary (Herman 3). James Phelan is the most renowned and prolific representatives of rhetorical narratology and, as he writes in *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates* (2012), the "starting point" of the rhetorical approach narratives can be summarized by the sentence: "*Narrative is somebody telling somebody else, on some occasion, and for some purposes, that something happened to someone or something*" (3). Rather than simply studying the "where" and "when" the narrator is narrating from, like Genette did, rhetorical narratologists are more interested in analyzing the "functions of the narrator," i.e., "to whom and why is the narrator narrating?" (Dawson 49), and their approach is grounded in "a study of the relation between narratorial voice and (implied) authorial intention, which evokes certain readerly stances"[13], something

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[13] Phelan also views narrative fiction as characterized by a "doubled communicative situation" with "twin communicative tracks"—one between author and reader, and one between narrator and narratee—that readers "must negotiate as part of their 'experience' of fiction" (Dawson 49).

which lies at the center of Paul Dawson's own discursive approach to the "narrative authority of contemporary omniscience" (49).

3.3 Optional Narrator Theory

Optional narrator theory is the other main narratological position on the function of the narrator in narrative fiction: this theory supports the idea that narratives can function without narrators and, in clear opposition to the dual voice theory, that the category of the narrator should be discarded altogether in third-person narratives: third person narration either showcases the author's voice or is "narratorless." One of the most renowned supporters of the optional narrator theory is the linguist and critical theorist Ann Banfield who, in her influential *Unspeakable Sentences* (1982), advocates for the notion of "narratorless" narratives and explicitly rejects dual voice theory. Banfield conceives of narrative fiction as being independent of communication (Aczel 486) and to be "linguistically constituted by two mutually exclusive kinds of sentences, optionally narratorless sentences f pure narration and sentences of represented speech and thought," both of which are deemed "unspeakable" (Banfield 185) since they lack an addressee (i.e., a "you"), "the fundamental requirement of the communicative act" (Aczel 488).

Two principles lie at the base of her argument: first, the idea that for any expression in any sentence there can be "at most one referent, called the 'subject of consciousness' or SELF, to whom all expressive elements are attributed" (Banfield 93), expressed by the "formula" 1 E/1 SELF. Second, the idea that a narrator can be attributed only to first-person narratives expressed by the formula 1 TEXT/1 SPEAKER, where SPEAKER indicates the "unique referent of *I* … to whom all expressive elements are attributed, and a unique referent of *you* (the ADDRESSEE/ HEARER)" (Banfield 57), from which she derives the notion that third-person narratives are "narratorless".

While analyzing Henry James' *What Maisie Knew*, she criticizes Dorrit Cohn's claim in *Transparent Minds* of a dual voice (that of Maisie and that of the Jamesian narrator, Cohn 47), yet Aczel points out how "she restricts her observations solely to questions of 'point of view' and altogether ignores the crucial distinction between point of view and 'language' implied by Cohn" (485). According to Aczel, Banfield confuses language with "point of view, voice and focalization" and this results in a wrong conceptualization of dual voice: the error in her reasoning is that she redefines SELF as point of view (to be found in the text through "precise grammatical elements", Banfield 188) and, when she cannot find the grammatical elements of a narrator's point of view, she dismisses its existence (and dual voice theory) altogether. As he emphasizes towards the end of the paragraph, Cohn never argued for two points of view (i.e., 1 E/2 SELF) but for "two distinct voices" recognizable by specific idioms (Maisie's more "childlike" and the narrator's more "sophisticated") (485).

A more "moderate" expression of Banfield's optional narrator theory is reflected by literary theorist Monika Fludernik in the final chapter of *The Fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction* (1993) (Aczel 488-89). In this book, Fludernik builds on Franz Stanzel's concept of "reflector mode" to argue for the optional narrator theory, and writes how in "*pure reflector mode narrative*," i.e., narratives in which there is "no 'communication' between a narrator and a narratee" (the "locus" for Ann Banfield's "unspeakable sentences"), narration without a narrator can exist (Fludernik, *The Fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction* 435). She reserves the term "narrator" for "those instances of subjective language that imply a *speaking* subject: the personal pronoun *I*, addresses to the narratee, meta-narrative commentary (frequently in conjunction with *I*, *you* and *we*) and explicit commentary and evaluation" (435).

Richard Aczel does not agree with her: he considers her "criteria" for establishing the existence of a narrator to be too weak and limited, and to ignore the "rhetorical and stylistic features" he considers essential in "evoking narratorial presence" (Aczel 489). He admits,

however, that the reason why there is so much debate around the nature and functions of the narrator in narrative theory is because of the "terminological" confusion around the term: some, like Banfield and Fludernik, consider the narrator to be "an identifiable teller persona (not addressing its functions)", while others, such as himself and the supporters of dual voice theory, consider it "an umbrella term for a cluster of possible functions, some of which are necessary (the selection, organization, and presentation of narrative elements) and others optional (such as self-personification as teller, comment, and direct reader/narratee address)" (492). Supporters of the optional narrator theory generally deny such organizing functions to the narrator (only ascribing them to the author): Banfield is the first to reject the idea of a "unifying or organising agent in narrative" (488), but scholars such as Brian McHale, David Hayman, and Manfred Jahn support this idea as well.

In his article "Unspeakable Sentences, Unnatural Acts" (1983), clearly connected to Banfield's theory, McHale posits the existence of a variant of Wayne Booth's "implied author" between the author and the narrator who organizes the text; in *"Ulysses": The Mechanics of Meaning* (1982) David Hayman coined the term "arranger" to denote "something between a persona and a function, somewhere between the narrator and the implied author" (Hayman 122, qtd. in Aczel 491), and in "Narration as Non-Communication" (1983) Manfred Jahn proposed the notion of a "tape recorder, or the person who transcribed a taped event" to demonstrate that the narrator need not be the agent of a text's integrity (Jahn, qtd. in Aczel 492). As I will illustrate in ch. 4.3, Aczel does not agree with this and will argue that arranging and organizing are essential parts of the narrator's function in narrative texts.

In response to Aczel's article, Monika Fludernik published "New Wine in Old Bottles? Voice, Focalization, and New Writing" (2001) on *New Literary History* and further expressed her ideas on the functions of the narrator and on the concept of narrative voice. She opens the article by criticizing Genette and Stanzel's classical narratological paradigm and is passionate

about her critique of the "unwarranted application of the communicational model to narrative *texts*, to *writing*" (622). She considers Genette's "major theoretical drawback" to be the fact that he takes "the existence of a narrator (or narrative voice) for granted" (621) and that he "*on principle* denies the possibility of a text without a speaker (or narrator), a stance that can be rejected on the basis of redefinitions of the term narrator" (622). She considers Genette's "insistence on the narrative voice as a constitutive element of texts" to be "theoretically suspect" and an "interpretative move in which the reader concludes from the presence of a narrative discourse that somebody must be narrating the story and that therefore there must be a hidden narrator (or narrative voice) in the text." She points out that on the "real level" readers *do*, in fact, impose the "communicational framework" on narrative texts, a cognitive process she names "narrativization"—the act of projecting "real-life parameters into the reading process and, if at all possible, treat the text as a real-life instance of narrating"—and for which positing the existence of a narrator deducible from the text is a "useful strategy" (623). However, she thinks that scholars should not limit themselves to this interpretative strategy of reading when analyzing texts, and ultimately considers Genette's and dual voice theory's insistence to find a "human source" behind the words in a text to be a weakness on the theoretical level (622).

Monika Fludernik is not only a supporter of the optional narrator theory, but also one of the most important representatives of the postclassical movement of natural narratology, a branch of narratology grounded in the belief that "narrative fiction is modeled on, and 'narrativized' in terms of, cognitive frames derived from natural occurring oral storytelling situations" (Dawson 167). This movement is interested in how readers process narrative and, as Fludernik explains in her article "New Wine in Old Bottles?", natural narratology identifies various types of "narrative schemata" on the basis of their relationship with natural storytelling modes. Schemata that follow real-life parameters include conversational storytelling (a reflection of the communicational model), quasi-autobiographical fiction, and historical

writing. Schemata that differ from real-life parameters include "the VIEWING schema" (Fludernik's term for Stanzel's "reflectoral narratives," i.e., internally focalized narratives), the "neutral observer schema" (exemplified by E. Hemingway's objective "camera eye" narration and brought to the extreme by first-person neutral narratives, i.e. the use of "the OBSERVER schema" to narrate "one's own" experiences), simultaneous narration (even if it is a "nonnatural" schemata it is not felt as violating real-life parameters, but rather as extending them, and readers have become used to it in contemporary fiction[14]), second-person narration (in a similar situation to simultaneous narration), and Fludernik's "new type of nonnatural narration," exemplified by George Garrett's work and characterized by being authorial and focalized at the same time (624-28).

After having analyzed Garrett's *The Death of the Fox* (1971), Fludernik concludes that the new type of nonnatural narration works "without invoking the parameters of voice and focalization" because "It does not really matter to a reader who is speaking. […] The concern is to get the optimum of information by whatever means; and one can dispense with a realistic situation of communication or with a realistic perspectival setup" (636). Fludernik argues that narrative theory should stop trying to distinguish voice from focalization when approaching new texts, because it leads to a binary reading of "any passage" as being either from the character or from the narrator's focalization. She considers dual voice theory's approach to be an interpretative move based on "illusionistic presuppositions" that, "in the case of voice, projects a communicative schema on the narrative, and—in the case of focalization—uses a visual metaphor for determining the source of fictional knowledge" (635). She argues that there is no real distinction between the two categories since they rely on the same "textual features" (i.e., on "deictic and expressive markers … supplemented by perceptual and epistemological

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[14] For an in-depth study of contemporary present-tense novels I suggest reading Carolin Gebauer's *Making Time: World Construction in the Present-Tense Novel* (2022).

parameters—for example, what a character is likely to know or perceive—and by stylistic clues: what is likely to be the narrator's language or the character's," 633), and that the category of voice, having lost its usefulness, should be "discarded altogether" (636).

Now that I have summarized the core notions of the main narratological positions on narrative voice and on the role of the narrator in narrative fiction, I will apply some of them (specifically dual voice theory) to study Michael Cunningham's novel. In the next chapter I will adopt Genette's terminology to analyze *Day*'s narrator and employ Cohn's terms to define the techniques employed to represent figural consciousness, with the exception of narrated monologue, which I will interchangeably refer to as FID or "free indirect discourse" to include more recent studies in my discussion. The main purpose of my research, which seeks to identify and characterize *Day*'s narrator, leads me to naturally align myself with the dual voice interpretation of FID and of narrative voice, avoiding Fludernik's debunking of the category of voice and optional narrator theory's general dismissal of the narrator (and of his functions) in third-person narratives. The notion of narrative voice will prove to be an essential element to the location and textual identification of *Day*'s narrator, and I will argue for the narrator's organizing function in the construction of the narrative in ch. 4.3.

4. *Day*'s Narrator

A few complications arise when analyzing *Day* from a narratological perspective, especially when trying to identify its narrator, as the novel is characterized by an indeterminable focalization due to the frequent overlap (which I argue is intentional on the part of the author) of the narratorial and figural voices. Furthermore, the novel is characterized by a double-levelled structure that does not fully reveal itself until Part Two and that contributes to the confusion around focalization.

The first level is what creates the initial impression of *Day* being an internally focalized novel: it is reflected in the formal structure of the novel, with each chapter devoted to the in-depth portrayal of a specific character's mind through a narrative information seemingly limited to their knowledge of the storyworld, and to the representation of their thoughts and feelings. On this level, the narration seems dominated by the figural perspective and by what Stanzel calls the "illusion of immediacy of presentation" (i.e., "covert or dissimulated mediacy," typical of reflectoral narrations, Stanzel 5), heightened by the presence of reported letters, e-mails, text-messages, etc., written by the characters in the first person. However, it is exactly the use of techniques such as quoted and narrated monologue to represent character thought that betrays the mediated nature of the narrative and, as I will demonstrate in the next chapters, the presence of a narrator, the central feature of *Day*'s second level of narration.

The second level, undermining the initial impression of figural narration, is gradually revealed from the end of Part One and is characterized by a covert yet textually identifiable narrator staging what Genette calls zero focalization (i.e., knowledge that the characters could not have). Different instances in the text betray the presence of *Day*'s narrator, such as the presence of introductory passages, reflections, and descriptions (all characterized by a distinguishable narrative voice), and of exceptional chapters that display the narrator's omniscience overtly. Finally, the increasingly frequent exhibits of the narrator's superior

knowledge (e.g., knowledge of past and future events that exceed the characters limited scope) contribute to subvert the initial impression of internal focalization and to establish the real, underlying structure of the novel, characterized by an omniscient narrator who showcases his organizing power as the one responsible for the text's integrity. In the next two chapters I will illustrate the ways in which *Day*'s narrator becomes audible (and thus recognizable) in the text, specifically focusing on the technique of FID (free indirect discourse) and on Richard Aczel's theory of "stylistic expressivity," in order to demonstrate the existence of a narratorial voice that is different from that of the characters and, consequently, of a narrator that is distinguishable from them.

4.1   Free Indirect Discourse (FID)

The technique of free indirect discourse (FID), described by Dorrit Cohn as "a character's mental discourse in the guise of the narrator's discourse," is the most linguistically complex as well as the most frequently used technique for representing a figural consciousness "in the fiction of the last hundred years," and has been the object of numerous studies ever since its first appearance (Cohn 13). In *Transparent Minds*, Cohn describes the main techniques used by novelists to represent figural consciousnesses, and in the first part of her book she describes FID—or, in her own terms, narrated monologue—and locates it in-between psycho-narration and quoted monologue, at the heart of what Fludernik calls the "tripartite schema of direct discourse, indirect discourse and free indirect discourse" (Fludernik 275). I will now briefly summarize Cohn's theories regarding the three major techniques of third-person narrations, starting with psycho-narration and quoted monologue before diving into a study of the use of FID in Cunningham's novel.

The first technique Cohn analyzes in *Transparent Minds* is psycho-narration, described as "the narrator's discourse about a character's consciousness" (14), a technique that maintains

the third-person reference, the basic tense of narration, and that can be either "dissonant," dominated by a prominent narrator who is "emphatically distanced from the consciousness he narrates" (making "ex cathedra statements" in the gnomic present tense, using an abstract "conceptual language" to underline the disparity between character and narrator, making evaluative judgments, etc.), or "consonant," mediated by a covert narrator who "fuses with the consciousness he narrates" (this type of psycho-narration is popular in stream-of-consciousness novels, in which narrator and character cannot be distinguished from each other and there is no "authorial rhetoric") (29-33). Psycho-narration is characterized by an "almost unlimited temporal flexibility" (34) and can have two functions/effects on the time of the story, "summary" (the quickening) and "expansion" (the slowing down or arresting of time), effects that can also be achieved through "psycho-analogies" and the narration of "sub-verbal states" (e.g., visions and dreams) (35-51). There are a few instances of psycho-narration in *Day*, but the predominant techniques for representing figural thought are quoted and narrated monologues.

Quoted monologue is a technique defined by Cohn as "a character's mental discourse" and can be easily set apart from the other techniques for its "overarching grammatical structure," i.e., its "reference to the thinking self in the first person, and to the narrated moment (which is also the moment of locution) in the present tense" (13). Cohn points out how the term "interior monologue" is subject to "terminological ambiguity," and for this reason she prefers to distinguish between "quoted (interior) monologue" (the term denoting the narrative *technique* in the third person, mediated by a narrating voice) and "autonomous (interior) monologue" (the term denoting the narrative *genre* in the first person, "unmediated and apparently self-generated") (15). Before the rise of realism, passages of quoted monologue were always introduced by the narrator and the character monologized audibly (e.g., "he cried," he "exclaimed," etc.), but with its advent the "monologic voice" became silent and turned inwardly (in the mind of the character), "signaled merely by quotation marks and other

standards signs" (60). "Introductory phrases" and "graphic signs" are omitted altogether in modernist fiction (62) and James Joyce's *Ulysses* is pivotal in marking the rise of the "unsignaled quoted monologue," which became "a hallmark" for stream-of-consciousness novels by creating the impression of reading unmediated figural thought. (63) Cohn points out, however, that the monologizing character in a third-person narrative is always "more or less subordinated to the narrator" and that our interpretation of the character's monologue depends entirely on the context in which the narrator presents it to us. Frequent monologizing "is not (as is sometimes thought) a sign of a unified, figural point of view" (66); in fact, quoted monologue always produces "a measure of disparity" between character and narrator, and whether this disparity is underlined or reduced depends entirely on the author's attitude towards his narration (i.e., "on the dosage of irony and sympathy") (68).

In *Day*, Michael Cunningham frequently uses the technique of quoted monologue to represent the thoughts of his characters; however, the fact that these are unsignaled and that the basic tense of narration of the novel is already the present makes it difficult to identify and clearly distinguish quoted monologues from narrated monologues (which I will present shortly) or from simple narratorial report. The only grammatical sign that helps distinguish quoted monologues in the text is the change from third person to first person pronouns (be it *I* or *we*). Second person references also point to a monologue because, as Cohn points out, monologic language allows for self-referentiality (following the wide-known phenomenon that "the self tends to take itself for an audience", 91), a key factor that distinguishes internal monologues from dialogues in the text. Consider this example from ch. 42 (160-64) taken from a dialogue between Dan and Isabel, who are experiencing a crisis in their marriage:

"I thought if I was a musician again, it would change things."

"Dan, sweetheart—"

"You've tried so hard to be in love with me."

She has no idea how to respond to that.

Does it ever get to be *too late*? If neither of **you** abuses the dog (should **they** finally get a dog?) or leaves the children in the car on a hot day. Does it ever become irreparable? If so, when? How do **you**, how does anyone, know when to cross over from *working through this* to *it's too late*? Is there (she suspects there must be) an interlude during which **you**'re so bored or disappointed or ambushed by regret that it is, truly, too late? Or, more to the point, do **we** arrive at *it's too late* over and over again, only to return to *working through this* before *it's too late* arrives, yet again? (164, italics original, emphasis mine)

The last paragraph is recognizable as a quoted monologue from the conspicuous use of the second person pronoun *you* which, towards the end, becomes a plural *we* that implies a reference to the couple as a single entity. The quoted monologue, however, is interrupted by a narrated monologue ("should they finally get a dog?"), characterized by the third person *they*, and by psycho-narration ("she suspects there must be") introduced by the thinking verb "suspects". Quick interruptions of one technique with another (e.g., quoted monologues interrupted by narrated monologues) are very common in the novel, they are a typical pattern that heightens the confusion between character and narrator and that brings readers to ask themselves "who is speaking here?". The example above can be ascribed to Isabel's interior monologue only thanks to the specific references to her thinking process offered by the short parenthetical sentences, without which one would not be able to distinguish this passage from an intrusive narratorial reflection on marriage.

In a novel such as *Day*, in which the distance between narrator and character is reduced greatly, this sort of equivocation as to "who is speaking" appears often and is also common, Cohn writes, in narratives written in the present tense. As an example of this, Cohn points to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway,* where passages of quoted monologue are often preceded by

statements (usually descriptions) in the gnomic present that suggest the presence of a "disincarnated narrator-consciousness" different from the character. Only retrospectively, as a result of the semantic and tense continuity between the "unassigned" statements and the character's thought, can the reader find "a sense of unity between the two voices" and naturalize the statements by attributing them to the character (75).

Something similar happens in *Day*, where often passages of unassigned or disembodied statements and reflections can be retrospectively attributed to a character because of semantic/thematic continuity or of the subsequent mention of their name. This holds true especially in Part One, in which many of the ambiguous passages can be naturalized as Robbie's statements as he is the character whose focalization is the most frequent and through which we are first introduced to the other characters. What is peculiar in *Day*, however, is that while some passages can be naturalized as character speech, there are many instances of intrusive comments or passages that defy the reader's naturalizing effort and that retain some form of independence from the characters (these instances, which become increasingly frequent in Part Two and Three—following Robbie's untimely demise—are what will lead me to postulate the presence of an extradiegetic narrator in *Day*).

This phenomenon is also connected to what Cohn calls "psychological credibility," the fact that, in order to be considered realistic (and to be naturalized), quoted monologues have to imply "mimesis of a real language" (77). This language is what psychologists call "inner voice" or interior language, an attested psychological activity (even though not physically observable like spoken language) which, to appear "valid," must be deemed "in character," i.e., in keeping with the linguistic idiosyncrasies of a certain character's spoken language. The reason why certain passages cannot be ostensibly naturalized as a character's quoted monologue is because they do not appear mimetic to the language they use in the novel.

The last technique described by Dorrit Cohn in *Transparent Minds*, also the predominant one in *Day*, is the narrated monologue, defined as "the technique for rendering a character's thought in his own idiom while maintaining the third-person reference and the basic tense of narration" (100). It emerged in nineteenth-century realism and developed alongside the twentieth-century psychological novel, finding some competition in the unsignaled "Joycean" monologue (112). Cohn coined the term "narrated monologue" to restrict its meaning to the representation of figural thought and discourse and to counteract the common confusion (and fusion) of the technique with "the entire realm of figural narration" promoted by the German and French terms *erlebte Rede* and *style indirect libre* (110).

Narrated monologue stands in-between psycho-narration and quoted monologue, "sharing with quoted monologue the expression in the principal clause, with psycho-narration the tense system and the third-person reference" (105). It can be recognized in the text thanks to certain "clues" (be they "contextual, semantic, syntactic, or lexical, or variously combined") that attract the reader's attention: "A narrated monologue, in other words, reveals itself even as it conceals itself," but, as Cohn adds, "not always without making demands on its reader's intelligence" (106). Similarly to quoted monologue, narrated monologue is dependent on "the narrative voice that mediates and surrounds it" (116), i.e., on narrative context, and it tends to "commit the narrator to attitudes of sympathy or irony" independently of how impersonal the tone of the text is (117). It can achieve great "temporal fluidity," as it reveals a "fictional mind suspended in an instant present, between a remembered past and an anticipated future" (126-7).

The most distinctive characteristic of narrated monologue, however, is the fact that it "superimposes" the voices of narrator and character usually kept distinct in the other techniques, creating "ambiguity" between thoughts and spoken words as well as between inner and outer reality (103). The juxtaposition of the two voices creates a "characteristic indeterminateness"

of the technique's relationship "to the language of consciousness, suspending it between the immediacy of quotation and the mediacy of narration" (105-6). As it happens in quoted monologue, in narratives where the distance between character and narrator has been reduced the narrated monologue can create confusion as to "who is speaking": according to Paul Dawson in *The Return of the Omniscient Narrator*, this is because the technique of FID collapses the distinction between voice and focalization and brings about confusion as to "who sees and who speaks" (Dawson 172). Such confusion can also be caused by the rupturing of the "cognitive frame of reception" established through FID by a narratorial style that is "too sophisticated for the character or for that character's mental state at a particular moment" (Dawson 176-77). For instance, in narratives where descriptions are often "projections from the viewpoint of a character," readers become used to identifying passages as always internally focalized and tend to expect them everywhere, so that "narratorial descriptions" which break away with this frame of reception will cause them confusion (Roy Pascal, *The Dual Voice* 103, qtd. in Dawson 176).

