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Navigating—Making Sense—Interpreting (The Reader behind *La Jalousie*)

senseless adj. 1 unconscious or incapable of sensation 2 without discernible meaning or purpose → lacking common sense; wildly foolish. (*Concise OED*)

Introduction: Whatever One Calls the Process

For a humanist scholar, a choice of word is a choice of method. In this essay, of interest are the words used in describing the understanding of narrative. Here, we may notice, classical and postclassical narratology diverge considerably. The French structuralists, followed by many classical narratologists, cultivated the words *signification*, *meaning*, and—sometimes warily, at other times more offhandedly—*interpretation*. Such metaphysical catchwords have been replaced by much more down-to-earth vocabulary in postclassical narratologies¹: readers *navigate* within storyworlds, get *immersed* in them; they try to *frame* and *apperceive* whatever textual strangeness befalls them. As Monika Fludernik writes in a recent article dealing with narrative mediacy, “[i]t makes perfect sense to contrast the messy text that one has in hand with an idealized chronological story, which the reader needs to piece together in order to understand the narrative” (“Mediacy” 109). Both structuralist and cognitivist narratologists speak of sense-making, but in considerably different senses. Correspondingly, two alternate reader figures emerge: the reader constructed from the classical-narratological discourse is an industrious and yet somehow doomed performer of higher thinking, reaching for the ultimately un-

1 Here I mainly speak of cognitive narratology and some recent approaches reacting to cognitive applications, including unnatural narratology. Rhetorical narratology, a prominent postclassical paradigm, will not be touched upon here; the rhetorical reader construct is a multi-layered structure determined more by ethical stances than by cognitive abilities.

attainable (the “meaning”). We will call this type Reader 1. The other type—let us call him Reader 2—erected by some postclassical theories and analyses, is a languid “general reader” who opts for the primary, the likely, the coherent and the familiar.²

The common denominator for these reader figures is that they are both interpretive constructs, synthetic constellations of hypotheses about the actual reading process—agents that are only implied and reflected in the narratological discourse. The tendency to metaphorise reading instead of indulging oneself in the empirism of the reader-response is deep-rooted in the narratological tradition. For classical narratology, a discipline determined by its appreciation for close reading (not “prototypical” or “schematic” reading), this abstention from messing with real readers is the only way to sustain the high standards for a valid interpretation. Jonathan Culler, for example, is after the imaginary “competent reader” (113–30). Menakhem Perry, in his classical analysis of the dynamics of reading, defines the reader as “a metonymic characterization of the text” (43). A textual analyst is on the safe side as long as he can reduce the readerly endeavors back to textuality. How about the postclassical approaches that seek their inspiration and vocabulary from the cognitive-scientific discourses? If we are to believe one of the leading theorists working in the field, Marie-Laure Ryan, nothing much has changed.

[T]he kind of work that passes as cognitive narratology remains in spirit strictly speculative, and some narratologists interested in questions of cognition claim to be totally bored with experimental approaches. Furthermore, unlike the hard versions of cognitive science, cognitive narratology does not want to sacrifice an interest in texts, even though it often treats them as “tutor texts,” that is, as an instrument for the demonstration of ideas borrowed from the [cognitive-psychological] side. (“Narratology” 476)

Indeed, it seems that the reader construct is just as speculative in cognitive narratology as in classical-structuralist theorizing. Differences can only be perceived in words that describe the hypothetical reader’s mental operations. And perhaps a cognitive narratologist would not call his reader construct “a metonymic characterization of the text”—he will rather, as Manfred Jahn does, refer to it as “the cognitive mechanics of reading” (“Frames” 464). Yet to me it seems that narratological analyses are *all* camped at the same frontier between the narrative and its reader where both risk becoming the other’s metonymy.

2 I owe thanks to Tytti Rantanen who, in her most inspiring Master’s Thesis, gave an apt characterization of the Reader 2 type featuring in some current “unnatural narratology” applications: “a lost poor creature who has to be taken care of and who has to be helped across the bog of extreme and experimental fictions” (11).

From a narratological point of view, the interpretive stances towards a storyworld, its actions and its inhabitants are multi-layered: there are interpretive agents at least on three different levels: that of the fictional world, that of narration, and that of reading. Yet one of the key players in narrative sense-making is always intangible and indefinite: the characters and the narrators, all tackling cognitive operations of different kinds, need to be constructed from the narrative, but at least they have a textual presence (and they are not required to transgress it); whereas the reader, assumed by the analyst, is a liminal pseudo-presence somewhere between the structure of the narrative and the analyst's own interpretive method.

This uncanny setting—the table is set for three but only two guests are demonstrably present—reminds one of Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie* (1957, *Jealousy* 1959), featuring a wife, a neighbor and arguably a jealous husband who nevertheless is not even once referred to. The default interpretation of the novel, established by the eminent Robbe-Grillet scholar Bruce Morrissette, posits the elusive husbandly presence in the place of a narrator:

A first-person narrator who, however, never says “I” and whom one never sees or hears, draws us into an identification with him, installs us in the “hole” that he occupies in the center of the text, so that we see, hear, move, and feel with him. (7)

A narratologist, such as Mieke Bal, is more comfortable interpreting the third character as a *focalizer* since the lack of third-person reference in an internally focalized narrative (reported by a heterodiegetic narratorial voice) is not perhaps as troubling as would be the absence of first-person reference in a homodiegetic narrative (29). For some reason, Bal does not even hint towards the other possibility, that of reconstructing the third person as the *narrator* of the events. Yet she offers a perfectly plausible description of *La Jalousie*'s narrative situation in her definition of the *external narrator*: “When in a text the narrator never refers explicitly to itself as a character, we may...speak of an external narrator” (22). Thus it is not surprising that narratologists, both classical and postclassical, repeatedly use *La Jalousie* as an illustration of the different possibilities for narratorial and perceptual framing: the novel appears to represent several mutually contradictory types at once—and at the same time, is incompatible with each type (see also Cohn, *Transparent* 207; Richardson 8).

Technically, both interpretations—the husband as narrator and the husband as focalizer—are valid. After a point, fussing about narrators and focalizers becomes senseless, however. Texts such as *La Jalousie* are not narrated or focalized by anyone, they can only be interpreted as doing the one or the other. As a *writerly* text, Robbe-Grillet's novel foregrounds the

use of those interpretive operations that are always at play when we read literary narratives. Furthermore, the insubstantial presence of the husband is an illustrative reflection of the reader as the hypothetical Third in literary sense-making, as the “hole’ in the center of the text” that literary analysts struggle to fill. In the following, *La Jalousie* will be analyzed as an allegory of Reader 1 and Reader 2 as they manifest in narratological reasoning. We may remember how Jonathan Culler characterized the process of “naturalization” in structuralist terms, well before cognitive narratology, and in terms that later inspired Monika Fludernik’s ‘natural narratology’:

Whatever one calls the process, it is one of the basic activities of the mind. We can, it seems, make anything signify. If a computer were programmed to produce random sequences of English sentences we could make sense of the texts it produced by imagining a variety of functions and contexts. If all else failed, we could read a sequence of words with no apparent order as signifying absurdity or chaos and then, by giving it an allegorical relation to the world, take it as a statement about the incoherence and absurdity of our own languages. As the example of Beckett shows, we can always make the meaningless meaningful by production of an appropriate context. And usually our contexts need not be so extreme. Much of Robbe-Grillet can be recuperated if we read it as the musings or speech of a pathological narrator, and that framework gives critics a hold so that they can go on to discuss the implications of the particular pathology in question. (138)

In a nutshell, this is