This is exactly what happens in *Day*, where often the reader is not sure about "who is speaking": a frame of reception has been established in the novel by the frequent use of FID, so that when the narrator speaks with his own voice it strikes the reader as out of place, strange, and possibly intrusive. In order to resolve this confusion in passages of narrated monologue, readers tend to apply the "method of linguistic attribution," i.e. assigning certain stylistic features in the text to either the narrator's or the character's voice (usually through questions such as "would a character use this word, or think this way?" or "would a narrator, or author, use such language?", Dawson 171), and this is why "character's idiom" is generally accepted as the "key textual marker of FID" (Dawson 172). Consider these examples of Nathan's FID:

1. Nathan leaves the bedroom first, with an air of barely patient resignation. **Okay, sure**, breakfast and school **and everything**, if it'll get Robbie **off his back**, although

Nathan doesn't need to eat breakfast (he lives on protein bars) and has only **idiots for teachers**. He'll do it for Robbie. […] (33, emphasis mine)

2. Dan pours Violet a new glass of juice. Nathan eyes her murderously. **She is sucking the life force** out of the kitchen and into herself, she is stealing from him, she's a thief and a **tattle-tale** and there's something **creepy** about her neck. […] (47-48, emphasis mine)

These examples are instances in which the focalization quickly changes to Nathan's perspective and in which his narrated monologues, starting from "Okay, sure, breakfast and school and everything …" and "She is sucking the life force out of the kitchen …," are signaled by the presence of the typical idiom of an annoyed ten-year-old boy (e.g., "get Robbie off his back," "idiots," "tattle-tale," "creepy"). As Dawson maintains , the importance of a character's idiom in the identification of FID often causes the technique to be considered "synonymous" with stylistic contagion, a phenomenon Dorrit Cohn identifies as the "reporting narratorial syntax mixed with vocabulary and rhythm idiosyncratic to the character" ("a kind of mid-point" between psycho-narration and narrated monologue) (33). He underlines, however, how such a confusion is fundamentally problematic because there is a difference between "a narrator imitating figural subjectivity" and "a narrator yielding deictically to a character's perspective," and it is embodied by "the distinction between voice and focalization" (Dawson 172).

In the two examples above, the "reporting narratorial syntax" is only maintained in the initial sentences and it is not "infected" by Nathan's idiom, indicating that what comes after them is not stylistic contagion, but rather the presentation of Nathan's thoughts in narrated form. In *Day*, a psychological novel predicated on the representation of characters' thoughts, passages of narrated monologue abound and often create confusion as to "who is speaking" (i.e., between the narratorial and figural voices); the narrated monologues of the children, however (such as examples n. 1 and 2), are instances in which the narrator's voice features prominently and in

which such a confusion is resolved due to the difference between the kids' age and the idiom used to represent their thoughts (often more rational and "adult" than it could verisimilarly be). I will now proceed to analyze some of the most relevant passages of the children's narrated monologues that highlight a distance between the narratorial and figural voices and, consequently, the mediating presence of the narrator.

4.1.1 Textual Examples

The first character whose narrated monologues I will illustrate is Violet, the child whose consciousness is the most frequently represented in the novel. She is Dan and Isabel's youngest child, and she is five years old when the story begins; this example from ch. 9 (43-49) features her waiting at the kitchen table for breakfast:

3. Violet says, "We're ready."

   She's been rushed here in a skirt that, while appropriate, has robbed her of her own sense of enchantment—now she must walk, diminished, into the trials of the day. How is it possible that she's been called to breakfast earlier than necessary? … (43)

The whole chapter portrays the morning of April 5, 2019, and the focalization alternates between the adults, Robbie and Dan, and the children, Violet and Nathan. The last sentence transmits Violet's state of mind in a language more sophisticated than a usual five-years-old's, also reflected by the diction of the preceding narratorial report (e.g., "appropriate," "enchantment," "diminished," "trials of the day," etc.). After breakfast, Dan and Garth decide to bring their children to the dog park so that Violet could play with her favorite dog, a white Chihuahua; when they get to the park, however, the dog is not there and Violet, who only wanted the little Chihuahua, is disappointed:

4. Violet is not interested in other prospects. She loves only the little white dog. […]

Violet goes to the waist-high fence that surrounds the dog run, where she stands facing out over the park, with its meandering pathways and its licorice-stick lampposts, its brittle wintry bushes. The white dog must be coming. If Violet waits long enough, she knows it will appear, straining at the end of its leash. She knows that when she first spots it it will look like a speck of light on the broad brown slope of the park, hurtling toward her. (114)

Her narrated monologue, starting from "The white dog must be coming," is once again characterized by highly specific vocabulary (e.g., "straining," "speck of light," "broad brown slope," "hurtling") and is introduced by a sentence of narratorial report that is sophisticated in its choice of words, specifically adjectives ("meandering pathways," "licorice-stick lampposts," "brittle wintry bushes").

Part Two of the novel is characterized by the advent of the Covid-19 global pandemic and by the ensuing of city-wide lockdowns, which will cause Violet to develop anxiety and fear of the virus reflected in her effort to keep the apartment windows closed. Her narrated monologues will become increasingly frequent and her reflections more complex: in the following example from ch. 38 (p. 153) she is waiting in her room for someone to come and reassure her, and in the meantime thinks about Robbie, who has been in Iceland for some months now.

5. Violet sits expectantly on her bed, on the edge of the mattress, her feet planted on the floor. Someone will come and speak consolingly to her about how the kitchen window was carelessly opened, that the thing probably didn't get in, and that no window will ever be opened again. Somebody, her mother or father, will come soon, and tell her that. All she has to do is wait.

   While she's waiting, she writes a letter. […] (153)

Her narrated monologue, starting after the narratorial introduction, is characterized by the confidence that someone will come and talk to her, yet the repetition of the reassurance "Someone will come" betrays her general state of anxiety. A few chapters later (in ch. 46, 171-73) Violet is still in her bedroom, waiting, and decides to console herself by looking at herself in the mirror, wearing Robbie's yellow dress. Almost immediately she is interrupted by Isabel, and this will spur a series of reflections about her relationship with her mother:

6. A cloudiness rises in **her mother**'s face. She is an obvious person. Violet herself is more mysterious, better possessed of what she's recently learned to call *bearing*. Violet is practiced, already, at appearing to be calm and self-possessed, like Sara in ***A Little Princess***. […]

   Violet's mother doesn't always make sense. […]

   A second later, her mother's reflection vanishes. Violet is alone in the mirror again. It seems possible that a different mother lives inside the mirror, nearly identical to her real mother but older and angrier. **The mirror mother** might be her mother's future self, invisible when you look at her directly but revealed by the truth of the mirror. When Violet's own reflection performs a half-turn, the mirror offers back **a pretty girl** in a dress that floats and shimmers, a dress the color of sunlight, a dress chosen for her by Robbie, who, when he comes back, will want to see her in it. Robbie does not envy Violet, he does not want her to doubt herself or to feel diminished or to question her increasing awareness of herself as well-favored, gifted and graceful, the girl in a story about a girl like her. Robbie will be back soon, and when he's back, the world will not only make more sense, it'll be more thoroughly infused with jokes and hope, with the sparkling bounty, the bigheartedness, Robbie took with him when he went away. (172-3, italics original, emphasis added)

This passage is very complex in terms of the juxtaposition of narratorial and figural voices: the judgement of Isabel ("She is an obvious person," "Violet's mother doesn't always make sense," her envy, etc.), inventions such as the "mirror mother," and the references to *A Little Princess* and to herself as "a pretty girl" all indicate Violet's focalization, yet the supposition about the "mirror mother" being Isabel's future self and the use of words such as "cloudiness," "practiced," "possessed," and "self-possessed" highlight the voice of the heterodiegetic narrator. From the "half-turn," the narration focuses back on Violet's internal monologue and her focalization takes over the rest of the chapter, which features a series of reflections about Robbie (who "will want to see her" in the dress, who "does not envy Violet," who "will be back soon" and, when he does, the world will make sense again) expressed with an air of surety that reflects Violet's hope and her subjective view of the world. The presence of the narrator's voice in this narrated monologue is evident in parts such as "he does not want her to doubt herself or to feel **diminished** or to question her **increasing awareness** of herself as **well-favored, gifted and graceful**," and "it'll be more **thoroughly infused** with jokes and hope, with **the sparkling bounty, the bigheartedness**, Robbie took with him when he went away" (emphasis mine), characterized by his refined diction.

In Part Three (April 5, 2021), two years after the beginning of the story, Violet and Nathan are seven and twelve years old, respectively, and they both display a profoundness and introspection that is reflected in their narrated monologues. Violet's monologues in this part will evolve to include the description of supernatural entities, such as "shadows" and "spirits," and it is never clear in the novel whether they are real or imaginary. This passage is from ch. 61 (244-45):

7. Violet needs to be by herself, at present. She's had the good sense not to mention the shadow she saw, a few minutes earlier, slipping by the living room window. It might have been Robbie or it might have been another shade, wandering past. The world is

full of shadows, some of them purposeful, some confused or lost, some so formless as to be not much more than fleeting disturbances on a pane of window glass. Since Violet has learned to see **them**, after that first visitation when she was sick and **the gentle dog-man** came to her, she can barely remember a time when shades and improbable beings were as invisible to her as they are to others. […] Violet goes to the window, opens the curtains. The curtain rings rattle. She looks out into the woods behind the house. The woods are alive with the spirits of animals and the dreams of trees, most active at night, when the dreams and the spirits are most fully awake, when they drift across the forest floor, murmuring in wordless languages they themselves don't fully understand, searching, confused, as the planets shine down from among the leaves and the houses glow so faintly as to be invisible to anyone who does not live in them.

Violet is sorry, sometimes, that no one else can see any of **it**, that they live in a more obvious and less interesting world. […] (244-45, emphasis mine)

Since the beginning, the chapter seems focalized through Violet, yet the mediating voice of the narrator is very strong as he describes her perception of the world and of its shadows. Specifically, after the first few lines of narrated monologue ("She's had the good sense not to mention the shadow she saw"), the description starting from "The world is full of shadows …" raises the question of "who is speaking?" because it makes no reference to Violet thinking these words. The tone is reportorial, as if the narrator were describing a mere fact about the storyworld, and only from the following sentence is the reader able to naturalize the description as belonging to Violet, thanks to the reference to "the gentle dog-man" (an old vision she's had which is described in ch. 55, 212-15) and to the pronoun *them*, clearly referring to the shadows. The same holds true for the second longer paragraph, which can ostensibly be ascribed to Violet due to the pronoun *it* referring back to it. Unlike the first paragraph, the second one is introduced by three sentences of simple narratorial report regarding Violet's actions (she "goes

to the window …," "she looks out into the woods …") and the rattle of the curtain rings, to which the description of the supernatural forest that follows is connected by the word "woods."

This example clearly shows the fusion of the story's outer reality with Violet's inner reality in the same narratorial discourse, something which R. J. Lethcoe termed "narrated perception" and defined as "the report of a character's conscious perceptions . . . presented in such a manner that they resemble objective report, but on careful consideration can be shown to be transcriptions of consciousness rather than reality" (Lethcoe, qtd. in Cohn 134). The attribution of the description of the woods' "aliveness" to Violet's consciousness is also due to the thematic continuity of her monologues in Part Three (her being the only character who ever alludes to supernatural beings), which contrasts sharply with the realism and verisimilitude of the rest of the novel. Example n. 8 features a clear transition from Violet's narrated memory (from the day Robbie bought her the yellow dress) to her narrated perception of Robbie's spirit:

8. She can't tell if he thinks she's part of a dream he's having.

   She can, however, stand in the window in the yellow dress, the dress he bought for her on a day he applauded not only for the dress but for the girl she was, inside the dress. She knows how much he wanted to see her turn more and more into herself, how much he wanted to be there for it. Now he's a flurry of quickened air, outside a house he doesn't recognize, but he is, in a way, turning more into himself, too. As that happens, Violet can stand in the window, wearing the dress, to remind him of this world as he leaves it for another. She can do that, for him. (255)

In this chapter there is, once again, the superimposing of inner with outer reality: Violet is standing at her bedroom window waiting for her uncle to appear, and when he does, he is described as a "flurry of quickened air," a choice of words that is definitely narratorial (i.e., could not ostensibly be a seven-year-old's). The focalization, however, remains Violet's, who probably interprets reality through her own imaginative lens and ends up attributing

supernatural meaning (e.g., her uncle's spirit visiting her) to natural phenomena such as a gust of wind stirring up some leaves or moving some tree branches.

Violet's brother, Nathan, also experiences a great change in Part Three: he is twelve years old—at the beginning of puberty—and this will cause him to feel out of place and to analyze his relationships with his family members. His narrated monologues have become more profound and are characterized by feelings of guilt towards his father and sister (the text alludes to him being responsible for Dan and Violet contracting the virus), as well as towards his uncle Robbie, for whose death he feels responsible. The following example is taken from ch. 54 (206-11):

9. Nathan **thought** his mother came out onto the porch with him because she knows, without needing to be told, about the ways in which today and the day before and the day to come evacuate him. Because his mother knows in ways no one else does how impossible it's become for him to reenter the orderly passage of time, how he lives in an ongoing series of minutes that arrive and depart but are not quite fully connected to each other, so that a day is a rapid-fire progression of still photographs, with Nathan as their subject. Here he is in a room with Chess and Odin and a blue rabbit. Here he is, turning to face his father's approaching headlights. He's **felt**, he's **hoped**, that his mother knows about it or can guess at it in ways no one else can, not even **Doctor Missus Doctor**, who gets paid to know about the ways in which Nathan has been emptied, has become photographs of himself. He has no language to convey that. He can only **hope** someone —if not his mother, someone else —will figure it out. He has no faith in Doctor Missus Doctor, with her Could you say more manner, Doctor Missus Doctor, who does not love him, and who dyes her hair a dead black.

    His mother loves him. But she hasn't forgiven him, even if she does her best to act as if she has. (209-210, emphasis mine)

This passage represents Nathan's thoughts by alternating psycho-narration, signaled by verbs—broadly speaking—of consciousness such as "thought", "felt", and "hoped," with narrated monologue colored by his idiom (e.g., "Doctor Missus Doctor"). What is interesting to notice is the fact that his feelings toward his mother and himself (e.g., how he cannot "reenter the orderly passage of time" or how he feels "emptied" and "photographs of himself") are described very minutely, yet they are followed by the sentence "He has no language to convey that," which suggests that he might not be the one expressing his own feelings, but rather that someone else—i.e., the narrator—is doing it *for* him. The same effect is achieved in an even stronger fashion in passages alluding to Odin's consciousness because, seeing how he was merely an infant at the beginning of the story, he should not have the cognitive and linguistic abilities to form grammatically complex thoughts such as the ones featured in the next examples:

10. Odin merely stared at Garth, uncomprehendingly. Why was he being asked to look at this stranger? (166)

11. She [Chess] says, "Hey, Odin, look who it is." Odin looks eagerly, if uncertainly, at Nathan—is this guy *still here*? […] (207, italics original)

Chapter 43 (165-66), from which ex. 10 is taken, is entirely focalized through Garth, yet the question "Why was he being asked to look at this stranger?", preceded by a narratorial report about Odin, raises doubts as to whether it is Odin's unverbalized thought rendered in the narrator's language or if it is Odin's narrated monologue imagined by Garth (i.e., Garth's quoted monologue). The same ambiguity is achieved by the question "is this guy *still here*?" in ex. 11, characterized by the presence of italics (usually associated with speech/thought reported *verbatim*) and preceded by a narratorial report. In this chapter (ch. 54) Odin is approximately 29 months old (almost two-and-a-half years) and should not be able to correctly verbalize such a feeling (as is stated in the book, he is not yet able to distinguish between past

and present tense): someone else is expressing his thoughts, and the question is whether it is the narrator *interpreting* or Nathan imagining them. This impression of the narrator interpreting the character's thoughts perfectly aligns with Paul Dawson's understanding of FID as "a kind of translation" of figural consciousness which is not "telling" as opposed to "showing," i.e., it is not "an account of how the character may have articulated theory thoughts […] requiring a kind of lexical fidelity to the character's linguistic habitus," but rather "a performative inhabitation of a fictional mind" (Dawson 194)—the narrator "performing a character's lines rather than imitating them" (193).

Dawson takes the strong position of refusing the method of linguistic attribution and the interpretive frame of alterity as productive means of analyzing FID in contemporary fiction and instead adopts the "hypothetical approach," claiming that it can better deal with "the hesitancy of attribution that arises from the characteristic ambiguity of FID" (193). I agree with Dawson in recognizing the possibly limiting effects of only relying on linguistic attribution to study FID in narrative fiction; I do not, however, consider the method of attribution as unreliable as he does as I believe that stylistic features play a key role in the identification of narrative voice in texts and in the evocation of centers of subjectivity (be it the narrator's or the character's)—as do "psychologizing" and "stylistic assumptions" about figural and narratorial language (171)—which is why in the next chapter I will rely on Richard Aczel's notion of "stylistic expressivity" to argue for the presence of *Day*'s narratorial voice in the text. I find it more productive to study the use of FID in Cunningham's novel by adopting both the method of linguistic attribution and the hypothetical approach, a combination that would propose a new way of interpreting FID and that turns out to be useful when analyzing the narrated monologues of the children in *Day*.

Dawson's hypothetical approach stems from David Herman's notion of "hypothetical focalization," which brings the element of doubt into the study of FID by interpreting it as "this

is what a character would have said were they asked" or "what the narrator would say were he or she to adopt the character's perspective" (Dawson 181-82). Dawson argues that language which "cannot be attributed to a character may be understood less as an intrusion in the character's interior monologue" than as a "rhetorical strategy of narrators, invoking doubt about the linguistic nature of a character's thought processes" (181), and locates this discussion about the nature of FID in the broader context of contemporary omniscient narration, viewing the technique as a rhetorical strategy of authors to assert narrative authority. He argues that FID in contemporary omniscient novels is used self-reflexively to shade the borders between narrator and character and between "authorial psychonarration and figural narrated monologue," producing "what might be described as a kind of immanent psychonarration: with commentary or analysis embedded in the stylistic evocation of character thought (this is what the character would have thought if they had the narrator's insight), or invoking a deictic center of consciousness but verbalizing the thought in narratorial language" (182). The second expression of this immanent psychonarration (i.e., "invoking a deictic center of consciousness but verbalizing the thought in narratorial language") seems to be the most suitable to describe the narrated monologues of Violet, Nathan, and Odin analyzed in this chapter.

To conclude, I find it important to point out that the confusion between narratorial and figural perspectives fostered by this technique is what underlines the presence of a narrator in the first place: there would not be confusion as to "who is speaking" if there were no narratorial voice in the text. In *Transparent Minds*, Cohn writes how "In narrated monologues, as in figural narration generally, the continued employment of third person references indicates, no matter how unobtrusively, the continued presence of a narrator" (112): the use of narrated monologue is therefore one of the clearest signs of narratorial presence and, in the case of the children's monologues, the narrator's mediating presence is additionally foregrounded by the difference in idiom between characters and narrator. I would like to conclude this chapter by paraphrasing

Dorrit Cohn who, at the beginning of her book, states that even though "the growing interest in the problems of individual psychology" has brought about the disappearance of the audible narrator from "the fictional world," he has never actually ceased to narrate and, under changed appearances (from "audible" to *inaudible*), has become "the neutral but indispensable accessory to figure-oriented narration" (26).

4.2   Stylistic Expressivity

The second most important aspect that contributes to the identification of narratorial voice in *Day* is what Richard Aczel refers to as "stylistic expressivity" in the article "Hearing Voices in Narrative Texts" (*New Literary History*, 1998). In this article, Aczel sets out to investigate how readers are able to discern different narrative voices from "silent, written texts" (495) and, starting from his conceptualization of voice as a textual effect, argues for a "qualitative, as opposed to merely functional, concept of voice," which translates to a qualitative approach to interpret it (467). A "qualitative approach" to narrative voice, specifically to narratorial voice (the focus of his article), is a method that considers stylistic features such as idiom and tone as equally important as more overt grammatical signs of narratorial presence.

According to Aczel, much of the narratological studies around the concept of voice draw on Genette's categories of "time, level, and person" to identify it, neglecting the equally important aspect of "*how* a narrator speaks." He points out that "To identify 'who speaks'—at least in situations where the attribution of voice is ambiguous […]—it may be necessary first to identify *how* a particular voice speaks, and to distinguish it from other competing voices" (468). But how can one distinguish *how* a particular voice speaks in a text? Stylistic features such as "tone, idiom, diction," and "speech-style" contribute to its identification (what he calls "qualitative" features of voice), and they become crucial in narrative situations in which

traditional markers of narratorial intrusiveness are absent, i.e., "explicit (grammatical) self-reference, direct reader address, comment, and interpretation" (468-69). According to Aczel, style itself has an "*expressive* potential" that can indicate the presence of a narrator in a text and create the textual effect of narrative voice:

> This is not to say that style necessarily evokes a subjective center (there are, for example, impersonal, collective, and period styles), but where style does have an expressive function it will produce a voice effect. Not only, therefore, does stylistic expressivity— style anchored in subjectivity—have an important role to play in the *identification* of narratorial audibility, but it must play the central role in the *characterization* of a narrator's voice. Narratorial self-mention posits a speaker function, and comment names a subject position, but it is only stylistic expressivity which endows this speaking subject with a recognizable *voice*. (472, italics original)

As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, the use of certain techniques for rendering a character's consciousness (such as quoted and narrated monologue) already highlights a narratorial presence in the novel; Aczel's concept of stylistic expressivity, however, is crucial in assigning to *Day*'s narrator his own "recognizable voice," especially since he is most audible in passages that feature a speech-style distinctly different from any of the characters'. This "narratorial style" can be found in passages featuring unfocalized descriptions (such as the opening paragraph of the first chapter, cf. ex. n. 12), reflections, and in the "Image" sections of Wolfe's Instagram posts, all characterized by a specific tone and diction that is recognizable in certain passages of free indirect discourse as well (e.g., the narrated monologues of the children, cf. ch. 4.1). Aczel also argues that voice is "best identified contextually as an alterity effect" (i.e., as "voice-different-from") and that "dual voice" can be derived, in free indirect discourse, from the "perceived difference of voice" between the FID utterance and the "broader utterance

in which it is embedded": "the reader is made aware of the presence of an identifiable narrative voice precisely by the momentary (embedded, framed) deviation from it" (478).

Readers play a central role in Aczel's theorization of voice as they are the agents who construct narrative voice from the stylistic and rhetorical features of a text, and "textual voices" are thus conceived as "the product of a dialogue between the reader and 'the traces [the narrating instance] has left—the traces it is considered to have left—in the narrative discourse it is considered to have those produced'" (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 214, qtd. in Aczel 494). The insistence on the "necessary presence" of grammatical markers (such as tense and person shifts) to identify the narrator's voice free indirect discourse is considered by Aczel to be outdated, a weakness of the dual voice theories of FID, especially given the scholarly consensus around the fact that FID, though it can be grammatically marked, is "above all contextually identifiable" and constructed by the reader "on the basis of contextual clues" (477-78). Finally, drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of "double-voiced discourse" (cf. ch. 3.2) and of narrative discourse as a "quotational form" (i.e., the quoting of different, already-existing social speech types "artistically organized" into a work of fiction), Aczel's "qualitative approach" identifies narrative voice as a "composite configuration of voices, whose identity lies in the rhetorical organization of their constituent elements" (495).

Aczel's theorization of narratorial voice as textual effect that relies on stylistic expressivity and on the creation of an "interpretive frame of alterity" (Dawson 176) is fundamental in identifying and *characterizing* the narrator's voice in *Day*, especially considering the absence of grammatical markers such as self-reference and direct reader address in the text. The way the narrator "speaks" (Aczel's *how*) in certain passages is what sets him apart and makes his presence audible in the novel, especially since the style he uses is unique and clearly distinguishable from that of the characters. The speech-style of *Day*'s narrator is characterized by a refined, almost poetic diction (i.e., choice of words), and by an

attention to detail that is reflected, for example, in the adjectives he uses describe objects and places, and which contrast greatly with the character's usually simpler vocabulary. The syntax is smooth, grammatically correct, and the tone is conversational, vaguely distant but never ironic. The narrator's language displays a tendency for abstraction as there are often reflections on human nature, society, the divine and the supernatural embedded into passages of narrated/quoted monologues, something which contributes to the confusion of narratorial and figural voices that is typical in *Day*. However, the fact that such reflections share their abstract themes and refined language, and that they appear in focalized as well as unfocalized passages (e.g., at the beginning of chapters, which are almost always opened by a few lines of unfocalized narration), is what makes one able to attribute them more to the narrator rather than to the characters.

I will now proceed to illustrate some of the most relevant examples of "qualitative" narratorial voice found in the text, starting with descriptions and reflections to which will follow an overview of Wolfe's Instagram posts.

4.2.1　Textual Examples

The first instance of *Day*'s narratorial voice can be found as early as in the first chapter, one of the most important chapters in the novel which sets the tone for the whole story, and which I will analyze more in depth in ch. 6.1. For now, I will focus only on the opening paragraph, as it displays some of the stylistic features of the narrator's voice identified in the previous chapter:

12. This early, the East River takes on a thin layer of **translucence**, a **bright steely skin** that appears to float over the river itself as the water turns from its **nocturnal black** to the **opaque deep green** of the approaching day. The lights on Brooklyn Bridge go pale against the sky. A man pulls up the metal shutter of his shoe repair shop. A young

woman, ponytailed, jogs past a middle-aged man who, wearing a little black dress and combat boots, is finally returning home. The occasional lit-up window is exactly as bright as the quarter moon. […] (3, emphasis mine)

The first paragraph smoothly locates the reader in the time and place of the story, which begins on an early morning in Brooklyn, New York. The references to "the approaching day" and to "the quarter moon" indicate that the time is in a moment of transition from night to day: it is not morning yet, but rather dawn. This paragraph is detached from any focalization: no references to the characters have been made yet, and only in the second paragraph will the character of Isabel be mentioned standing in front of her bedroom window. The opening description can therefore be assigned to *Day*'s narrator, who appears to narrate from an extradiegetic level (not as a character in the story) and from a *nonfocalized* perspective suggested by the panoramic scope of the description, overseeing different people and different places at the same time (i.e., no limits of time and space). The description brings attention to visual elements such as the colors of the river and the lights of the Bridge, and specific words such as "translucence," "bright steely skin," "nocturnal black," and "opaque deep green" reflect the refined diction and attention to detail we will learn to associate to *Day*'s narratorial voice.

Other descriptions of nature in the story include the unfocalized opening of ch. 19 (95-98), which describes the park that Dan, Violet, and Garth must cross to get to the dog run as "**wintry**, its grass **sere** and its trees **bare**" (95), the description of Iceland and the cabin in ch. 27, of the New York streets in ch. 51, and of the lake near Isabel's country house in ch. 54. While most of these descriptions belong in otherwise focalized chapters, they are not explicitly presented as the characters' thoughts and are characterized by the peculiar descriptive style of the narrator. Consider this description of the Icelandic landscape from ch. 27 (124-25):

13. With one foot on the floor of the cabin he [Robbie] can maintain his **bearings**, his sense of **domestic scale** as he sets his other foot out onto **the edge of the immensity**: the

valley that slopes downward among the pinnacles, **fists and spires of rock**, treeless but covered everywhere in grass, a **seamless carpet** that runs uninterrupted to the tops of the **escarpments** and into their **vales and crevasses**, as if some god of the North had waved a **titanic hand** and simply said, *Green*. It's difficult not to think of gods here. The landscape is possessed of **a summoned quality**, **heaved up** out of the sea like other islands but, unlike other islands, still possessed of its underwater element, still silent, still extending out into what appear to be **limitless oceanic depths**. […] The stone could be a barrier against the **ubiquitous grass** […] It seems that no one who builds a house here would fail to erect a barrier between the house and the mountain to which it attaches itself, lest the green gain a **foothold**, and **lay claim** to the entire house. […] (124, emphasis mine)

Robbie is mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, before the description begins, as standing "at the threshold of the cabin, with the door propped open" (124), and the use of deictics such as "here" locate the reader in the same place as him—yet the words I have emphasized in the passage betray a poetic *impetus* more recognizable in the narrator than in Robbie. This is especially true if one compares this detailed and imaginative description (which includes divinities and living nature) with Robbie's declaration, in a letter to Isabel, that he is not good at describing things, despite his knowledge of complex words (e.g., "quixotic"): "[…] there's no denying that it's one hell of a view but I'm not going to try to describe it to you, I'm not very good at that kind of thing. Grass, glacier, river, sky—you know what to do with that information" (197).

In ch. 51 (192-93), during the pandemic lockdown, Isabel sets out to go and change the flowers on her mother's grave as a favor to her father (their phone call is transcribed in ch. 48, 176-180)—something she describes, via narrated monologue, as "the most meaningless of

errands" (192). Before heading out, however, the street in front of her house is described as frozen by the pandemic crisis, and particular attention is given to the light:

> 14. Isabel descends the stairs and walks outside. The afternoon light, **pallid and unwarming**, seems to **coalesce** in the air rather than **emanate** from the sky, more like **a wan, permeating glow** than actual sun. There are no cars. There's no one on the sidewalk. The street, unpopulated, **awash in sourceless light**, could be a photograph of itself. Across the street the Shoe Hospital remains closed, its sign unlit. The reflection of the street itself skims over its front window. […] (192, emphasis mine)

Again, the passage is not introduced as the character's internal monologue but rather seems a narratorial report, a description of the scene in the narrator's style. Attention to the lights and shadows is also what characterizes the description of Isabel's country house in the opening of ch. 53 (201-205) and of Part Three as a whole:

> 15. **Darkness** comes early to the house in the woods. The house, with a Norway spruce on its southern side and a red oak standing between it and the road, is **enfolded in shadow** for two or more early-evening hours, depending on the season, while the sky remains **bright** overhead. For those hours the house's **window lights** shine under a sky still settling into **night**, its **blue** going to **lavender**, then to **twilight**, until finally the house and sky inhabit the same **darkness**.
>
> The sky now is an **intricate fretwork of brilliance blazing** between the branches and twigs of the spruce and the oak. Isabel's **white** cotton sweater emits its own **faint illumination** as she stands on the front porch. Nathan, standing beside her, **darkly** dressed, is **a shadow** in the shape of a boy. […] (201, emphasis mine)

As the emphasized words show, there is a recurring attention to colors in unfocalized descriptions, and this example also portrays a symbolic opposition between light and darkness, day and night, captured in the twilight anticipating the evening, as well as by Isabel and Nathan.

In the following chapter, ch. 54 (206-211), Nathan, who is the "focalizer" (cf. Bal, ch. 3.1), will express his anxiety regarding the place Violet has chosen for the scattering of Robbie's ashes and his feeling "emptied" after his uncle's death (cf. example n. 9). Nathan's narrated monologue is interrupted, on p. 209, by a description of the lake that showcases the narrator's descriptive style, specifically his attention to colors and his tendency to abstraction:

16. […] the **searingly blue sky** of late March, the lake **blue-black** under **skittish** patches of **paper-thin ice**, the general impression of a world at pause, preparing to **relinquish** winter but still holding on, for a while longer, to its **clear, cold light**, its leafless bushes with their clusters of red berries, nothing buzzing yet, nothing quickening. […] A fitting departure point for the no longer alive. (209, emphasis mine)

There are multiple other instances in the novel that display attention to detail and a refined diction in the description of people or objects, underlying the ubiquity of *Day*'s narratorial style alongside the characters' focalization[15]; I am going to refrain from analyzing them in this section, however, and proceed instead with the study of other instances of stylistic expressivity that appear in the text.

Certain reflections in the novel stand out from character speech due to their universal themes and refined language, and they often appear in unfocalized passages such as the beginning of chapters. The most relevant examples of this kind of reflections are the descriptions of music, which occur three times in the novel: the first time in connection to Dan, while the second and third in connection to Isabel. The first "musical" description can be found in the opening paragraph of ch. 30 (133-34), which deals with Dan's relationship to songwriting and to his new aspirations:

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[15] For instance, p. 61 (Chess' description), p. 91 (the cashmere scarf), p. 101 (Adam's hair), p. 244 (Violet's "fleeting disturbances," cf. ex. n. 7), and p. 255 (Robbie's spirit, cf. ex. n. 8).

17. There's a song inside the song. It isn't beautiful, it isn't *only* beautiful, though it contains beauty like a plum contains its stone. It's the song that leaves nothing out. It's a **lament** and an **aria**. It's that **old ditty** about Frosted Flakes and it's an **anthem** to the perfume your mother wore when you were a child. It's a **hymn** sung by girls with candles in paper cups, it's the **cry** of the rabbit when your father slit its throat, it's the **sound** of your wife whispering in a dream that's not about you.

   Dan hasn't written that song. He can't write it, nobody can, but others have come close. Closer than Dan, so far, at least. (133, emphasis mine)

This reflection seems to be describing the idea of the perfect, quintessential song, "the song that leaves nothing out" and that everyone can connect with, and it does so by combining the ordinary with the refined (Frosted Flakes and perfume), the gritty with the divine (death and hymns), so as to include all experiences of human life. The narrator's linguistic dexterity is reflected by the variety of words connected to the field of music, ranging from classical terms such as "lament," "aria," and "hymn" to the more colloquial "old ditty" and "anthem," and his poetic refinement is reflected by the simile "it contains beauty like a plum contains its stone." When Dan is mentioned after the first paragraph the narrator underlines the fact that he *cannot* write the song, and therefore he probably cannot even imagine it: this fact, coupled with the lack of focalization in the first paragraph, causes the reflection to be read as a narratorial intrusion rather than as Dan's quoted monologue. Consequently, the use of the second pronoun *you,* which cannot ostensibly be read as Dan's self-address, has the effect of addressing the reader and of universalizing this reflection on the "perfect" song.

The second and third "musical" descriptions are both connected to Isabel's experience of listening to Johannes Brahms's *A German Requiem*, a piece of classical music she uses to momentarily escape the pressures of her daily life during the pandemic and to soothe herself while hiding out on the stairs. The musical piece is described in detail across two chapters

which it also connects, as the reflection is divided between the last paragraph of ch. 36 (149-150) and the first paragraph of ch. 39 (154-55). Ch. 36 alternates between narratorial report and Isabel's narrated monologue, and the reflection takes place after she is described putting on her "earbuds":

18. […] She hits Play, closes her eyes as the **stringed instruments** launch into the **opening strains**, that slow rising with its **intimations of an anticipatory patience**—*Hush, child, the story is beginning*—soon joined by the **chorus**, which, at this point, could almost be the voices of the instruments themselves, granted not only their own **mournfully articulate swells and reverberations**, their vocabularies of chords, but **a muted solemn human language**, as well. (149-150)

The description continues in ch. 39:

19. The choir has progressed from its **initial murmuring** to one of the most **fervent interludes**, twenty minutes in. The **hushed lullaby** has swelled to **ecstatic lament**, an urgency as much like weather as it is like music, possessed of **weather's inevitability**, forceful but nor emotional, not specifically emotional, more of the gathering storm than the **merely human**. […] (154, emphasis mine)

These descriptions are characterized by a profusion of terms connected to the semantic field of music and sound, and expressions such as "intimations of anticipatory patience," "mournfully articulate swells and reverberations," "muted solemn human language," "fervent interludes," and "ecstatic lament" reflect the narrator's usual tendency towards lexical *grandeur*. The reflections are also joined by a thematic evolution from specific to universal, from the experience of listening to Brahms to reflections on human language and on "weather's inevitability." The instruments are granted a "voice" and speak to Isabel through a "vocabulary of chords," an experience which, much like the weather, is common to all human beings and which instils the same inclination to devotion.

4.2.2 Wolfe's Instagram Posts

The last instances I have listed as showcasing the narrator's stylistic expressivity and, more generally, his voice, are Wolfe's Instagram posts, specifically the descriptions of the images. As anticipated in the "Book Overview," Wolfe is a childhood imaginary friend of the Walker siblings who, shortly before the beginning of the story, recreated him on Instagram at the account @wolfe_man. The reason for Wolfe's creation was Robbie's breakup with Oliver (the last of his boyfriends) a couple of months before April 5, 2019 (cf. p. 33), and, even though both Robbie and Isabel contributed to the imagination of his backstory, it is Robbie who is the primary agent behind Wolfe's Instagram account (i.e., posting pictures, writing captions, and collecting photos of strangers off the Internet to add to Wolfe's profile). He will remain so for Part One and Two of the novel, or until his untimely death, after which Isabel will take control of the account.

The Instagram posts on Wolfe's account that feature in the novel follow a standard structure composed of "Image" and "Caption": the paragraph after "Image" is supposed to describe the picture that is being posted (or that has already been posted), while the one after "Caption" is a faithful transcription of the caption. *Day* features nine posts in total: four in Part One (April 5, 2019), two in Part Two (April 5, 2020), and three in Part Three (April 5, 2021). The first six posts are all made by Robbie (in Part One it is explicit, in Part Two it is implied), taking the photos from his "#wolfe_man" folder, while the last three are made by Isabel, who took the photos from "Robbie's file" (246).

One of the most striking characteristics of Wolfe's posts is that the "Image" descriptions are never descriptions in the strict sense, but mostly a combination of description and reflection. The "Image" passages are opened by a few lines of actual description that eventually develop into broader reflections, and it is not always clear who the mind behind them is. The length of

these descriptions mixed with reflections often contrasts sharply with the shortness of the captions, somehow highlighting the difference between what a person thinks (a person's inner world) and what they end up expressing verbally (its outer expression). While the creation of the Instagram posts and the writing of their captions is assignable, from textual cues, either to Robbie or to Isabel (e.g., Robbie "shoots off a second post," p. 47, or "Isabel posts again on Instagram," p. 246), the "Image" passages are more ambiguous and are not as easily attributable to them. In fact, the image descriptions are oftentimes characterized by elements of what has now been identified as the narrator's style, such as refined and detailed diction when describing objects and landscapes, poeticizing language, and abstract reflections.

The first of Wolfe's posts appears in ch. 4 (20-22) and, as is the case for all the posts in Part One, it is published by Robbie:

> Image: A field in Vermont, or **possibly** New Hampshire. Photos like this are easy to find. Robbie's got a half dozen or more in the folder already. This one depicts an expanse of **blindingly green grass** presided over by a tree sprouting **thumbnail-sized white blossoms**. In the foreground, the upper right-hand corner of the side mirror of the car from which somebody called Horsefeather took the photograph. **It must be from another year**, it's too early for this much greenness and blossoming so far north, but Robbie doesn't worry about verisimilitude. Wolfe is a fictitious person who lives in a fictitious world of shifting time and precarious seasons. His followers seem not to notice, or to mind. Robbie, in collecting images for Wolfe, must have anticipated some **pastoral release** for him, liberation from his own happiness, even if the scenes of his escape are not always technically possible.
>
> Caption: Road trip! One day only. It's all crazy with spring here couldn't miss that. (22, emphasis mine)

The post introduces a recurrent theme in the novel: Instagram's artificial nature and its ability to exist outside the boundaries of time and space, and it is linked to yet another prominent theme, that of Wolfe's fictionality. As will be discussed numerous times in the novel, Wolfe is the "amalgam" (21) of other people's photos and his posts (due to human error) are not always chronologically or geographically plausible; what the characters (and, presumably, the author) want to highlight, however, is the fact that Wolfe's followers do not seem to care about realism, and that such inaccuracies are able to freely exist in the alternative world created by social media. As a consequence of this, Robbie does not "worry about verisimilitude" and, as can be learned from the text (e.g., "A field in Vermont, or **possibly** New Hampshire," "It must be from another year"), is not even sure about the location or the time the photo was taken, an insecurity that will accompany all the posts of Part One. The only descriptive part of this "description" are the two sentences following "This one depicts an expanse of blindingly green grass …," characterized by the narrator's penchant for description and by his heterodiegetic perspective.

The second "Image" description is characterized by an even more meticulous diction than the first one, yet it is devoid of any abstract reflections: "Image: A farmhouse, its clapboard turned by weather from white to **ivory**, chapel-like with its **steeply peaked central gable**, covered porches on either side shading **spectral wicker chairs**, the **variegated off-whiteness** afloat among **spines of granite hills** touched, here and there, by outcroppings of trees" (47, emphasis mine). The third post, sent by Robbie while holding Odin in his arms, begins with the depiction of a coffee cup:

> Image: A **white porcelain** coffee cup steaming on a kitchen tabletop alongside Arlette's **chewed-up red leash**, dangling its brass hook over the table's edge, where, just out of range, Arlette would be staring at the leash's suspended end, whimpering with anticipation.

> Wolfe and Lyla's apartment is an amalgam of three places: the loft in which the dog
> lives (MommaGirlBronx), a **stylishly scabrous apartment** with **rippled tin ceilings**
> and scraps of ancient wallpaper still clinging to its walls (MattPhotoGuy), and a place
> somewhere in the East Village, **meticulously furnished** in mid-century modern
> (Bibi&Julie). Robbie has chosen them so **judiciously** that they look like different rooms
> in the same apartment. (67, emphasis mine)

The initial description quickly turns into an explanation of the creative process behind Wolfe's digital *façade*, with emphasis on the sources of the photos and on Robbie's role in combining them. What is interesting to notice is that, even though the "Image" part is supposed to provide a description of the picture, the first paragraph ends with a supposition regarding Wolfe's dog, Arlette, who apparently is not in the picture. This kind of merging of the real with the imaginary is what characterizes Wolfe's posts, highlighting the fact that the real purpose of the "Image" passages is not to offer a description of the photos, but rather to provide the reader with more insight about the characters and their storyworld. The "Image" description of the fourth post reads as follows:

> Image: A farm stand in a place that **could** be Vermont, with an **unsmiling old woman**
> standing behind **a profusion** of daffodils and hyacinths in **white plastic buckets**.
> Wolfe and Lyla have driven far north. **Maybe** they'll buy that house. **Maybe** they won't.
> **Maybe** the house won't appear on Instagram again. **Maybe** it was nothing more than a
> fleeting impulse, already forgotten. Wolfe's followers don't insist on narrative
> coherence, any more than they insist on the persistence of memory. (115, emphasis mine)

Again, the actual description only lasts two lines, and there is doubt regarding the location. The reflection that follows features a series of suppositions about Wolfe and his best friend Lyla's future which will continue in the text outside of the post ("Maybe Wolfe and Lyla will drive all the way to Canada. Maybe they'll abandon their lives, which are rich and full but

nevertheless …"), and the reference to "daffodils and hyacinths" in the last sentence of the chapter expresses thematic continuity between Wolfe's post and Robbie's narrated monologue.

In Part Two of the novel the presence of the narrator in Wolfe's Instagram posts becomes stronger for a number of reasons: as is the case for many chapters that begin with other kinds of media in the novel (e.g., letters, e-mails, text messages, phone calls, etc.), Wolfe's posts in this part are not introduced by any sentences or references to the characters— they simply exist on the text's surface as they exist in the storyworld, seemingly unfocalized. Furthermore, in Part Two, Robbie is in Iceland all by himself and he will mostly be off the grid, with no Internet connection apart for a few instances when he posts from Wolfe's account. The narration does not convey his focalization as it did in Part One: information about Robbie will be narrated only once in ch. 27 (124-5) and, for the rest of Part Two, it will be conveyed only through the transcription of his letters and notebook entries. In this part, the absence of Robbie's internal monologue in the chapters that portray Wolfe's posts makes it hard to ascribe the highly abstract reflections to him, something which, along with the presence of refined diction in the "Image" descriptions, contributes to the hypothesis that Wolfe's posts are a place in which the narrator can communicate in his own voice. Post n. 5 reads as follows:

> Image: A harbor so **extravagantly blue** as to suggest a **glistening serenity uncompromised** by the presence of human beings, although there is a sailboat, a **pristine white triangle** in the middle distance, and **the finger of a lighthouse** so far away it appears to **float** on the horizon. The boat and the lighthouse, along with the water and the sky, could be properties of an afterlife that mimics the earthly works of mortals (boats, lighthouses) but has also prepared for **us** a **rarefied incarnation** of that which **we** knew on earth, that which **we** knew to be the earth, **a vastness** intended to inspire both **consolation and awe**, as if the two were variations on a single human response.

Caption: Iceland. Even after a few months it still feels more like it's been bestowed on us, like it recognizes us, instead of a place where we're just visiting as tourists. (119, emphasis mine)

The speech style is recognizably narratorial, i.e., sophisticated and abstract in its description of the "uncompromised" natural landscape and of the picture of afterlife it is supposed to suggest, and the passage's scope is at the same time universal and specific, referring to the whole of human kind ("human beings" and "mortals") before specifically addressing an "us" that, for lack of focalization in the entire passage, seems to include the narrator and his readers (a similar effect was achieved in the "musical" description of ex. n. 17). The use of the same pronoun in the caption, however, has a different effect, as the "Caption" passages are the faithful transcriptions of Robbie's words. Isabel, who does not have control of the account yet, will be mentioned only after the Instagram post as a spectator who is looking at Robbie's post from her phone, and the lack of semantic continuity between the post's reflection and her psycho-narration suggests that she is not the author of the "Image" passage. Wolfe's sixth post opens chapter 34 (144- 47) and reads as follows:

Image: A slope of **luminously green grass** bisected by a trail of **black earth**. The trail leads up over the **grassy hill** to another, steeper hill and, eventually—though the trail itself vanishes—toward the **purpled base** of a faraway mountain. On the photograph's far left is the **barely discernible stripe** of a waterfall, a **cataract** tumbling down a rock face. The waterfall would be the object of most photographs but is, in this one, **an incidental phenomenon**, like the hint of a bystander inadvertently caught on film by someone taking a photograph of someone else. Robbie's sole object when he took the photo was the swell of grass with its line of trail, which cuts across the hill as precisely as the stroke of a knife. (144, emphasis mine)

Page 144 only features Wolfe's post and is framed by two unfocalized lines, the first is the introductory "Wolfe_man" and the last is "Robbie posted it five days ago. There's been nothing since." The fact that this entire page is unfocalized and that the other characters (Dan and Isabel) are mentioned in the next page underlines a distance between Wolfe's post and them and, consequently, highlights the presence of the narrator. His presence is also strong in the description of the landscape and in the reflection about Robbie's intentions behind the photo, expressed in a matter-of-fact way that seems too sure to be Isabel's suppositions.

The last three posts of Part Three are all created by Isabel, who uses Wolfe's Instagram account to deal with the loss of her brother, managing her pain by inventing stories about him and Wolfe. Post n. 7 appears after a passage of narrated monologue in which Isabel recounts her imagining of Robbie and Wolfe meeting at a party, falling in love, and going to Iceland together:

Image: An Icelandic landscape, a field of black stone **punctuated by outcroppings of phosphorescent green moss** and **brilliantly blue thermal pools**. It's **the least earthly possible** place on the surface of the planet. It could be the surface of another planet altogether, one that might disappoint interstellar travelers in their hopes for fecundity— for jungles teeming with unknown creatures, winged or hooved or both—but that offers instead a **stark and severe grandeur** that equals, in its way, any offering of fern or frond. Didn't Robbie write, in that long-ago letter, about Iceland as a kind of heaven, even if it would have disconcerted poor old Aunt Zara, who'd have wanted to know if there'd been some mistake, if she who'd lived a pious and righteous life had been sent to the wrong afterlife.

Caption: Robbie and I are in heaven together. Here, in the middle of everywhere. (226, emphasis mine)

The words in bold remind one of the narrator's lexical creativity, as does the reference to planets and extraterrestrial visitors, yet the reference to Robbie's letter in the last part (cf. ch. 40, 156-58) highlights a connection between these reflections and Isabel, who is the clear author of the post. Despite the initial impression of narratorial style, therefore, the reflections contained in this "Image" description could be ostensibly attributed to Isabel, who might have simply rephrased the imaginative descriptions of moss and of the thermal pools from Robbie's own words in the letter he sent her ("The mountains are covered with grass but the plain, being volcanic, is all black rock, with outcroppings of **neon-green moss** and thermal pools **the color of swimming pools at night**. That **insanely vivid aqua color**", 168). As is clear from this example, in Part Three the narrator's presence in Wolfe's posts is weaker and will become increasingly more so, until it will eventually disappear and make space for Isabel's own reflections. Wolfe's eighth post, taken from Isabel's "Robbie" file, reads as such:

> Image: The photo was taken inside the cabin, looking out through a window. The window is **bracketed by murky brown curtains**. On the sill are an empty cut-crystal vase, a few coins, and a **dark gray stone** the size of a baby's shoe. Outside, though: a field of grass that slopes downward to what would be a valley but appears, in the picture, to be **a dropping off into a void** filled only with **the pale, misty blue** of a sky that turns, in its upper reaches, to an **almost violent blue**. The sky offers a **single white cloud, compact and well-defined, no incident of furl** or softening at its edges, a companion of sorts to the stone on the windowsill. (246, emphasis mine)

This passage does not include any narratorial reflections of universalizing scope, such as posts n. 1 and n. 5, yet a reflection is offered by Isabel's narrated monologue outside of the post, on the "corollary between the rock and the cloud" that feature in the picture. The description of the objects emphasized in the example are not characterized by the usual refinement or *grandeur* of other instances of narratorial style (though they retain its attention to detail), and

Isabel's subsequent reflections on the fabrication of the "Caption" part (her doubts regarding the words she chose and her hesitation in sharing the post) contribute to connect the passage contained in the "Image" part to her.

The last of Wolfe's posts is different from the others in that it does not follow the standard "Image" and "Caption" structure: in this case the "Image" description is subsumed under Isabel's narrated monologue and the only trace of the narrator's style can be found in the description of the light in Robbie's selfie ("He's bathed in **slanted golden light**, the light that makes all of us look like **the most burnished possible incarnations of ourselves**" 268, emphasis mine). This Instagram post only features a long caption, in which Isabel finally lets go of Wolfe's account and of the idea of Robbie she was able to create through it: "[…] Goodbye from this bright high place. Here there's something I can only call immaculate, some state of sacred suspension, but soon it'll be time to come home again, and go on from there. It's almost time now" (269). For both Robbie and Isabel, Iceland represents some kind of heaven, a place of "sacred suspension" in which Robbie could feel time "passing through" him (197), and the last words of the book articulate Isabel's realization that she must let go of this ideal place—i.e., the Instagram account in which Robbie still lives—in order to go on with her own life and find some form of peace.

4.3 The Organizing Function of the Narrator

Wolfe's Instagram posts have revealed themselves to be an important site of interaction between the readers and the narrator's voice, which is recognizable from expressive stylistic features such as diction and language and which indirectly addresses the readers in Part Two of the novel. The narrator's stylistic expressivity, as has been demonstrated in this section, is essential for readers to identify his specific narrative voice on the textual surface and to determine his presence in absence of more "traditional" markers of narratorial intrusiveness.

According to Richard Aczel, however, the presence of the narrator can be inferred also from the more subtle structural features of novels, even when these do not showcase an expressive narratorial style.

As was mentioned in ch. 3.3, Aczel does not agree with the "optional narrator" or "narratorless narrative" theories supported by scholars such as Ann Banfield, with her linguistic "formulae" (i.e., 1 E/1 SELF, 1 TEXT/1 SPEAKER), and Monika Fludernik, with her concept of "pure reflector mode" narratives which derive from Stanzel's typology. More specifically, in "Hearing Voices" Aczel criticizes Monika Fludernik for conflating "narrator (as function) and narrative voice (as effect)" (491) and does not agree with the optional narrator theory's denial of the organizing functions of the narrator. He points out the difference in the conceptualization of the term "narrator" between optional narrator theory and dual voice theory (the former considering it only an "identifiable teller persona," while the latter including also "a cluster of possible functions" in its definition, 492) and ultimately aligns himself with the notion of the narrator as an organizing agent of the text's integrity (dual voice theory).

Aczel considers "organization and arrangement" to be intrinsic functions of the narrator, as they are "integral" parts of "the act of narration itself": "a narrator who does neither (because both are already done for him) is relocated at—or relegated to—the other end of the narrative act with the reader, but without even the active, interpretative privileges the reader enjoys" (492). "Even the most covert narrators," he continues, "*implicitly* comment on and interpret the stories they narrated in their very selection and ordering of events" (491), and this would recognize an organizing function to a narrator such as *Day*'s, especially in the frequent instances in which narration is substituted by the seemingly faithful transcriptions of letters, e-mails, phone calls, and other means of communication. These "transcriptions" appear often in the novel, especially in Part Two, when the characters are isolated in their homes during the pandemic-driven lockdowns of 2020 and have no way of communicating *vis-à-vis* with other

people. During these trying times, communication with the outside world was dependent on the Internet and on modern communication technologies, and the predominance of such transcriptions in Part Two suggests the author's intention to represent the fragmentary character of contemporary communication, now dispersed across multiple screens and surfaces.

Day features nine different forms of communication alongside "traditional" narration: e-mails, text messages, written notes, letters, notebook entries, tweets, transcribed phone calls, inventory lists, and Instagram posts. These appear both as quick intrusions (e.g., the tweets on p. 134, the text messages on p. 160, and Violet's letter on p. 153) as well as taking up whole chapters (e.g., Robbie's letters on ch. 32, 44, and 52—pp. 138, 167-69, and 194-98, respectively—; the e-mails on ch. 28 and 37—pp. 126-29 and 151-52— and the phone call on ch. 48, 176-180), and can be alone or be combined (e.g., text-message and phone call on ch. 50, 187-191). The transcriptions are usually not introduced and are recognizable from formal features of the page's format, for example: e-mails are preceded by the structure "To: …, Subject: …, From: …," letters are opened by the date and the standard "Dear …" construction and are closed by sentences such as "Love, Robbie" (169), while text messages are characterized by the name of the sender, the date, and the time (e.g., "Nathan Walker-Byrne, Today 12:45 PM", p. 148). They all feature first-person narration and are presented as the *verbatim* words of the characters, contributing to a sense of reading unmediated and authentic figural speech. These transcriptions are useful to the development of the story because they usually provide insight into the characters' minds and add depth to their personality by illuminating their relationship with another character (especially parent-child relationships) and providing information about past events (e.g., the death of Robbie and Isabel's mother in ch. 48).

The transcription of Robbie's "Inventory" of the objects he considers "tricky" in his apartment, featured in ch. 18 (87-94), is an exceptional instance because, while providing

insight on Robbie's past romances and regrets (e.g., turning down medical school or not getting to the hospital in time to see his mother before her death), it is narrated in the third person instead of the first. Its visual structure is that of a list, but its contents are quickly revealed as the narrator's transcription of Robbie's mental inventory rather than an actual list Robbie wrote (the list of "tricky" objects is actually something that Robbie wants to write, "in the future if not today," but that probably does not exist yet). The "Inventory" only features six elements, the last of which are "5. Everything" ("There is nothing here that Adam didn't touch, in one way or another.") and "6. Nothing" ("There is nothing here that Oliver did touch, though he came over on any number of days and nights. He is, however, gone, without a trace."), highlighting how the objects' categorization is not based on objective criteria but on Robbie's personal attachment to them. The other elements of the "list" are: "1. A missing photograph,"[16] "2. Medical school letters," "3. A cashmere scarf," and "4. A boarding pass." Rather than a faithful transcription, the example of Robbie's "Inventory" is more akin to the "Image" descriptions of Wolfe's Instagram posts, where the initial descriptions are short and meant to introduce subsequent reflections.

The figure of the narrator as "transcriber" was first proposed by Manfred Jahn in "Narration as Non-Communication" (1983) to support the optional narrator theory's idea that the narrator has no organizing functions in the text, and it defines a concept of narrator that, even if present in the story, is not the agent of the text's integrity. According to Aczel, however, in narrative fiction transcription is intrinsically tied to the selection of presented discourse, and selection is tied to narration itself:

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[16] Particularly interesting is the detailed description of a "missing" photograph (an object, therefore, that is not physically in the scene and that clearly indicates it is only in Robbie's mind) in which Robbie and his first love Zach ("**tousled, wiry, densely freckled**") are described "standing together in the semi-shade of a campus archway, with **a furl of carved limestone flowers** hovering over their heads" (88, emphasis mine), in a descriptive style reminiscent of the narrator's voice.

>If *all* the "sentences of narrative" are in some sense selected sentences, it becomes very difficult to conceive of a narrated discourse without a "selector"; and if narration, as a process, is itself impossible without selection, there seems to be little reason for banishing the narrator from third-person narratives. (492, italics original)

The selection of what information to present in a novel lies at the base of every narrative process and is indisputable proof, for Aczel, of the narrator's organizing function in narrative fiction. If we were to apply this to the analysis of *Day*, this would mean that even the selection of which letters, e-mails, Instagram posts, text messages, etc. (i.e., parts that do not feature the stylistic expressivity of the narrator) to show in the novel betrays the active role of the narrator as organizer of the narrative.

5. Contemporary Omniscience

The study of the techniques of FID (i.e., narrated monologue) and quoted monologue contained in ch. 4.1 revealed the underlying presence of *Day*'s narrator in the text, while the analysis of Aczel's concept of stylistic expressivity contained in ch. 4.2 was central in identifying and, more importantly, *characterizing* the qualitative features of *Day*'s narratorial voice. Aczel's viewpoint regarding the organizing functions of the narrator was also decisive in demonstrating the active role of *Day*'s narrator as "selector" and as the agent of the text's integrity. The study of *Day*'s narratorial voice up to now clearly reveals *Day*'s narrator to be, to use Genette's terms, heterodiegetic and extradiegetic (i.e., narrating in the third person and not as a character in the story), with instances that betray his zero focalization despite the illusion of internal focalization produced by the novel's focus on the characters' thoughts. According to Genette in *Narrative Discourse*, zero focalization (i.e., no restriction of narrative information) is characteristic of narratives with an omniscient narrator, "where the narrator knows more than the character, or more exactly *says* more than any of the characters knows" (189).

In this chapter I argue that, due to the displays of superior knowledge and of spatio-temporal freedom that characterize zero focalization, *Day*'s narrator can be classified as "omniscient"—not in the traditional sense, but in the contemporary sense identified by Paul Dawson in *The Return of the Omniscient Narrator*. After an overview of his theory of contemporary omniscience, therefore, I will proceed to analyze instances in the text that exhibit features of omniscience—such as intrusive commentary and reflections, displays of superior knowledge, and control over focalization—which, I argue, cause the underlying narrative structure of the novel to be fully revealed and the narrative authority of the narrator to be established in the text.

5.1 Dawson's Theory of Contemporary Omniscient Narration

In his 2013 book *The Return of the Omniscient Narrator: Authorship and Authority in Twenty-first Century Fiction*, Paul Dawson traces the historical development of omniscient narration and investigates its role in the establishment of authors' narrative authority, both inside and outside of the text (i.e., in the public sphere), in a contemporary age characterized by a decline in readership culture and by a weakening of the novelist's authority. He distinguishes the classical concept of Victorian omniscience from the post-postmodern manifestations of omniscience that characterize narrative fiction today, and identifies four "modes" of contemporary omniscient narration in an effort to show that the contemporary return of this mode of narration is not "a nostalgic revival or parodic critique of an archaic form" irrelevant to "current debates" on the cultural status of the novel, but rather a "hyperbolic or agonistic" search for "new modes of narrative authority" (65) which has become "a vital feature of fiction after postmodernism" (249).

In order to study contemporary omniscient narration and to determine whether *Day* belongs in this category, it is important to define narrative omniscience first. The term "omniscience" itself has been at the center or numerous debates because of the clear analogy with the divine it suggests: omniscience and omnipresence are characteristics of God, the only being that can theoretically know everything and be everywhere at the same time. [17] Paraphrasing David Lodge and Nicholas Royle, Dawson writes how this analogy "describes an author's relation to their creative product, and the narrator's relation to the fictional world, in religious, and specifically Christian terms," with the effect of leading to "the postulation of a supernatural narrator ontologically distinct from character narrators and the narrators of

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[17] The analogy with God actually stems from the Renaissance period, when the poet's creative power used to be equated to God's power, and the term "omniscient" was first used in English literary theory by Anna Laetitia Barbauld to describe the "narrative or epic" mode of storytelling (Dawson 35).

nonfiction" (31-32). Dawson thinks that this analogy can be misleading when used to define narrative form and that it is one of the reasons for the confusion around the term "omniscience."

The earliest examples of novels that feature an omniscient narrator are to be found in nineteenth-century Victorian literature (e.g., the novels by Charles Dickens, Henry Fielding, William Thackeray, Thomas Hardy, George Eliot, etc.), characterized by a "vocal authorial narrator" (Cohn, *Transparent Minds* 23) that has privileged access to the minds and "hearts" of multiple characters and that asserts his presence audibly in the text through intrusive comments and evaluative statements—what is generally considered "classical" omniscience. In the nineteenth century, this kind of narrator had authority as an "ethical guide" (57) for readers and appealed to "the general consciousness of the community," often using the editorial *we* (27-28). With the rise of literary realism in the second half of the nineteenth century, the God-like powers of omniscient narrators began to be seen as morally wrong and more akin to the powers of the devil than to those of God—an analogy from which the term "Asmodean flight" derives (from "Asmodeus, demon king," 37).

Towards the end of the century, literary criticism underwent a drastic shift: the growing interest in psychology and the changes to the "book publishing industry" (39)[18] fostered a shift from "modes of telling to modes of perception," so that the point of view in narrative fiction became the focus of literary studies. This shift, what Dawson calls "an anticipation of narratological theories of focalization," was foregrounded by Vernon Lee's essay "On Literary Construction" (1895) and George Gissing's writings and was subsequently developed by modernist literature. As Paul Dawson and Dorrit Cohn point out, Henry James' literary works and theories were central in the development of a modernist aesthetic grounded in the "realistic" portrayal of character consciousness, i.e., from the character's point of view and with no

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[18] The role of the publishing industry in the development of a new aesthetic is underlined by Dawson also in connection to the return of omniscient narration, which was deeply influenced by the contemporary commercialization and digitization of print literature.

intervention of the audible Victorian narrator. James' theories deeply influenced Percy Lubbock who, in *The Craft of Fiction* (1921), praised the modernist aesthetic grounded in "showing rather than telling" and was decisive in rendering classical omniscience (which he considered to be "all techniques which display authorial presence"—e.g., overt commentary, exposition, and "multiple points of view"—and not simply the access to fictional minds) "outmoded" (40-41).

The modernist aesthetic was then "reinforced" by formalist literary criticism, embodied by scholars such as Joseph Warren Beach, Gérard Genette, and Franz Stanzel, who were also pivotal, as has been shown in ch. 3.1, in distinguishing the author from the narrator and, consequently, in complicating the analysis of literary omniscience—raising the question "Does literary omniscience refer to the act of writing and its genesis in authorial imagination, or to the act of narration and the knowledge of the author's storytelling proxy?" (32). The susceptibility of the concept of literary omniscience to historical, social, cultural, and economical changes such as the ones illustrated highlights what Dawson calls the "theoretical instability" and "historical mutability" of omniscience, two aspects that have contributed to the lack of a unitary definition around the term which persists to this day (31-33).

The advent of narratology in the second half of the twentieth century, accompanied by the distinction between point of view ("who sees," i.e., focalization) and voice ("who speaks") fostered by Genette, caused the features of omniscience to be "dispersed throughout separate facets of focalization" while at the same time being "unified under the category of narrative voice, which provides the authorization for the focalization" (46-47). As was illustrated in ch. 3.1, Genette refers to omniscience in the sub-chapter "Focalizations" (ch. "Mood") while presenting his narratives with *zero focalization* (or *nonfocalized* narratives) (189), a category Dawson considers "the narratological alternative to the omniscient point of view" (Dawson 45). The relationship between focalization and voice is discussed by Genette only in "Functions of

the Narrator," in the chapter "Voice," where he connects the *ideological function* (i.e., commentary on the story action) to omniscient narration.

Mieke Bal, who revised Genette's theory of focalization by further distinguishing between the "focalizer" and the "focalized" (cf. ch. 3.1), interprets omniscient narration as "an external narrator or narrator-focalizer who has the capacity to focalize from without or from within" (i.e., who can focus both on "observable action" and on the character's consciousness) (Dawson 46). In *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (1983), Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan expands on Bal's theory by adding "facets" of focalization, divided into four categories: *perceptual (space and time)* ("the external focalizer has a bird's eye or panoramic view and can focalize simultaneously on events in different places"), *psychological (cognitive)* ("the external narrator has unrestricted knowledge of the represented world"), *psychological (emotive)* ("the narrator's detached objectivity and capacity to focalize from within to penetrate the consciousness of characters"), and *ideological* (46).

If one were to compare the features of focalization identified by Bal and Rimmon-Kenan with the features displayed by *Day*'s narrator, one would be able to classify him as "omniscient" due to his ability to focalize both "from without" and "from within" and to his access to all "facets" of focalization. As Dawson points out in "Omniscience and Narrative Authority" (ch. 1), postclassical narratological studies have been more concerned with the study of focalization than with the study of voice (often focusing on reader's responses to it and on the possibility of narratorless narratives), and branches such as natural narratology consider omniscient narration to be "unnatural" because of its access to the consciousness of characters (cf. ch. 3.3) (47).

What is interesting to notice about Paul Dawson's study in this chapter is the way he approaches focalization, which in turn defines his approach to contemporary omniscient narration. Generally speaking, contemporary narratology studies focalization (specifically, *how*

perspective is "brought about" in stories) in terms of readers' responses, how they interpret and construct meaning from the text; Dawson, on the other hand, approaches focalization in terms of "how authors bring about perspective in the story" (48), focusing on the author's role in the creation of texts. This leads him to theorize focalization as a product of narrative voice and as a "rhetorical strategy" of narrators, a shift from the postclassical study of voice and focalization that he argues is essential to fully understand contemporary omniscient narration:

> My argument is that we will not arrive at an adequate understanding of omniscient narration unless we assimilate focalization, or perspective in the broader sense, into the category of voice and approach it as a rhetorical strategy of the narrator. Monika Fludernik claims that the narratological distinction between voice and focalization is theoretically untenable, because "[t]he linguistic clues for determining focalization . . . are the same clues as those employed to determine voice" ("'New Wine'" 633). She goes on to reject the concept of voice as an interpretive illusion. […] I would suggest that the concept of narrative voice is an interpretive strategy of reading precisely because it is a rhetorical strategy of authorship, and that focalization is constructed from voice in the way that story is constructed from discourse. (47-48)

According to Paul Dawson, therefore, focalization is a strategy of the narrator's voice, and his argument, when applied to the study of Cunningham's *Day* (a novel that features Genette's *multiple* internal focalization), would effectively prove the existence of a narrator in the novel. He then goes on to investigate the reasons behind an author's specific use of focalization, wondering about the "broader cultural purpose" that might bring authors to "construct narrators who employ different types of focalization as part of a rhetorical assertion of narrative authority" (49). His interest in *why* authors write in certain ways is the reason he aligns himself with rhetorical narratology's conception of narrative as a rhetorical act with a communicative purpose, and with its study of "the relation between narratorial voice and (implied) authorial

intention, which evokes certain readerly stances"—what lies at the base of Dawson's "approach to the narrative authority of contemporary omniscience."

So, how does Paul Dawson define omniscient narration? Contemporary scholars such as Jonathan Culler and Nicholas Royle denounce a confusion around the term "omniscience," often considered a "dumping ground" for different and distinct phenomena such as "the reporting of character's private thoughts" and "overt self-reflexive statements" (Dawson 49-52). Dawson, however, thinks of omniscience as an "overall effect" that is produced by the combination of Culler's "phenomena" with other "formal qualities": he restricts the term "omniscient" to denote "only certain types of fiction"—i.e., those that "actualize a panoramic intrusive narrator"—in order to distinguish them from other types of heterodiegetic narrators[19] (53-55). Omniscience, for Dawson, is not "a default quality of authorial narrators" but a performance: "it must be manifested in overt displays of zero focalization (saying something no character could know) and extranarrative statements which establish the intrusive presence of the narrator" (63). He considers "intrusive narratorial commentary" personalizing the narrator to be an essential element of contemporary omniscience (26) and excludes those narratives "which report without comment, or in which commentary does not reveal a sense of the narrator's personality" (53-54).

Dawson ultimately links omniscience to narrative authority: he believes that omniscient narration produces the effect of "a specific rhetorical performance of narrative authority" with the purpose of invoking "a historically specific figure of the author" (54). This authority is both narratorial and authorial (i.e., "the heterodiegetic narrator's authority to pass judgment on the fictional world, and the authoritative resonance of these judgments in the extradiegetic or public world of the reader") and cannot be understood in "purely formalist terms," as it is the

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[19] The confusion between omniscient narrators and the more general category of heterodiegetic narrators is reflected and strengthened by Meir Sternberg's notion that all heterodiegetic narrators, as "the author's super-knowing delegate," are inherently omniscient and "merely display a restricted performance of knowledge" (Dawson 53; cf. "Omniscience in Narrative Construction: Old Challenges and New," Sternberg 2007).

combination of "authorial creativity and narratorial knowledge" and is inherently connected to "the author's cultural status and the circulation of the novel in the public sphere" (54-56). The figure of the narrator, of "a coherent narrative persona who serves as a proxy for the author," becomes essential in creating narrative authority, and omniscient narrators are conceptualized by Dawson as "storytellers who generate and perform this knowledge [about the storyworld] in the act of narration" (213), rather than "all-knowing" beings who possess unlimited knowledge *a priori*. Narrative authority is seen as "performance (the actual use of knowledge) rather than as competence (the possession of knowledge)," and the omniscient knowledge it generates contributes to asserting "the significance of a story" in the public sphere (248). The term "omniscient narration," for Dawson, is "a trope, a figure of speech denoting a particular type of narratorial performance, not simply a quality of narratorial performance":

> The term omniscient narration, then, is best used to describe a certain type of narrative in which a heterodiegetic narrator, by virtue of being an authorial proxy, functions as an extradiegetic character, setting up a communicative rapport with the reader in order to rhetorically highlight the value of the narrative to a broader extraliterary public sphere. (55)

Based on the quality of their rhetorical performance, narrators can either project an "archaic" (i.e., Victorian) or a "(post)modern" authorial figure, and this determines whether an omniscient narration can be considered "contemporary" in the technical sense (63). For Dawson, contemporary omniscient narration is to be found in "works of fiction in which intrusive third-person narrators demonstrate an awareness of the influence of postmodernism on the figure of authorship which their narrative voices project. In this sense, there may be works written today which employ omniscient narration but are not contemporary in their use of the form" (63-64). He believes postmodern experimentation with narrative voice to have allowed for the contemporary return of omniscience, especially the technique of metafiction

(which features the performance of narrative authority through "self-reflexive, intrusive commentary"), yet this return is also underpinned by an "awareness" that the contemporary omniscient narrator "cannot be the same as an omniscient narrator in previous centuries" (66).

Dawson explicitly links "the return of omniscience in contemporary fiction" to the rise of post-postmodernism, underlying how they both appeared from the 1990s onwards. He describes post-postmodernism as a literary movement that "owes some debt of influence" to postmodernism (demonstrating a "textual awareness" of it) but that also considers it outmoded[20] and wants to use its formal experimentations for "more humanist" purposes such as reconnecting with readers[21] (68). This impulse to "move beyond" has brought about "a return to or reworking of traditional forms and narrative," such as omniscience, as well as more engagement with popular culture and "a more humanistically oriented exploration of the self, rather than a critique of the subjects." Dawson locates contemporary omniscience "within this broad concept of the post-postmodern" for two main reasons: first, he argues that post-postmodernist literature foregrounded the presence of an "author-narrator … [that] revived the omniscient narrator," and second, he sees this type of narrator as "symptomatic of the post-postmodern novelistic anxiety over the cultural relevance of fiction" (68-69)—what Kathleen Fitzpatrick termed "the anxiety of obsolescence" in 2006. Drawing on Susan Lanser's *Fictions of Authority* (1992)[22], Dawson posits a connection between an author's narrative voice and his or her public identity, and considers contemporary omniscient narration to be a new way for novelists to regain cultural authority in the public sphere (characterized by "electronic media"

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[20] Postmodernism lost its characteristic "avant-garde dynamism when metafictional strategies became absorbed and co-opted by mainstream popular culture and marketing," i.e., by television (Dawson 68).

[21] As David F. Wallace wrote in "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction" (1993), the new generation of writers must "risk charges of banality and sentimentality" (the "yawn" and the "rolled eyes," Wallace 193) to reconnect with readers and "reclaim cultural authority from television" (Dawson 72; cf. Wallace).

[22] Representative of "feminist narratology," the branch of narrative theory that studies "the impact of culturally constructed gender upon the form and reception of narrative texts" (Herman 9), this book explores the way women novelists used to assert their cultural authority in "gendered" public spheres through a "strategic deployment of narrative voice" (Dawson 57).

and by a perceived loss of readership culture, 61) by first asserting their narrative authority in the text[23].

5.1.1 Modes of Contemporary Omniscient Narration

In chapters 2 through 5 Dawson describes his four proposed "modes" of narrative authority of contemporary omniscience—i.e., the *ironic moralist*, the *literary historian*, the *pyrotechnic storyteller*, and the *immersion journalist* and *social commentator*—paying particular attention to "formal manifestations of 'authorial' presence" (evaluative comments, human-nature statements, self-reflexive addresses to the reader, etc.) as well as to an author's nonfictional "extra literary statements" and to "how this commentary configures the narrative voices around modes of authority different from that of the novelist in classic omniscience" (69).

The first he identifies is the *ironic moralist*, a mode of contemporary omniscient narration that heavily relies on the use of "narratorial direct address" to assert the narrator's authority in the text. Direct address is "one of the key features of classic omniscient authority" (as well as the most criticized one for "working against dramatization") and the re-working of this technique by contemporary novelists displays a self-reflexive intent to engage with the "legacy of the 'universalizing' moral authority of classic omniscience" while "in the shadow of metafiction" (69-70). As Dawson writes:

> The self-reflexivity in this mode, in which the narrator's intrusive authority is constantly paraded, is less concerned with exposing the artifice of fiction, than with the problem

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[23] More specifically, Dawson agrees with Fitzpatrick in pointing out how contemporary omniscience seems largely linked to "the continuing role of the white male subject in contemporary society" (Fitzpatrick 230) and in the "the feminized space of popular mass media" (Dawson 61)—underlining the role of gender in the figure of authorship projected by the performance of narrative authority of contemporary omniscient narration (59).

of how to assert the universal in relation to the particular. […] demonstrating an anxiety over the extent to which moral commentary can be taken as authoritative. (69-70)

David F. Wallace's short story "Octet" (1999), while not a "typical example" of omniscient narration, is characterized by an authorial narrator who self-consciously plays with some of the key features of omniscient authority, specifically "the authorial narrator's direct address to the reader" (73). The short story stages an "agonistic encounter with the process of writing" in which the authorial narrator engages with the reader and, through a series of "pop quizzes," discusses the characters with them, something which, according to Dawson, shows an effort on Wallace's part to "recuperate the sincerity and intrapersonal efficacy of the direct address from its deployment in metafiction as a laying bare of the artifice of fiction" (73). In this story, however, the reader is addressed *indirectly* through what Dawson calls a version of Brian Richardson's "autotelic second person," a use of second person narration that directly addresses the reader by superimposing the address to "a fictional character designated by the 'you' that tends to be treated from an external perspective as if in the third person" [24] (Richardson, *Unnatural Voices* 32; qtd. in Dawson 77). The author, therefore, attempts to communicate directly with the reader while displaying an "anxiety over which moral commentary can be taken as authoritative" and, more importantly, sincere; this narrator's rhetorical function is, according to Dawson, "to ask whether the universal authority of the author to comment meaningfully on human nature can survive the postmodern critique of this authority" (78-79).

The second mode of contemporary omniscient narration is the *literary historian*, a mode that "relies upon the authority of the historical record" and displays "faith in the literary imagination to supplement the historical record, rather than undermine the narrative 'truth' of history" (88). The traditional metaphor of the novelist as historian is "literalized in the figure

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[24] Paul Dawson mentions Garret Stewart's theory, expressed in the book *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (1996), claiming that the experimental form of second person narration (i.e., autotelic second person) exemplified by Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979) is the postmodern "resuscitation" of the "Dear reader" trope popular in Victorian fiction and later abandoned by modernist fiction.

of the contemporary narrator as historian engaged in historical and historiographic debate," and the feature that displays the narrator's omniscient authority is the "quantifiable temporal gap" between the narrating instance and the events of the story (traditionally kept "indeterminate" by Genette), i.e., "the sense of history, rather than the panchronic omnitemporality of divinity" (89-90). "Verisimilar authenticity" is established through different strategies (e.g., expositional summary, references to contemporaneous publications, descriptive details, etc.) that the narrator uses to "parade the archival research of the author," yet omniscient authority is ultimately predicated on the assumption that the narrator "knows," while in reality he imagines, "something about history which the historical record cannot" (91). Gail Jones' "On the Piteous Death of Mary Wollstonecraft" (1992), Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* (2003), and Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) are mentioned as examples this mode, and last novel is also an example of neo-Victorian fiction, "another mode by which omniscient narration finds its way into contemporary fiction" (specifically through a parodic contradiction of classic Victorian conventions exemplified by the insertion of "explicit sexual descriptions") (94).

The third mode of contemporary omniscient narration is described as the *pyrotechnic storyteller*, asserting its narrative authority through the extravagant and "expansive" style of the narrative voice which often "overshadows the characters being described or analyzed" (111). Dawson's analysis of the *pyrotechnic storyteller* is connected to the debates around narrative voice and, more specifically, to Richard Aczel's notion of stylistic expressivity: the intrusive presence of the pyrotechnic storyteller, Dawson argues, is "established stylistically" by "colloquial language, informal tone, idiosyncratic syntax, and metaphorical excess," which contribute to "the evocation and characterization of a dramatized narrator" (112). Expressive stylistic features are considered as personalizing as intrusive commentary by Dawson, who argues that "pyrotechnic storytellers of contemporary omniscience invoke the highest degree

of personalized narration by virtue of these stylistic choices." Differently than Aczel, who refers back to Bakhtin's dialogic theory of narrative, Dawson's approaches style as "an extranarrative function of the narrator," as "part of the act of narration, employed not only in the service of telling a story, but of asserting the omniscient narrator's linguistic presence at the level of discourse" (114). Novels such as Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), Nicola Barker's *Darkmans* (2007), and Rick Moody's *The Diviners* (2005) are mentioned as examples of this mode of omniscience, and Dawson points out how the *pyrotechnic storyteller* is also "the mediating voice for much of the fiction which the prominent British critic James Wood denounces as 'hysterical realism'" in *The Irresponsible Self* (2005), a genre characterized by an "excess of storytelling" (Wood 171) and represented by novels such as Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*, Don DeLillo's *Underworld* and D. F. Wallace's *Infinite Jest*. Many of these novels are also representative of literary maximalism, a style of writing that is characterized by "overdescription," "metaphorical excess," and "elaboration of character thought" and which provided a "stylistic model for the narrative voice of the pyrotechnic storyteller" (Dawson 114-15). Dawson's analysis of Rick Moody's *The Diviners* (2005) will be particularly relevant for my study of *Day* as a contemporary omniscient novel, because of the stylistic and structural features they seem to share and which I will explore more in depth in chapter 5.2.3.

The last mode of contemporary omniscience identified by Dawson is comprised of two "types": the *immersion journalist* and the *social commentator*. The *immersion journalist*, exemplified by Tom Wolfe's *I Am Charlotte Simmons* (2004), features a narrator that poses himself as the "fictional counterpart of the narrators of documentary non-fiction novels" and that wants to "diagnose and report a social problem through the techniques of omniscience" (136). Tom Wolfe is a supporter of the "new social novel," an attempt to reclaim the territory of social realist novels that was "lost to journalism" and non-fictional novels by "reviving the

omniscient narrator," whose omniscience relies upon "journalistic research" instead of "moral authority" (138-39)—i.e., remaking "the Victorian novelist as a journalist" (143). The *social commentator* shares with the *immersion journalist* the desire to "diagnose and report a social problem," but its narrative authority operates by "deploying the capacious knowledge of the narrator to analyze postmodern culture" (136). What joins these two types under the same "mode" of omniscient narration is that their omniscient authority is contingent upon the display of "polymathic knowledge":

> If omniscient authority must be granted by the reading public, rather than unselfconsciously assumed by the narrator, "all-knowing," in this case, has come to mean less a divine or telepathic knowledge of the human interior, than a polymathic knowledge of how the world works. […] In other words, contemporary narrators "know" more than any character not simply because of their omniscient privilege, but because of their intellectual scope. (136-37)

Richard Powers' *Generosity* (2009), Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001), and Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997) are all examples of the *social commentator* type; furthermore, both *Underworld* and *The Corrections* are analyzed by Dawson in connection to their author's nonfictional statements, such as DeLillo's view of the novel as being "under threat from the consumptive speed of contemporary culture" (a threat that can be confronted with the "power of history"), expressed in his 1997 essay "The Power of History," and Franzen's lamentation about the "crisis of the novelist," expressed in his 2002 essay "Why Bother?".

Dawson ultimately links the re-emergence of omniscience in contemporary fiction to the emergence of "encyclopedic fictional narratives" which embody the shift from minimalism to maximalism in late twentieth-century American fiction (161-62). He highlights how "all four modes of narrative authority employed by contemporary omniscient narrators, but in particular the last two, indicate a general shift in fiction": from minimalism, exemplified by the writing

style of Ernest Hemingway and Raymond Carver, to maximalism (what Wood denounces as "hysterical realism"), exemplified by Salman Rushdie, David F. Wallace, and Don DeLillo. In paraphrasing Trey Strecker's article "Ecologies of Knowledge" (1998), Dawson writes how "following the lead of Pynchon, a number of contemporary novelists, including Powers, David Foster Wallace and William Volkman, are producing encyclopedic narratives distinguished by the disparate range of information systems they organize in their novels" (161). These novels are characterized by the "diversity of specialized knowledge" they use, and the "polymathic" narrator's authority is "less a product of reliable knowledge of the fictional world than of a capacity to mobilize a range of extraliterary discourses to make sense of this world" (161-2). The figure of authorship that this narrator projects is that of "the author as polymath, as omniscient in the hyperbolic rather than divine sense of the word" (163).

5.1.2 Discursive Narratology

Dawson's theorization of a "discursive narratology," contained in ch. 8 of *The Return* ("Real Authors and Real Readers"), is relevant to fully understand his study on contemporary omniscient narration, and for this reason I will include a summary of his core arguments. Dawson's interest lies, as he writes in the final chapter of his book, in the "public reception of literary works" (231), and he ultimately thinks that narratology has the potential to engage with "critical debates about the cultural status of contemporary fiction" (249). This potential can be unlocked, according to him, through a reconsideration of the narrative communication model—exemplified by Seymour Chatman's 1978's diagram (fig. 1)—to include "the role of real authors" and readers, as well as of "fiction as a mode of public discourse" (61)—i.e., "fictional narratives as public statements in a broader discursive formation, and therefore as vital elements of public discourse" (231-32). This approach would consider "the narrative *discourse* of fictional texts *alongside* other nonfictional and nonliterary discourses in the public sphere,"

such as the "public textual responses of readers" (divided into *literary establishment*, *academia*, and *general public*), and views both readers and authors as public figures.

Ultimately, Dawson wants to develop a "narratological theory of authorship" that "takes into account the question of authorial responsibility and narrative authority in relation to contemporary omniscient narration" (232-35), and does so through a "discursive" approach founded on the premise that works of fiction and nonfictional authorial statements circulate in the same "discursive formation" (what he calls "discursive narratology") (236):

> […] narratives are not static for they are read differently each time according to their context of reception. Narrative authority, then, operates via a continuum between narrative voice, extrafictional voice and authorial voice, and establishes a dialogue with the public response. These voices have different textual forms and diegetic levels, but they co-exist as public statements in the same discursive field, and operate as interrelated rhetorical strategies for asserting the cultural significance of the novel to public life which establish a dialogue with the public response. (236)

This "discursive formation" is reflected by Dawson's theory of the paratext[25], and his "discursive reformulation" of the narrative communication model (fig. 2) divides the new model into three "discursive sites" (i.e., *epitext*, *peritext*, and *text*) that interact with each other in what he calls "the paratextual zone of transaction" (in which "what is being 'transacted' is not so much textual meaning, but the significance of the text to public discourse"), and that dispense with the concepts of "implied author" and "implied reader" essential to Chatman's model (238). You can compare Chatman's communicational model with Dawson's paratext in the two figures below:

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[25] Dawson constructs his notion of the paratext from Genette's own theory, contained in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1987, translated in English in 1997). In summary, Genette calls *paratext* every production (verbal or not) that frames and presents "a literary work to its readership": it is a "threshold between the text and its frame," and Genette distinguishes between *peritext* (paratextual elements within the same text) and *epitext* (elements outside the book), the combination of which then results in the *paratext* (Dawson 236-37).
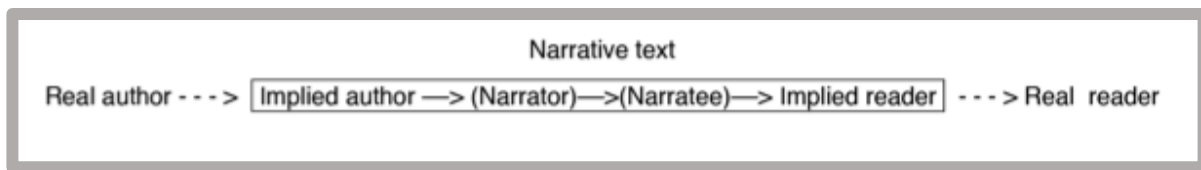
Narrative text

Real author - - - > | Implied author —> (Narrator)—>(Narratee)—> Implied reader | - - - > Real reader

Fig. 1: Chatman's diagrammatic model of narrative communication from his 1978
book, *Story and Discourse* (Dawson 223).

Paratext

epitext (Author) <—> **peritext** (extrafictional voice) <—> **text** (narrator > narratee) <—> **epitext** (reader)
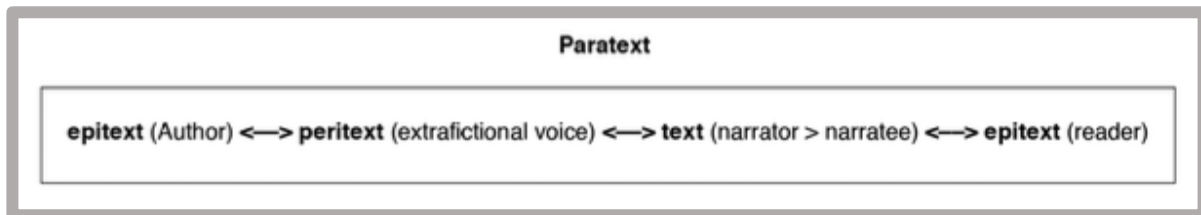
Fig. 2: Dawson's discursive reformulation of the diagram of narrative
communication (Dawson 238).

5.2 Omniscience in *Day*

I will now proceed to analyze the features of Cunningham's novel that align with Dawson's study and that allow me to classify *Day* as an instance of contemporary omniscient narration. As was previously illustrated in this thesis, the novel is characterized by passages that display the narrator's zero focalization and that lead me to posit *Day*'s narrator's as "omniscient." In this chapter I will provide a series of textual examples that exhibit an omniscient narratorial presence in the contemporary sense identified by Paul Dawson, focusing on instances of "intrusiveness" (both in the form of intrusive comments and of stylistic expressivity), superior knowledge, and on displays of control over the focalization in the novel. I will also consider the extent to which *Day*'s narrator can be represented by Dawson's "modes" of contemporary narrative authority and, when these are not exhaustive, provide alternative ways to interpret his narratorial presence.

5.2.1   Focalization

The most noticeable display of the narrator's omniscience can be found in those textual instances that betray a superior knowledge of the storyworld which exceeds the limited scope of the characters, and which cannot, therefore, be ostensibly naturalized to them. These instances support Dawson's conceptualization of omniscience as "performance," as the narrator clearly wants to draw attention to his omniscient knowledge of the storyworld by *saying* more than any of the characters could know. The most noticeable example of the "Olympian" scope of the narrator appears in the first chapter, which opens with an unfocalized panoramic overview of Brooklyn and the East River, as well as of the actions of multiple people at once (cf. example n. 12). Superior knowledge is also conveyed through certain references to past and future events that the characters would know little—if anything—about (unless they already lived through them and were retrospectively reflecting on them), and that clash with the predominant "code" of simultaneous narration of the novel.

The most significant examples of *prolepsis* (pl. *prolepses*), the term Genette uses to indicate the "narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later" (Genette 40) in his study of temporal anachronies ("Order"), are concentrated in Part Three of the novel and deal with the anticipation of future events related to Violet (specifically, to her growing up). Example n. 20, for instance, refers to behaviors she will develop in the future (after the time of the story), while example n. 21 refers to a realization she will experience only later in life:

20. Violet will not embrace the habit of refusing to get out of the car for a while yet, and when she does—when she remains obdurately belted in after they've arrived at the dentist and the school play and the Jersey Shore—Dan will be prepared for it. Extracting Violet from cars will have been incorporated by then into their ritual of collaboration and argument. (214)

21. It's surprisingly easy to console her parents. It helps that they think of her as simple. She can play along with that, if it's helpful to them.

She's wearing the yellow dress, which still fits well enough.

When she tried it on in the store, she did a pirouette. The gauzy skirt belled out. Robbie applauded. The saleswoman smiled. It was—**as Violet will realize, years later**—her first true intimation of her own prettiness, of herself as an extraordinary being, twirling in the store-light as others smiled and applauded. (215, emphasis mine)

These examples are all taken from ch. 55 (212-15), a chapter dealing with the aftermath of Robbie's death and of the Covid-19 pandemic; Violet is now seven years old and has started to have visions of spirits and shadows (cf. ex. n. 7-8), as well as to reflect more deeply on her life and relationship with her parents. The chapter shows her and Dan arriving at Isabel's country house to attend to Robbie's funeral (or rather, the scattering of his ashes), and example n. 20 anticipates the behavior of refusing to get out of cars Violet will develop in the future. This proleptic passage is expressed in a confident manner, as if the events it reports had already happened, and the presence of Dan in the chapter creates the illusion of an "older Dan" reflecting back on past experiences—something which would break the governing code of simultaneous and internally focalized narration. However, the passage is not Dan's narrated monologue and it highlights the presence of the narrator conveying more information than the characters could verisimilarly possess at the time of the story.

Example n. 21, on the other hand, features a series of quick-paced changes in the narration that are interesting from a temporal perspective: it opens with Violet's narrated monologue about her parents that changes into a narratorial description of her appearance (all in the present tense), after which there is a recollection of the day she bought the dress with Robbie (a narrated memory, therefore in the past tense) with, embedded in it, a reflection that

will be fully developed only by Violet's older self ("as Violet will realize, years later," future tense) but that is anticipated here by the narrator.

An important example of *analepsis*—the opposite of prolepsis, i.e., the recounting of past events that happened before the time of the story—betraying the narrator's superior knowledge can be found ch. 2 (7-12), when the narrator talks about the prior inhabitants of Robbie's attic apartment and, specifically, about the two Irish girls who presumably lived there in the early twentieth century. What is interesting to notice about the instances (three in total) in which these girls are mentioned is the confidence and surety with which they are described, especially when compared to the vagueness around the other inhabitants (remembered only for the physical marks they left in the apartment), even though they are first introduced in a passage that is framed by what could be interpreted as the narrator's projection of an invented story on Robbie. Consider this passage from ch. 2:

22. If Robbie were more prone to morbid romanticism, he might consider all this unstoppable seepage to be a vestige of the grief suffered by the attic's original inhabitants, who would have been Irish girls come to America in flight from the famine only to find themselves vying for jobs as housemaids—girls who'd been sought after in Dublin, girls of whom it had been said, *In another few years, she'll have her pick*. Girls who were now expected to be grateful for two damp rooms in the attic of a row house in Brooklyn.

    Robbie is the latest in a line of people who, unlike the long-dead Irish girls, have considered this cramped, dank warren to be a lucky break. Which of his more recent predecessors was the optimist who, in an attempt to admit light, did not fully anticipate the rain and sleet of Brooklyn winters? Who else (it has to have been someone else) painted the place a murky orange-brown that's been painted over in white but that remains, like the saddest possible haunting, on the bit of wall behind the cabinet under

the kitchen sink. Did that denizen come before or after the one who punched the leaky skylight into the ceiling? […] (9)

The detailed description of the Irish girls (complete with imagined words of people from their time) appears at the beginning of Robbie's introduction, right after a description of Wolfe, and stems from a reflection on the water infiltrations in the apartment inspired by Robbie's pondering over the "leaky skylight" on the ceiling. Yet, while the second paragraph clearly contains Robbie's narrated monologue (recognizable by the parentheticals and questions), the first paragraph is framed as supposition, something Robbie *might* think of were he "more prone to morbid romanticism," and not as Robbie's actual thoughts. In fact, it does not seem likely for him to possess such detailed information about the "original inhabitants" of his apartment (there are no references, for instance, to him studying the history of the building), especially since the other "denizens" are described vaguely and only considered for the traces they have left in the apartment—whereas there is no mention in the text of physical marks left by the Irish girls. However, despite the lack of traces, their presence in the apartment is felt as tangibly as that of the person who built the skylight, and their existence is presented as fact by the subsequent references in the novel, which are characterized by the determinatives "the" and "those" (e.g., ch. 2, p. 11; ch. 20, p. 100): this profusion of detailed information about the Irish girls, which is unlikely Robbie's, thus highlights the narrator's superior knowledge about the storyworld.

The overarching presence of the omniscient narrator as the hidden organizing agent of the story is also revealed in instances of *paralepsis* (pl. *paralepses*), the term Gérard Genette uses in *Narrative Discourse* to refer to changes in focalization that involve "giving more [narrative information] than is authorized in principle in the code of focalization governing the whole" (195). Paralepsis falls into the category of "isolated alterations" or infractions of the "code" (i.e., the "dominant mode/mood"), which alter it momentarily but do not call into

question "its existence," alongside *paralipsis* (or "lateral omission"), which gives "less information than is necessary in principle" (195). Both paralepsis and paralipsis are discussed in the subchapter "Alterations" of the chapter "Mood," and paralepsis in particular is discussed by Dawson in ch. 7 of *The Return* in connection with the phenomenon of homodiegetic (i.e., first-person) omniscient narration.

The most significant instances of paralepsis in Michael Cunningham's *Day* feature a change from internal focalization (the dominant "mood") to zero focalization: the change can either occur inside single chapters (in which case it is predominantly from zero focalization to internal) or it can take up an entire one (e.g., ch. 56), in which case it breaks with the dominant mood of the whole novel. The most important example of paralepsis that proves the unequivocable presence of an omniscient narrator in *Day* is ch. 56 (216-17), a chapter that is entirely unfocalized in its detailed description of Robbie's cabin after his death (i.e., none of the characters of the story are in the scene) and that demonstrates the narrator's superior knowledge (i.e., zero focalization) in the conveyance of narrative information none of the characters could possibly have at the time of the story. The reader is able to infer from the text (e.g., from the mention of certain objects such as Dan's old RAMONES T-shirt, the fox skull hanging over the bed, the calendar turned to "April 2021," and a copy of Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*) that the narrator is describing Robbie's cabin in Iceland, yet there are no explicit references to him: the only living creature in the scene at the time of narration is a small mouse scurrying across the cabin's floor, while the cabin itself is depicted in a state of transition between one visitor and the next ("months ago" there was a German backpacker who left a can of coffee, and "next week" the new renters will settle in). The description of the objects is detailed and, while the diction is not characterized by its usual refinement (cf. ch. 4.2), the narrator's voice is distinguishable from the scope of the following reflection on a painting: "which, hung close to one of the two windows, might have been put there as a demonstration

of the disparity between the genuine world and various human attempts to pay homage to it" (216).

Chapter 56 is an exceptional chapter in *Day*, unique in its display of the narrator's zero focalization; other instances of paralepsis in the novel are more limited and display a change in focalization that is internal to the chapters. The opening of *Day*'s chapters is a prime example of this, as they are generally introduced by a line or more of unfocalized narration that comments on and introduces their content before restricting the focalization to a specific character. These openings can initially create confusion about "who is speaking" because, even though they adopt a heterodiegetic perspective, they often blend seamlessly with a character's internal monologue due to the semantic and thematic continuity with the chapter's general subject. On some occasions, however, the narrator's style prevails, and the passages cannot be ostensibly naturalized to the characters. The most relevant examples of this kind of "internal" paralepses have already been analyzed in ch. 4.2.1, the chapter devoted to the textual examples of the narrator's stylistic expressivity, and include: the narratorial description of the Icelandic landscape outside Robbie's cabin that opens ch. 27 (124-25; ex. n. 13) and that gradually merges into Robbie's perspective and narrated monologue; the narratorial description of the "song inside the song" (ex. n. 17) preceding Dan's focalization; and the panoramic description of the scenery around Isabel's country house that opens ch. 53 and the whole of Part Three (ex. n. 15).

Lastly, omniscience is reflected by *Day*'s narrator's ability to know the minds of multiple characters, something that was considered the primary feature of omniscient narration from the nineteenth century until well into the twentieth century. Although Paul Dawson identifies several characteristics of omniscient narration beyond the access to fictional minds, he still views focalization (as a feature of narrative voice) as one of the primary techniques through which the narrator asserts omniscient authority. *Day* is a novel that is entirely

predicated on the narrator's alternating portrayal of the thoughts of different characters, and this alone would suffice to demonstrate the narrator's omniscience. I argue, however, that the narrator's omniscient authority is stronger in those chapters that feature multiple focalizations at once and in which the portrayal of one character's consciousness eventually overlaps with another's.

Ch. 46 (171-73) is the first instance in the novel in which the point of view of multiple characters appears in the same chapter and, presumably, at the same time in the story. The chapter portrays the perspectives of Dan, Nathan, and Violet, each neatly separated by a blank space: Dan is in his bedroom writing a new song and his passage features his narrated monologue ("where else is there for him to go? […] What else is there for him to do, now that the question of dinner has been decided?", 171), as well as the lyrics he is working on reported *verbatim* and in italics; Nathan is re-watching *School of Rock* and his passage features the transcription of a text message he sent to his friends, Chad and Harrison; Violet is in her bedroom, waiting for someone to come and "reassure her" about the open window she found in the kitchen, and her passage features her narrated monologue while she reflects on her relationship with her mother and on herself (cf. ex. n. 6).

In Part Three, chapters 55 and 60 also display multiple focalizations, but the different perspectives are not as neatly separated as the ones in ch. 46: they are unsignaled and appear quite abruptly, creating confusion. Ch. 55 (from which examples n. 20 and 21 were taken) alternates between Dan, Violet, and Isabel's perspectives, sometimes overlapping with each other and other times merging into one another (e.g., the merging of Dan and Isabel's perspective into a single, joined parental being[26]), and it is characterized by a strong narratorial voice that contributes to the "hesitancy of attribution" (Dawson 193) of certain sentences. Ch.

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[26] "Thank you, Violet, for not turning alien on us, not tonight. Thank you for not refusing to get out of the car as it seemed, for a minute, that you might" (Cunningham 214).

60 is more straightforward, as it only features Dan and Isabel reflecting on their relationship: the chapter is mostly focalized through Isabel, who reflects on Robbie's death and on his romantic relationships (including Robbie's relationship with Dan), until page 241 when, after the report of a dialogue, the focalization abruptly changes to reveal Dan's thoughts on his marriage with Isabel (from "Dan waits. He waits for Isabel to ask about him. How is he doing?"). The difference between Isabel's and Dan's viewpoints is emphasized by their internal monologues, which reveal the polar opposition of their expectations (i.e., Dan is convinced they will get back together, while Isabel is sure their marriage has come to an end), and it reaches its climax on page 242, when the focalization reverts to Isabel after the line "Another silence descends. An aperture has closed" and Dan's hopes for the future are overturned by Isabel's narrated monologue.

5.2.2 Intrusiveness

As was outlined in ch. 5.1, Paul Dawson classifies as "omniscient" only those narratives which "actualize a panoramic intrusive narrator," i.e., in which the narrator displays "zero focalization" and "extranarrative statements which establish the intrusive presence of the narrator" (53-63). *Day*'s narrator, as has been shown in the previous chapters, demonstrates zero focalization in the text on numerous occasions, from the display of panoramic viewpoint to the presence of *prolepses* and *analepses*, the access to the mind of multiple characters and control over the focalization. In this chapter I want to highlight the textual instances that display the narrator's "intrusiveness," something that can be established, according to Dawson, by intrusive commentary that reveals "the narrator's personality" (53) as well as by the narrator's stylistic expressivity. It might also be established by instances of zero focalization when they

"draw attention to the narrator's capacity to tell rather than show" (248) [27], for example when they are accompanied by the elaborate speech style of *Day*'s narratorial voice (e.g., ex. n. 12).

The intrusiveness of *Day*'s narrator in the form of stylistic expressivity has already been studied in ch. 4.2 and is best represented by the numerous unfocalized descriptions that are characterized by the narrator's researched diction and imaginative, abstract language, such as the musical descriptions (ex. n. 17, 18, 19) and the highly poetic and abstract "Image" descriptions of some of Wolfe's Instagram posts (n. 1, 5, and 6). In this chapter I will focus, instead, on instances of intrusive commentary that somehow reflect the narrator's stance towards the storyworld and the issues raised by it (such as the problems of American society, Instagram's fictionality, etc.) and that "personalize" him for the reader. This commentary appears both in the form of short, single sentences, and in the form of longer passages or reflections. I will analyze examples of both to provide a comprehensive view of how the narrator discursively interacts with the storyworld and the reader.

Short intrusive comments appear regularly in the three parts of the novel (although Part Two features less of them because it is mostly the transcriptions of other media) and often express a judgment or simply provide a comment on the story in a way that is not always easily attributable to a specific character. This is because these comments appear in passages of narrated monologue or of simple unfocalized narration that naturally rely on the mediating role of the narrator, and thus underline his presence. Consider, for example, the sentences "Isabel and Robbie should call him [their father]; it's been a while. […]" and "The Frankenstein association is inevitable" (21) from ch. 4 (20-22), a chapter opened by a long unfocalized passage in which the narrator describes Dan and Isabel's apartment and which is closed by the mention of Isabel and Robbie's father (from which the first comment is clearly inspired).

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[27] As he points out in the "Conclusion" of his book, "intrusiveness can also be a form of zero focalization, in the sense that to offer commentary is to provide insight beyond the awareness of characters, and that references to the act of narration itself are obviously at a higher diegetic level than characters" (Dawson 248).

Robbie will enter the scene only after this sentence and is described while creating a new Instagram post, a situation which elicits a description of Wolfe and of his made-up apartment, friend, and dog. The second example is a comment on Wolfe's artificiality that stands out for its visual separation from the other sentences and for the fact that, apart from a brief mention of Robbie's thoughts in the preceding paragraph (the psychonarration "Robbie hopes …"), it is not tied to any figural perspective and could ostensibly be read as the narrator's.

Another example can be found in ch. 7 (29-33), when Robbie goes to greet Violet and Nathan and is caught up in a fight which he—unsuccessfully—tries to break up: "They don't stop. They can't. They're driven by an **ancient filial wrath**, stunning in its purity" (30, emphasis mine). The choice of words in this comment and the fact that it visually clashes with the simple dialogue between Robbie and the children, in which it occurs, highlights the narrator's distinctive speech style, an effect that is similarly achieved by the description of a doll on the apartment's floor (i.e., "The baby doll lies facedown, an **unsettlingly** real simulation of **infant mortality**", 74, emphasis mine) and of Dan and Isabel's apartment, when everyone except Robbie has gone to the dog run: "The apartment, with Robbie as its sole occupant, settles all but imperceptibly into its **silent perpetuity**, the quality that will be unaffected when **these people** are gone and others take their place" (81, emphasis mine). Moreover, the dual reference to "these people" emphasizes, once again, the double-levelled structure of the novel: on the one hand, it could be read as Robbie's referring to his family as separate from himself (first level—internal focalization), while on the other hand, it could be read as the omniscient narrator referring to all of the characters (Robbie included) and commenting on the apartment from an extradiegetic perspective (second level—zero focalization).

In ch. 60, Isabel reflects on the physical attraction she feels for her estranged husband: "She wonders how many women think more kindly and, all right, more lustfully toward their husbands after they've left them. Maybe someone's done a study. Maybe **you** could Google it"

(231, emphasis mine). This example features a shift from Isabel's psycho-narration (touched by her idiom, "all right") to her quoted monologue in the last two sentences, which includes the use of autotelic *you* that might indicate her own monologic self-address. The presence of this *you*, however, is also what suggests the possibility of the narrator responding to Isabel and addressing her in his own voice: the "hesitancy of attribution" (Dawson 193) that arises is typical of *Day* and can only be solved by the personal interpretation of each reader.. Finally, instances of short intrusive commentary in *Day* can also be found in statements that highlight the inaccuracy or delusional quality of a character's thoughts by correcting them, such as "They keep no secrets (**they believe that they keep no secrets**)" (35, emphasis mine) and "Isabel was expecting this. **She believes she was expecting it**" (215, emphasis mine).

In *Day*, intrusive narratorial commentary can also take the form of long passages that distinguish themselves from the characters' speech for the scope of the reflections they contain (reflecting the abstracting tendency of the narrator's voice identified in ch. 4.2) and for expressing the narrator's opinion on topics such as American society, human relationships, and social media. One of the most prominent intrusive reflections that can be found in the novel is in ch. 2, when Robbie tries to correct his students' essays:

23. Robbie puts the essay down. He's not ready yet. He considers eating a Cheeto. He's struck by that which he, which most people, know already: there must be some intricate series of barely visible connections, a subterranean network that connects those ships appearing on the horizon to slave auctions, to Lewis and Clark first beholding the Missouri River, the War to End All Wars, the Chicago World's Fair, the Depression and the New Deal, another war, the rocket belts we were supposed to be wearing by now, random shootings in supposedly undangerous places (schools and movie theaters, village greens, the list goes on) as people die trying to cross a border into a land where they hope they'll be able to be servants or gardeners, as ever more inhabitable planets

show up at unfathomable distances, as Robbie himself worries over losing the

apartment that once imprisoned those long-dead Irish girls. (11)

This reflection on the "subterranean network" of "barely visible connections," which brings

the reader through a compacted history of the United States of America from their early

beginnings to contemporary social problems, is an abstraction that takes the reader away from

the relatively ordinary events of the story (Robbie's reflections on his apartment, his correction

of sixth-grade essays, etc.) and brings them to reflect on American society as a whole.[28] The

passage is embedded in Robbie's psycho-narration but it is also presented as general knowledge,

something that "most people" know: such a tendency to abstraction and to generalizing

statements has already been identified as a feature of *Day*'s narrator's voice in ch. 4.2, and I

argue that this reflection, with its allusion to school shootings, the exploitation of immigrant

labor, and the environmental crisis, embodies the first of many of *Day*'s narrator's veiled

critiques of American society which highlight his personality. A similar reflection about human

civilization appears in ch. 10 (50-53) in response to the unexplainable disappearance of Violet's

kindergarten teacher:

24. It can seem sometimes that the true end of civilization is starting not at the top, not

among deluded politicians and corporate lords, not among polluters and terrorists, but

at the bottom, among those who care for children, the people who can't be sure that the

walls have been checked for toxicity or that no one will walk into a classroom in

homemade camouflage and a Halloween mask, carrying a semiautomatic. (52)

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[28] The scope of this reflection, with its "subterranean network" and the focus on problematic aspects of society, also connects to the themes that characterize *The Crying of Lot 49*, a novel by Thomas Pynchon—one of the most innovative and significant representatives of high postmodernism—that deals with the presence of an underground communicational network (named "Tristero" and discovered by the protagonist, Mrs. Oedipa Maas) and with the political and societal crises characterizing U.S. society in the 1960s and '70s. Such an intertextual connection would demonstrate the reflective awareness of postmodern literature that Paul Dawson considers to be a crucial element of contemporary expressions of omniscient narration.

Similarly to the previous example, this passage deals with the "true end of civilization" and the major causes of its downfall, starting from a larger perspective and gradually restricting it to American society (reference to school shootings) and to this book's story (the asbestos test). Only when the narrator refers to the "toxicity" in the walls can the reader make a thematic connection with the asbestos-testing at Robbie's elementary school and imagine this reflection to be Robbie's internal monologue.

In Part Three of the novel, two instances appear that are worthy of attention, the first of which is in ch. 55 (a chapter I have already analyzed for its display of prolepsis and multiple focalization):

25. *Who isn't helpless? Isn't it better to acknowledge that? Shouldn't we trade accusation for a more dignified, world-weary acknowledgment? We love each other because we can't truly love ourselves, we depend on each other because we can't depend on ourselves. We can't talk our daughters out of ugly dresses that no longer fit, we can't embrace the world the way we once did, we can't stop people from dying.* (215, italics original)

This passage is formally presented as Dan's quoted monologue (signaled by the italics) and is supposed to express his "Gallic resign" towards Violet's choice of clothing and Isabel's accusing looks. The reflection, however, immediately stands out for its universalizing scope ("*Who isn't helpless?*") and for the use of the plural *we* instead of first-person narration in the singular, a choice that, similarly to what occurred in example n. 17 and post n. 5, has the effect of indirectly including the reader in its address. Even though the last sentence clearly refers to Dan's life experiences in the story (i.e., his inability to convince Violet about the dress, the failure of his musical comeback, and Robbie's death), the source behind the first lines of the paragraph is ambiguous and could be connected to the narrator, whose presence was introduced by the psycho-narration preceding them. The second noteworthy example appears in ch. 65

(251-54), towards the end of the novel, and features Chess and Isabel interacting for the first time and sharing their opinions around motherhood and their romantic relationships with men. Dialogues are predominant in this chapter, with the few exceptions of Chess' internal monologue in the beginning and the following passage:

> 26. They hesitate. It seems that they share a secret but the secret can't be spoken. The secret is this, the two of them, silent together, weary and vigilant, unaccompanied in the world although they are not alone in it; waiting, both of them, for something to collapse: the chair, the house, the economy; alert to the possibility of distant sounds: an approaching car, a whimpering child; two people who can't stop paying attention, ever; who are compelled to worry about the future because the future threatens to unmake their children. Two people who thought, each in her own way, that she'd be different. The secret is neither more nor less than this, the two of them, here. (253)

The presence of dialogues in the chapter heightens what Stanzel calls the "illusion of immediacy" (i.e., the impression of reading the characters' direct and unmediated speech), yet this passage stands out as entirely narratorial as it illustrates the details of a "secret" Isabel and Chess supposedly share but that they are not fully able to comprehend or put into words. The secret that unites them is simply their being women, the disappointment of not achieving their ideal relationship with the men in their lives (i.e., Dan and Garth), of realizing that they are, in fact, like other women and that they are united by the love for their children and the urge to protect them.

The passages I have analyzed in this chapter are only a few of the numerous examples of the narrator's intrusiveness that can be found in the novel, which features a constellation of short comments or reflections of dubious origin and generalizing scope that I will not examine in detail, but that nevertheless contribute to the characterization and personalization of *Day*'s narrator. Some of these are, for example, the reflection on marriage on p. 164 (cf. ch. 4.1), the

"overly dramatic" reflection on the chickens Isabel wants to cook on p. 224 (which clashes with the following description of her as "insufficiently dramatic" and superficial), and the comparison of an Icelandic harbor with afterlife contained in Wolfe's post n. 5.

5.2.3   *Day*'s Narrator as Omniscient

The different displays of zero focalization—i.e., panoramic point of view, prolepses, analepses, and paralepses—and of the narrator's intrusiveness, both in the form of stylistic expressivity and intrusive commentary, thoroughly studied in chapters 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 allow for the classification of *Day*'s narrator as "omniscient" in accordance with Paul Dawson's criteria outlined in ch. 5.1. To what extent, however, can *Day*'s narrator be defined by Dawson's theory of contemporary omniscient narration?

As was illustrated in ch. 5.1, Dawson considers omniscient narration to be "contemporary" to the extent that it connects with the post-postmodern aesthetic, i.e., that it demonstrates "textual awareness" of postmodern experimentation (particularly metafiction) but tries to "move beyond" it and to reconnect with the reader. Michael Cunningham's *Day* is a novel that reflects a connection to postmodern literature in its experimentations with narrative voice and in its use, as I will argue in the second part of this thesis, of metafiction,[29] while the post-postmodern desire for human connection is embodied by the "reworking of traditional forms," such as the narratorial direct address. The textual awareness of both postmodernism and post-postmodernism is what brings me to classify *Day* as an instance of *contemporary* omniscient narration. In terms of Dawson's "modes" of contemporary narrative authority, *Day* is a novel that *partly* reflects the modes of the *ironic moralist* and of the *pyrotechnic storyteller*;

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[29] The connection to postmodern literature is also embodied by the intertextual connection to Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), as has been pointed out in note 26.

I emphasize the word "partly" because, as I will shortly explain, Dawson's four modes are not exhaustive in classifying the omniscience found in Cunningham's novel.

The first mode of contemporary omniscience, the *ironic moralist*, is characterized by the use of narratorial direct address embodying the post-postmodern impulse to "move beyond" postmodern exhaustion through the "reworking of traditional forms" (Dawson 68). Similarly to D. F. Wallace's short story "Octet," however, *Day* does not feature direct but rather *indirect* address to the reader: the narrator never communicates with readers in a straightforward way, but rather maintains his "indeterminateness" by indirectly addressing them through the use of the "autotelic second person" and of *we* narration (cf. examples p. 164, n. 17, 25, and Wolfe's post n. 5). The *pyrotechnic storyteller*, on the other hand, is characterized by a distinctly intrusive narrator that asserts his omniscient authority through his style: Aczel's notion of stylistic expressivity plays a central role in this mode and is crucial to "the evocation and characterization of a dramatized narrator" (Dawson 112). As has been aptly demonstrated in the study of *Day*'s narrator's stylistic expressivity (cf. ch. 4.2 and 5.2.2), the narrator asserts his intrusive presence through the use of refined diction, smooth syntax, and abstract language; differently than Dawson's definition of the pyrotechnic storyteller, however, *Day*'s narrator never "overshadows" or overpowers the characters, and his tone is never "garrulous" (111). The first half of Dawson's analysis of Rick Moody's *The Diviners* (2005), a novel he classifies as expressing the mode of the pyrotechnic storyteller, reflects *Day*'s narrative structure in extreme detail, including minimal intrusive commentary and the overarching "palpable" stylistic presence of the narrator:

> After the prologue the rest of the novel proceeds to orient the narrative perspective of each chapter around an individual character in a large cast with a minimum of intrusive commentary. This is a typical pattern, setting the scene with panoramic external focalization before "zooming" into variable internal focalization. However, the opening

establishes a frame in which the *stylistic* presence of the narrator's voice remains palpable throughout the novel. (132, italics original)

The importance of the opening paragraph in establishing a "pattern" of variable internal focalization framed within the broader panoramic viewpoint and organizing presence of the omniscient narrator is reflected also in *Day*, and I will discuss it in more detail in ch. 6.1. The second half of Dawson's analysis of *The Diviners*, however, expresses what I argue distinguishes *Day*'s narration from the mode of the pyrotechnic storyteller:

Despite each focalized chapter relying heavily on free indirect discourse, there is very much the sense of the narrative voice moving from one character to another, performing their thoughts in pyrotechnic fashion, in much the same way that the light is traced in the prologue, rather than this narratorial consciousness yielding linguistically to shifting deictic centers. […] Throughout the novel the narrator acts as a sort of ventriloquist, taking on and parodying the characters' linguistic habitus, but with the same syntactic rhythm. (132-35)

While it is true that *Day*'s narrator communicates a sense of "performing" the character thoughts rather than yielding deictically to them (as has been seen in the narrated monologues of the children), I argue that he does not do so in "pyrotechnic fashion," but rather in a highly realistic fashion that makes it hard to distinguish his voice from actual figural thought (apart from the isolated instances in which he wants to be perceived and intentionally uses his distinctive speech-style). Furthermore, there is no "parodying" intention behind his representation of figural thought, but rather a sympathetic one that aims at inviting empathy towards the characters. This brief comparison of Dawson's modes of narrative authority and *Day*'s features therefore shows how the modes of the ironic moralist and pyrotechnic storyteller are not enough to define *Day*'s type of omniscient narration.

An alternative interpretation of *Day*'s omniscient narration can be found in Monika Fludernik's "new type of nonnatural narration," which she proposes in the article "New Wine in Old Bottles?" for *New Literary History*. She was inspired to theorize a new "type" of narration after the encounter with George Garrett's work, specifically *The Death of the Fox: A Novel of Elizabeth and Ralegh* (1971, the first volume of his "Elizabethan trilogy"), who was able to create an "omniscient third-person narrative that is both consistently authorial and focalized through the mind of the current protagonist" (Fludernik 626). The language of Garrett's authorial narrator is characterized by a "very laid-back," almost colloquial vocabulary that is hard to distinguish from the protagonist's own language, and that clashes with the "typically 'authorial' style of superior knowledge" of traditional authorial (i.e., omniscient) narratives, which usually highlights the hierarchical relationship between the narrator and the fictional characters (627).

According to Fludernik, this new type of narration is "unnatural" because it combines two types of nonnatural narration, i.e., "traditional omniscient narrative" with "modernist types of internal focalization": the "expectations of immediacy," typical of internally focalized narratives, clash with the presence of a "prominent teller figure," who would realistically be associated with "a personalized teller who could not see things from the internal perspective of the characters he is talking about," and this violation of "real-life frames" is what creates a sense of "oddity and disorientation" in the reader (628). Nevertheless, she believes that this new unnatural type of narration will become popular due to its ability to fulfill readers' needs in combining "a narrator figure, who can tell us what we need to know, with the privileged position of immediate access to a character's interiority" (628).

Fludernik's "new type of authorial narrative" (631) might be more suitable to define *Day*'s narrative, as she identifies a "heterodiegetic extradiegetic narrator and zero focalization" coexisting with what seems to be "internal focalization" in the same text. In analyzing Garrett's

The Death of the Fox, Fludernik points out that while the focalization is external, it is also consonant and "sympathetic" to the protagonist (i.e., Raleigh): she terms this phenomenon "consonant reflectorization […] the narrator's narrating the thoughts of the protagonist in his own language but as if the character had become the narrator" (629), something that can be observed in Cunningham's novel, too. Similarly to *Day*, Garrett's novel also devotes each chapter to a new character, and there are parts of the novel in which it is not clear whether a certain passage is simply a narratorial "description of facts" or the protagonist's internal thought process (Dawson's "hesitancy of attribution", 193). When this happens, readers are led to reevaluate their "objective reading into a subjective one on the basis of context" (e.g., the retrospective attribution of a passage to a specific character after the mentioning of their name) (631).

Generally speaking, Fludernik's "new type of authorial narration"—a "heterodiegetic discourse which focuses on the main protagonist from up and above and looks deeply into his subjective thought"—proves to be more comprehensive than Dawson's modes of omniscient narration in describing the specific features of *Day*'s narrative. There are, however, a few characteristics of Fludernik's "new type" that do not conform to the features displayed by *Day*'s narrator's, such as the absence of a "marked stylistic difference" between the narrator and the character's language (contributing to confusion between the two) and the fact that Garrett's narrator is described as being limited to "the range of knowledge available to the main protagonist" (629-30). As has been thoroughly illustrated, the narrator in *Day* possesses knowledge of the storyworld well beyond the characters' focalization and his narrative voice is stylistically distinguishable from that of the characters.

It would appear, therefore, that the way the narrator's voice manifests itself in the text is what singles out *Day*'s omniscient narration from both Dawson's "modes" and Fludernik's "new type" of authorial narration, placing it in a midway between the two. Although *Day*'s

narratorial voice never overshadows the characters he is describing (as the pyrotechnic storyteller does), his voice is not as "unmarked" as to render it indistinguishable from the character's voice (as Fludernik's "new type" does): as has been shown by my previous research, *Day*'s narratorial voice is stylistically different and clearly distinguishable from the characters' voice for his diction, syntax, tone, and tendency towards abstract reflections. Instead of making extensive evaluative or ironic statements about the story, as a traditional authorial narrator would, *Day*'s narrator reveals himself to be complementary to the story, never overpowering the characters, and the juxtaposing of "authorial and figural aspects" has the purpose, as Fludernik writes about Garrett's narration, of providing a "detailed analysis" of the characters (632). The peculiar mix of omniscient and internally focalized narration allows *Day*'s narrator to be both inside and outside of the storyworld, functioning almost as a "tenth" character contributing to the narrative in a meaningful way with symbolic and metaphorical descriptions and reflections that enrich the emotional texture of the novel.

6. Metafiction

The final part of my thesis will be dedicated to the use of metafiction in *Day*, a technique that is strongly associated with postmodern literature and that, I argue, is employed by Michael Cunningham to implicitly comment on the creative process of writing and to emotionally connect with readers (a "humanist" purpose that agrees with Dawson's conceptualization of contemporary omniscient narration in the post-postmodern context). The element of metafiction is an important aspect of the novel that accompanies readers from the beginning to the end: it is deeply connected to the character of Wolfe and, I argue, relies on a re-interpretation of the story's narrative structure which posits the opening chapter to function as a prologue. This is why I will begin this part by illustrating my claims regarding the opening chapter (the theoretical base for my argument), after which I will proceed with an analysis of the figure of Wolfe—i.e., how he is presented, the role he plays in the novel, his relationship with the characters and, most importantly, with the narrator—and eventually conclude with a theorization of the use of metafiction in *Day*.

6.1 The Opening Chapter

The opening paragraph of *Day* was first introduced in ch. 4.2.1, a chapter dedicated the study of the narrator's stylistic expressivity, due to its significant display of refined diction and unfocalized perspective. The book's first chapter is arguably the most important one, for three main reasons: first, it showcases the narrator's style and textual presence; second, it exemplifies the dominant narrative structure; and third, it introduces and sets the tone for the story that follows.

The narrator's presence is established from the very first paragraph, which features an unfocalized "Olympian" overview of Brooklyn and the East River underlining the presence of

Day's extradiegetic heterodiegetic narrator with zero focalization (i.e., the omniscient narrator) setting the scene of the story (cf. ex. n. 12). The paragraph which immediately follows the opening introduces the first character of *Day*'s story, Isabel, and the initially unfocalized perspective appears to become internally focalized on her. She is described standing in front of her bedroom window and reflecting on the people she sees on the street (the same ones that were described by the narrator in the first paragraph, i.e., the "ponytailed woman," "the man in the dress," and "the shoe repair man"), as well as on the people in her life—her husband Dan, who is sleeping in bed, her children Nathan and Violet, her brother Robbie, and her work boss Derrick—when she is interrupted by an outlandish encounter with an owl perched on a tree branch in front of her window.

This encounter will spurn a series of reflections characterized by the same tendency to abstraction (cf. ch. 5.2.2), attention to detail, and refined diction (cf. ch. 4.2) which are typical of the narrator's speech style. The owl, perfectly camouflaging with the tree on which it is perched, is described as follows: "Its feathers are an almost perfect match for the **dusky, variegated gray-brown** of the bark. Isabel might not have seen the owl at all were it not for its eyes, two **black-and-gold disks** no bigger than dimes, **blazingly attentive, utterly un-human**. It seems, momentarily, that the tree itself has chosen this moment to inform Isabel that it is sentient, and watchful" (4, emphasis mine). Its eyes are "unblinking" and "feline," and Isabel's interaction with the bird ends when it decides to fly away:

27. She and the owl remain briefly in place, eyes locked, before the owl flies away, so effortlessly that it seems not to beat its wings at all but merely to consent to flight. It arcs up, and vanishes. There is, in its departure, a sense of abdication, as if its presence in the tree outside the window had been a mistake, an unintended opening in the fabric of the possible, quickly and efficiently rectified. (5)

The encounter, an "unintended opening in the fabric of the possible," constitutes a momentary suspension of the time of the story (what Dorrit Cohn calls the "expansion" effect, cf. ch. 4.1), and the subsequent return to the normal passing of time is marked by a change in tense usage from present tense to present perfect ("The owl seems already to **have been** a waking dream of Isabel's," emphasis mine), future simple (...), and, eventually, past simple. The last paragraph of the first chapter begins in the past tense and describes the same people mentioned at the beginning, contributing to give to Isabel's previous reflections on the owl an isolated quality: "The owl has disappeared. The jogger has jogged on. The man in the dress has gone into his building. There's only the shoe repair man, who has turned on the shop's fluorescent light, a light that does not radiate from behind the glass of the shop's window, does not offer any added illumination to the street" (5).

This is an example of what Carolin Gebauer calls *alternate foregrounding* in her book *Making Time: World Construction in the Present-Tense Novel* (2022), the highlighting of fictional tense usage through the juxtaposing of two or more different tense forms (in this case, present tense with past tense) (Gebauer 74), and it has the effect of marking a return to the normal passing of the story's time. In *Making Time*, Gebauer studies the intricacies of present-tense usage in fictional narratives, underlining how fictional present tense does not constitute (as was for long believed in classical narrative theory) a "purely temporal category," but rather a "fully-fledged narrative strategy" (8-10), and proposes her "narratological model of present-tense narration," which relies on a tripartite approach to fictional present-tense usage—divided into *formal-structural*, *functional*, and *syntactic* dimensions (62-63). On the basis of her narratological model, *Day* can be classified as a contemporary present-tense novel with heterogeneous tense usage (i.e., with more than two different tense forms, common in present-tense novels that feature *prolepsis* and *analepsis*), in which the present is the *global* and *central* fictional tense, while past and future are local tenses. It features *tense-switching* (i.e., regular

tense shifts) with a temporalizing function (referring to "different time frames within the fictive universe," e.g., narrated memories and flashbacks) and, as was pointed out earlier, alternate foregrounding (64-80). Gebauer's functions of present-tense usage that can be found in *Day* are mostly the *referential* (locating the reader in the deictic fields of the story, i.e., the "I-here-now origines" of narrator and characters), the *immersive* (helping readers to "mentally experience" the story[30]), the *synchronizing* (creating the impression of "simultaneous or concurrent narration"[31]), the *thematic* (when "'presence' and/or 'contemporaneity' constitute(s) (the) story's central theme(s)"), and the *transmodal* function (featuring "representation strategies" typical of discourse modes different than narrative or report, specifically the descriptive, explanatory, and commentary mode) (86-136). However, even though the last paragraph begins in the past tense, the entire first chapter ends in the fictional present and it is closed by Isabel's final reflections on the "shoe hospital," with its neon sign and its ambiguous animal mannequin. Events such as the opening of the shoe repair shop, the returning home of the man in "little black dress and combat boots," and the jogging away of the ponytailed woman signal a return to the normal passing of time and function as an "announcement of the start of the day"—a day which will actually begin from the following chapter and, interestingly enough, with a description of Wolfe.

Chapter 1 features events happening in the short period of time that anticipates the coming of the day: it opens in a moment of transition from the "nocturnal black to the opaque deep green of the approaching day" (reflected in the waters of the East River) in which artificial lights still stand out against the sky, the moon is still high and bright, and people are either just

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[30] Readers can "project themselves into the here-and-now of the narrative" by mentally relocating themselves in the storyworld (what cognitive science calls "deictic shift theory") in narratives that create the impression of simultaneous narration, i.e., in which the distance between the narrated events and the perspective from which they are narrated has been reduced (Gebauer 95-98).

[31] "Narrative immediacy" is characteristic of simultaneous narration, an effect that can be achieved by the "unfiltered access" to the thoughts of the characters which gives the illusion of happening in the moment (Gebauer 113-115)—e.g., Robbie's "Shit. Retract" (Cunningham 44) and ex. n. 27.

returning home from a night out or having an early start to their day. This transitional moment

before sunrise is nothing more than an instant throughout the whole day, yet its quick passing

coincides with the time that is required to read the first chapter (i.e., the time of narration).

Once the reading is complete, the sun will have risen and the actual day—and with it the novel's

story—will begin: this, along with my previous observations, is why I argue that *Day*'s first

chapter actually serves as a prologue, introducing the location, the main characters, and the

presence of the narrator, while remaining outside the actual "day" of the story.

Furthermore, the first chapter is important because it exemplifies the double-levelled

narrative structure of the whole novel (the underlying presence of omniscient narration and the

embedded existence of multiple internal focalization) by first "setting the scene with panoramic

external focalization" and then "'zooming' into variable internal focalization," a pattern Paul

Dawson identified in Rick Moody's *The Diviners* (Dawson 132). Similarly to Moody's novel,

the opening of *Day* establishes "a frame in which the stylistic presence of the narrator's voice

remains palpable throughout the novel," despite the illusion of internal focalization.

6.2   Wolfe

The character of Wolfe, while not being a "character" in the strict sense (at least, not in

the same way the other characters appear in the novel), is the most unique one and proves to

be essential to the metafictional thread running through *Day*. As was illustrated in the book

overview and in ch. 4.2.2, Wolfe is a childhood imaginary friend of Isabel and Robbie's ("an

adult incarnation of the older brother the two of them made up when they were children—the

big brother who defended them, who feared nothing and no one, who knew the languages of

animals,"16) who was brought to "life" shortly before the beginning of the story, and that now

exists as a seemingly real person on the Instagram account @wolfe_man (33). He was created

as a way for Robbie to cope with his last breakup, and his existence will remain a secret

between the Walker siblings throughout the novel, connecting them even after Robbie's death. From the very beginning Wolfe is identified as a fictional creation, and his artificiality will be underlined by Robbie many times in the novel—yet this does not prevent him, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, to become increasingly "real" for the Walker siblings as the story develops.

According to the argument I made in section 6.1, the actual "day" of the story starts on the second chapter and is opened by a long narratorial description of Wolfe, immediately framed as imaginary: "If Wolfe were real, he'd be the elusive figure at the heart of the story. He'd be the animated, friends-encircled guy you feel to meet at a party, the athletic-looking stranger glimpsed as he strides off the B train, the prince whose kiss might fix everything if he were able to find you, comatose in your glass casket, deep in the woods" (7). After these first lines the description, which opened with a supposition (signaled by the use of the conditional), proceeds to describe him in the present tense as if he were a real person, addressing a "you" that, due to the unfocalized quality of the passage, indirectly includes the reader. He is described as a "regular guy with the volume turned up a little," working as a pediatrician at a community clinic and living with his best friend (Lyla) and dog (Arlette) in Brooklyn; he is possessed of a "sable-stubbed, off-center beauty" and is "Liked" on Instagram for embodying all the ideal qualities a person would look for in their romantic interest:

28. He's the handsome-ish man who'll follow through, who'll stick around, who sees it in you, that … youness that seems to escape the notice of others, or fails to hold their interest, over time.

Wolfe is fascinated by your gorgeousness of person. He's thirtyish. He's ready to commit. He doesn't need to be the prettiest person in the room, though there's nothing he can do about the fact that, more often than not, he's the most magnetic. He emanates. And yet, he's innocent of vanity. He's hot for now—he benches two hundred, has no

idea about the way water beads in his curls when he steps out of the shower, doesn't clock the boys who clock his pecs and abs in the locker room—and nurtures no pre-regrets about the future, when he'll be nearsighted, a few pounds overweight, a good doctor who attends faithfully to his patients while awaiting tonight with you, just you, which is all he desires, all he needs. (7-8)

No allusions have been made yet to the fact that Wolfe is Robbie and Isabel's creation, and he appears (for now) to simply exist in the storyworld, untied to any of the characters (apart from Robbie, who is thinking about him in ch. 2) and extremely real for his Instagram followers. Only in ch. 3 will Isabel ask her brother "Did you post anything for Wolfe yet?", explicitly linking Robbie to Wolfe, and while the siblings share the ideation of Wolfe's persona, they each have a different relationship with him, especially in Part One: Robbie is extremely aware of Wolfe's artificiality[32] and is generally more relaxed, while Isabel is more nervous, possessive, and emotionally invested in Wolfe, clearly viewing him as an alter ego of herself and of Robbie (for instance, she desperately wants to make him enact her and Robbie's childhood dream of buying a country house upstate, and wants to solve her financial problems by pitching his story to Netflix). Wolfe's fictionality is underlined again in ch. 4 (cf. ch. 4.2.2), first in the text and then in Wolfe's first post of the day; he is described as follows, while Robbie is searching for a photo to post from his #wolfe_man folder:

29. Wolfe is not some hyperbolic, studly fantasy. Wolfe's decently handsome, dark-eyed face is that of a stranger lifted from Depositphotos. His roommate, Lyla, is, in reality, an effortlessly fashionable Black woman whose Instagram name is Galatea2.2. His apartment is an amalgam of three different places. His dog was recently adopted from a shelter by someone called Inezhere. […]

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[32] E.g., "Wolfe is just some postings on Instagram. We're making him up as we go along. He's not a person. He's barely even the idea of a person" (18), and him asking Isabel "Do we need to get quite this real?" after she proposes to pitch Wolfe's story to Netflix (41-42).

The Frankenstein association is inevitable.

Wolfe, however, is the idea of a person, not a violation of formerly living tissue. He's not going to come to life mortified, lost, desperate for connection. He's not going to drift away on an iceberg into a frigid sea. He's a fantasy—a sweet and relatively minor one—shared (as it turns out) by 3,407 others. (21-22)

For Robbie, his main "creator," Wolfe is more than a simple "hyperbolic" fantasy: he is a sort of "real" fantasy, an imagined creation that is nonetheless predicated on aspects of real, existing people—he is real in his "fictitious world of shifting time and precarious seasons" (22). The artificiality of Wolfe's persona is underlined again in post n. 3 (67), showing Robbie's sources for the creation of his apartment, and post n. 4 (115), in which Robbie speculates on the various directions Wolfe and Lyla's life could take.

When Robbie resolves, towards the end of Part One, to move out of Isabel's attic and to "abandon a life of reasonable expectations," he realizes that with time he has "imbued" Wolfe with "the rudimentary aspects of a soul" ("or, if 'soul' isn't the right word (there are those discouraging, unsexy Catholic associations), a beingness that exceeds Wolfe's details and his days. A quality Robbie suspects he'll be able to see in just about any man," 103), something which spurns him to search for "his own Wolfe, in whatever form Wolfe takes" and which will eventually lead him to his aunt Zara's mountain cabin in Iceland.

In Part Two, Robbie is "trapped" in Iceland with no internet access and no direct contact with the outside world since the outbreak of the pandemic, and in this isolated situation, in which he has become more "prone to fantasies" and premonitions, Wolfe will represent his only companionship in the wilderness: "It's lonely, and it's liberating. He's accountable to no one except Wolfe, who's gone for a hike. Robbie has been tired lately, more prone to naps than explorations, but it's good to know that Wolfe is out there, in all that stern and verdant beauty" (125). Throughout Part Two, Robbie will refer to himself and to Wolfe as *we* and *us*, as is

evident in the captions of posts n. 5 and 6, as well as in Robbie's notebook entries and letters to Isabel. In the notebook entries featured in ch. 40 (56-58) Robbie describes the Icelandic nature that surrounds him (cold, holy, and smelling of "Green"), and Wolfe is mentioned as a real presence in note n. 3: "Wolfe was here earlier but he's gone, I'm sure he said he was going for a hike. He's quiet and quixotic (points for using "quixotic" in a sentence). He doesn't exactly live in time. I don't mind that he's imaginary but I lose track sometimes of the fact that he is" (157).

In the two letters Robbie writes to Isabel, he refers to himself and Wolfe with the plural *we*, as if they were actually living together in Iceland: the first letter (ch. 44, 167-69), describing the beautiful landscape and Robbie's wish to become a doctor, is short and easygoing, while the second letter (ch. 52, 194-98), in which Robbie writes about his health issues and isolation. is drastically more serious. While trying to keep it light and humorous, he confesses to feeling sick and feverish, too weak to walk down the mountain: he feels time passing through him, and hallucinates the calendar whispering in a foreign language, the sky singing (a sort of "musical rumble" which reminds him of "God singing to herself," 197), and Wolfe returning back from a hike in the mountains.

Robbie's second letter to Isabel is also his last one and the last chapter of *Day*'s Part Two, a part in which Wolfe has become a real living entity for Robbie and in which he becomes realer for Isabel, too. Differently than her brother, however, Isabel feels resentment against Robbie and Wolfe because she feels they have abandoned her and that Robbie has betrayed her with Wolfe. In ch. 26 (119-123) she self-identifies as "frighteningly intense" about them:

30. Although she knows better, she can't seem to overcome her conviction that Robbie has left her for Wolfe and that Wolfe has left her for Robbie, as well.

She's slightly frighteningly intense because she's at least somewhat delusional. In her right(er) mind she knows she has not been discarded or shunted aside. Still, the delusion

persists. Robbie has laid claim to Wolfe, Robbie has fled with Wolfe to Iceland (*Iceland*) and left her behind to take care of … everything that's happening here. (120, italics original)

In the rest of the chapter, Isabel's narrated and quoted monologues reveal her jealousy for the fact that Robbie moved out of the apartment and went to Iceland to follow his dreams, while she feels stuck and "abandoned to her own life, here in the apartment" (123). Wolfe will remain, however, the only way for her to instantly connect with her brother despite the thousands of miles separating them, and he will become even more of a bridge between the Walker siblings in Part Three, after Robbie has died of the virus. One last noteworthy observation regarding this part of the novel is that the two Wolfe's Instagram posts featured in Part Two—i.e., post n. 5 and n. 6—are the ones that display the strongest narratorial style and, more generally, his presence (consider the reflections on the Icelandic harbor, an "afterlife that mimics the earthly works of mortals," of post n. 5, and on "the barely discernible stripe of a waterfall" surrounded by "luminously green grass" of post n. 6), and that more than all of the other posts establish a connection between Wolfe and the omniscient narrator.

In Part Three, after Robbie has died, his phone and Wolfe's Instagram account will pass on to Isabel: "Isabel is Wolfe, now. She feels no guilt about it, she who feels guilty about almost everything else. Robbie would want, as does Isabel, for Wolfe to live on" (225). In this part, Wolfe only appears when Isabel decides to post on Instagram and represents a necessary means for her to keep the idea of Robbie alive; keeping the account active and inventing stories about Wolfe and Robbie's romance is her private way of keeping the virtual figure of her brother alive and happy in the alternate reality of social media, as well as in her own mind. As her narrated monologue in ch. 58 (224-26) reveals, she has "told herself" that Robbie and Wolfe fell in love after meeting at a house party discussing the ubiquity of red plastic party cups ("just like that, Wolfe found the man he'd been waiting for. Just like that, Robbie found him, too,"

226), and the creative process behind the "Caption" of post n. 8 (246-47) sheds some light on Isabel's idea of Wolfe, as well as highlighting his fictionality:

> 31. She hesitates. It isn't Wolfe's voice. Wolfe is poetic in his heart but is not given to lyrical flights. He's too abashed, too prone to venerations to try to put them into words. Wolfe knows that words fail. He knows that his life and Robbie's life are better contained in gestures, in a hand placed gently on a face, in an unexpected kiss or a whispered endearment, ephemeral, as impossible to speak of as they are to photograph. (247)

She reflects on the idea of Wolfe's "voice" and decides to post her initial draft for the caption despite it not reflecting the persona they constructed, as she knows that Wolfe's followers will not notice the discrepancy, nor mind if they do.

The last of Wolfe's Instagram posts (post n. 9) is unique both for its structure and for its significance in the story. The post, which only features the "Caption," is a metaphor for Isabel's coming to terms with her brother's death and for her desire to go on with her life, expressed by "It's the end of This and the beginning of That" ("That" referring to life without Robbie, her father, her husband—i.e., a life she has to start over without the people she was most used to). Her accepting this change is reflected in the last lines of the caption: "Goodbye from this bright high place. Here there's something I can only call immaculate, some state of sacred suspension, but soon it'll be time to come home again, and go on from there. It's almost time now" (269). While "goodbye from this bright high place" can be read as her own interpretation of Robbie's imagined point of view, the allusions to coming home and to "go on from there" are Isabel's reflections on her own life, since Robbie cannot return from the "bright high place" (which functions as a multiple metaphor for Iceland, heaven, and Instagram at the same time) anymore. Instagram, besides being a virtual place where logic is not required, takes on a deeper meaning in Part Three as it becomes a sort of heaven for Robbie: the "Image" in post n. 7 describes Iceland as "the least earthly possible place on the surface of the planet," and in the "Caption"

Isabel writes "Robbie and I are in heaven together. Here, in the middle of everywhere" (226), an idea that is reiterated by her following narrated monologue ("It is, she supposes, a kind of eternity for Robbie and Wolfe. An escape from the boundaries of time") and in the metaphor of the "bright high place" of post n. 9.

The last post from Wolfe's account is also significant from a macrostructural perspective, as the story ends with the last words of its caption. The fact that the novel closes with an Instagram post linked to Wolfe and begins with a narratorial description of him supports my argument that Michael Cunningham's *Day* is ultimately framed by this character—or, more precisely, by the most fictional and artificial element of the storyworld. Furthermore, the presence of Wolfe at the beginning and at the end of *Day*'s story brings attention to the process of fictional creation and is essential to the establishment of the metafictional structure in the novel, which is thus revealed as a fiction inside the fiction.

6.3 Metafiction and *Mise en Abyme*

Metafiction is described by Patricia Waugh, in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984), as a form of fictional writing which "self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact" in order to "explore the relationship between the world *of* the fiction and the world *outside* the fiction" (i.e., reality) (Waugh 2-3). I argue that Michael Cunningham makes use of metafiction in *Day* in connection to the figure of Wolfe (drawing attention to the artificiality of the novel and to its status as the author's creation) and, more specifically, that the novel enacts a *mise en abyme* of fiction writing itself, seeing how the two main characters are engaged in creating Wolfe and his reality in much the same way a fiction writer creates his or her characters—i.e., in the same way Cunningham created the story of *Day*.

Mise en abyme, a French term meaning "to put into the abyss" (Minissale 48), can generally be described as the recurrence of an image within itself in a possibly infinite loop of repetition and, when applied to writing, it usually indicates the technique of writing a story within a story. Gérard Genette writes about this technique in *Narrative Discourse* while discussing "metadiegetic narratives" (i.e., "second-degree narratives"), especially when these have a "purely *thematic* relationship" to the first narratives in which they are embedded (i.e., the *diegesis*): the "*structure en abyme*" is described by him as "an extreme form of this relationship of analogy [between diegesis and metadiegesis], pushed to the limits of identity" (233). The same technique is defined by Gregory Minissale in his book *Framing Consciousness in Art* (2009) as "a process of representation within representation which points to the *mise en abyme* of consciousness that produces it, and is engaged with it in the art experience" (49)[33].

In *Day* there is a clear repetition of the process of fiction writing within the fiction itself, a story whose artificiality is underlined by the "palpable" intrusive presence of the omniscient narrator. This *mise en abyme* of fiction writing, inherently connected to the figure of Wolfe, has the potential effect of changing readers' perception of him by making them reflect on the novel as a creation of the author: Wolfe is thus perceived to be as *real* as the characters in the story (a sort of ninth character with a tangible presence in it) because he is exactly as *fictional* as them. Highlighting the author's role in the construction of the storyworld bestows the same level of "realness" (or, rather, fictitiousness) to all the elements of the story, and all the characters emerge as equally constructed by the narrative (i.e., there are no characters more fictional than others). Wolfe, however, is a unique character that I argue is able to become even "realer" for readers in a way other characters in *Day* cannot, due to his intrinsic connection to the virtual world of Instagram.

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[33] He points out how many critical theorists only consider *mise en abyme* to happen when the internal representation duplicates "the external representation in which it is contained," yet he tends to consider the technique to be something "not simply to be found in the text, author or reader, but in the cooperation of all these in the field of consciousness" (Minissale 49).

Instagram is a social media platform created in 2010 (Eldridge) that is able to provide an immersive experience for people by combining images, words, sounds, and videos, which are then selected and filtered by users based on what they want to convey and what image of themselves they want to give to the world. This process of arbitrary selection and omission is what has brought about, with time, a confusion between the planes of reality and fiction (what is real and what is not) and the possibility for people to create alternative versions of themselves online which are meant to be as authentic as their real selves. Such a conception of Instagram is expressed by Isabel and Robbie in connection to Wolfe's posts: Instagram's virtual world is seen as self-referential, existing "outside the time-space continuum" (Cunningham 68), and independent from any narratives (i.e., "The gaps between images can go unexplained. The implication suffices […]," 226)—a "portal" between reality and fiction Isabel can "pass easily through" in order to imagine herself with Robbie (ch. 62, 246-47). Consequently, Instagram users "don't insist on narrative coherence, any more than they insist on the persistence of memory" (Cunningham 115) and they don't seem to care about temporal or logical incongruencies.

In such a world, real people become fictional (their reality is re-framed based on what is convenient) and fictional beings become real, and this is what allowed Wolfe to become real for the Walker siblings during the story. Instagram's ability to merge existential planes, however, is also what allows him to become real for *flesh-and-blood* readers of *Day* (Gebauer 85), as they see their own reality reflected in the story: Instagram exists in both the real world of readers and the fictional world of the characters, it is a bridge between them, and thus Wolfe (who only exists on Instagram) acquires a superior level of "realness" than his fictional counterparts—a "realness" that is also underlined by his connection with the omniscient narrator's voice (especially in posts n. 5 and 6) spurning an indirect association with the author

and with the process of writing itself—somehow overcoming the boundaries of the textual world and connecting with the readers' reality.

Ultimately, I argue that Wolfe is a paradoxical and oxymoronic element in the novel, yet he is also a fundamental one upon which the novel's entire narrative structure and inherent message relies. He is paradoxical in the sense that he exists as both *real* and *not real*, both *inside* and *outside* the storyworld and the fictional work as a whole. In *Day*'s storyworld, Wolfe appears to be *inside* the world and to be *real* when he becomes real for Isabel and Robbie (mostly Part Two and Three), while he is *outside* and *not real* when the characters remember Wolfe is their creation and does not exist on their same ontological plane. Similarly, he appears to be *not real* for readers when he lies *inside* the fictional work and is just another invented character, while he takes on a *real* presence *outside* of the textual boundaries of the novel when he is connected to the *mise en abyme* of fiction writing and to the world of Instagram. This quality of ontological "in-betweenness"—of existing across multiple planes of reality— however, is exactly what allows Wolfe to break the "textual fourth wall" of literature (Wallace, "Octet" 125) and to act as a spatio-temporal gate between the fictional storyworld and the real world in which the novel circulates to connect with readers on a deeper level, a desire common to many post-postmodern writers (most renownedly D. F. Wallace) and theorized by Paul Dawson to be characteristic of contemporary forms of literary omniscience.

Conclusively, Michael Cunningham's *Day* is a novel that deals with modern technology's unique ability of transcending the boundaries of reality and fiction, and that aims to make the reader reflect on the ways—both positive and negative—this has affected human connections and interactions in the contemporary age. I argue that Cunningham makes use of metafiction in order to spurn a reflection on contemporary U.S. society (i.e., "the world *outside* the fiction")—characterized by the ubiquity of technology and social media in people's lives and by the fragmentation of communication across multiple media—by reproducing a version

of it in the storyworld ("the world *of* the fiction"). His desire to provide a realistic portrayal of modern-day life is reflected in the conspicuous use of different communication media in the novel (especially in Part Two), a decision that tends to interrupt the fluidity of more traditional techniques of narration and that connects to the contemporary phenomenon Ansgar Nünning and Jan Rupp have named the "medialization of narrative" (Gebauer 314).

Medialization is an umbrella term that, as Ansgar and Vera Nünning write in *The British Novel in the Twenty-first Century* (2018), refers to multiple phenomena linked to the "rapid technological change" of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and in the contemporary age they particularly point out the enormous influence the new digital media has had in "fostering generic change" in narrative fiction (alongside financial crises and cultural, political, and social transformations) (Nünning and Nünning 5–12). The "medialization of narrative" thus refers to the influence modern-day communication technologies exert on the creation of contemporary novels (a direct response to the role they play in "all walks of everyday life," Nünning and Nünning 5) and it is reflected in *Day* by the substitution of traditional forms of narration with the "transcription" of letters, emails, text-messages, notebook entries, etc. (cf. ch. 4.3).

Carolin Gebauer, building on studies by scholars such as Irmtraud Huber (*Present-Tense Narration in Contemporary Fiction*), Ansgar and Vera Nünning, and Nina Leise (*Fictions of Time*), argues that present-tense usage in contemporary novels is linked to the medialization of narrative and to the pervasive influence modern communication technology has on people's lives: "simultaneous present-tense narration can, on the one hand, be seen as proof of the increasing medialization of narrative fiction in the modern age. On the other hand, it can be taken as yet another symptom of our accelerated culture" (Gebauer 314). With "accelerated culture" she refers to the contemporary Western cultural landscape, characterized by a different "experience of time" caused by what Hartmut Rosa calls "social acceleration" (i.e., "the ever-increasing speed of social change," Huber 107; qtd. in Gebauer 311) and Helga Nowotny's

notion of "extended present" (i.e., the future is considered as "ever closer to the present" because of "constant technological progress," Gebauer 311). New communication technologies' focus on "the present moment," such as "status updates in instant messaging apps or timelines on social media" (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, TikTok, etc.), has created the impression that "nowadays only the present counts" (Huber 108; qtd. in Gebauer 312) and, consequently, the widespread need for contemporary authors to narrate in the fictional present in order to cope with our new understanding of reality and with our "shortened attention span" (Gebauer 314):

> In times in which instantaneous posts and minute-by-minute updates influence our understanding of storytelling, the principle of "Live now, tell later" (Cohn 1999, 96) is slowly but surely losing its validity, or so it seems. Today, many of us no longer savor the moment by consciously experiencing it; we are too busy thinking about how we could best capture it in a picture or a video snap which we will immediately share with our friends or followers […]. As a consequence, we share occurrences in our lives at the very moment that we are actually experiencing them, because once these occurrences are over we immediately have something else to focus on. In such an overwhelming present, it seems only logical that the acts of experiencing and narrating synchronize; otherwise, we will never have the time to tell of our experiences at all. (314)

Gebauer views the contemporary use of present-tense narration as both a reflection of "the fast-moving nature of storytelling (or rather storysharing) in digital media" and a "counter-movement" to it, when the fictional present is used to slow down the pace of narration by focusing on "space and details" (what she terms "topochronic" present-tense narratives) (315).

The use of the fictional present as the main tense of narration, alongside the employment of multiple media in the story, contribute to the classification of *Day* as a contemporary present-

tense novel that aims to realistically portray the contemporary medialization of everyday life and human interactions, and that is able to directly connect with the readers' reality through the use of metafiction. The *mise en abyme* structure that emerges in connection with the unique figure of Wolfe is what allows *Day* to be a novel that asks its readers to reflect on the reality-fiction boundary and that paves the way, together with the numerous reflections on love, death, and human nature, for an emotional connection between each reader and the characters, the narrator, and, ultimately, the author.

7. Conclusion

This thesis sought to investigate the narrator's presence in Michael Cunningham's 2023 novel *Day* and, more generally, to identify the type of narration his presence creates. Though, on a superficial level, *Day* seems to be a psychological novel characterized by variable internal focalization, I argued that it is actually governed by an omniscient narrator pretending to limit his focalization to each character's perspective and betraying his unlimited access to narrative information in passages such as the exceptional chapter 56 (216-17) and in displays of superior knowledge of past and future events (cf. ch. 5.2.1). The first part of this thesis (i.e., chapters 3, 4, and 5) was dedicated to the textual identification of *Day*'s narrator and to his characterization as "omniscient" in the contemporary sense, while the second part (chapter 6) sought to study the narrator's relationship to the figure of Wolfe and to the use of metafiction in the novel. The results of these studies, as well as the conclusions I derived from them, have been singularly discussed at the end of each chapter, which is why in here I will simply re-trace the steps of my argumentation and provide a summary of the most important points that were made.

Chapter 3 was dedicated to study the narratological concepts of "voice" and "focalization," as well as the differing positions around the concept of narrative voice embodied by the dual voice theory and the optional narrator theory, while chapter 4 was an in-depth study of the textual indicators of the narrator's presence in *Day*. The study of techniques such as FID (i.e., narrated monologue) and of Richard Aczel's notions of stylistic expressivity and of the organizing function of the narrator—contained in chapters 4.1, 4.2., and 4.3—has proven essential in highlighting the narrator's subjectivity behind the words and the organization of the story. Specifically, Dorrit Cohn's theories expressed in *Transparent Minds* were fundamental in demonstrating the mediating presence of the narrator behind passages of quoted or narrated monologues (particularly strong in the representation of children's internal monologues, as has been observed in ch. 4.1.1), while Richard Aczel's theories in "Hearing

Voices in Narrative Texts" emphasized the expressive potential of style and allowed for a characterization of the narrator's voice based on stylistic features and his specific use of tone, diction, and language. The narrator's "speech style," characterized by a refined diction, abstract language, and a tendency to universalize, is observable in the examples contained in ch. 4.2.1 and in some of Wolfe's Instagram posts of ch. 4.2.2, while his organizing function is reflected, following Aczel's argument, by the peculiar use of different media forms in the novel and in the selection of narrative information this inherently implies (cf. ch. 4.3).

The study contained in the first part of my thesis was able to identify the presence of a heterodiegetic and extradiegetic narrator (i.e., narrating in the third person while not being a character in the story) showcasing what Gérard Genette called *zero focalization* (possessing more knowledge than any of the characters could possibly have), which allowed me to connect him with Paul Dawson's study of literary omniscience expressed in *The Return of the Omniscient Narrator*. The in-depth analysis of the narrator's displays of zero focalization contained in chapter 5.2.1—i.e., knowledge of the storyworld (paralepses) and of past and future events (prolepses and analepses) none of the characters could ostensibly have—and of the narrator's "intrusiveness" (both in the form of intrusive commentary and stylistic expressivity) contained in chapter 5.2.2 allowed for the classification of *Day*'s narrator as "omniscient" following Paul Dawson's criteria, and of Cunningham's novel as an instance of contemporary omniscient narration.

Dawson's "modes" of contemporary omniscient narration (specifically the *ironic moralist* and the *pyrotechnic storyteller*, cf. ch. 5.1.1), however, turned out not to be enough to aptly describe *Day*'s narrative, and while Monika Fludernik's "new type of nonnatural narration"—with its seamless combination of authorial and figural narration—is more to the point, my analysis of *Day*'s narration has led me to conclude that Cunningham's novel is a unique expression of contemporary omniscience altogether: a narration in which the omniscient

narrator does not overpower the characters and in which he contributes meaningfully to the emotional depth of the novel.

The second part of my research—chapter 6—focused on studying the opening chapter and the role of Wolfe in the novel, ultimately arguing for the presence of metafiction and *mise en abyme* in *Day*. In ch. 6.1. I claimed that the opening chapter functions as a prologue and thus that the actual story (and the actual day) starts on the second chapter; seeing how the "first" (i.e., the second) chapter is opened by a description of Wolfe and how the last is closed by a caption of his Instagram post, I argued that the entire story is framed by the figure of Wolfe— the most fictitious element in the story. The existence of Wolfe in the novel as an imaginative creation of Isabel and Robbie brings attention to the act of inventing stories, and the fact that *Day*'s story is framed by him highlights the artificial nature of the novel itself. Wolfe's character, therefore, is at the center of the metafictional reflection in *Day* and of what I argue is a *mise en abyme* of fiction writing itself.

According to Patricia Waugh, metafiction is used by authors to explore "the relationship between the world *of* the fiction and the world *outside* the fiction" (Waugh 3), and I argued that Michael Cunningham employs this postmodern technique to make readers reflect on contemporary society and on the way human relationships have changed due to modern progress in communication technologies (cf. ch. 6.3). The same aim is achieved by the abundant use of different media in the novel (e.g., letters, text messages, emails, phone calls, etc.), something which links *Day* to the contemporary "medialization of narrative" trend discussed by Carolin Gebauer in *Making Time*. The pervasive presence of modern communication technologies (especially social media) in everyday life and the existential dread these create are connected, according to Gebauer, to the contemporary popularity of present-tense narration, a literary genre into which *Day* can be located for its use of the fictional present as the *global* and *central* tense of narration, as well as for its reflection of contemporary society.

Ultimately, I argued that Wolfe is a paradoxical character who is able to transcend the textual boundaries of the story and to connect with readers on a real level due to his unique relationship with Instagram, the social media platform that is featured the most in the novel. Instagram creates an alternative world in which the planes of reality and fiction are not as distinct as they are in real life, in which real people can become fictional and fictional creations can become real, and readers see this aspect of their real life reflected in the novel, specifically in the figure of Wolfe and in the protagonists' relationship with him. This bidimensional quality of Wolfe—him being *real* both inside and outside of the fiction—is what allows him to emotionally connect with readers and Michael Cunningham to employ metafiction for "humanist" post-postmodern purposes.

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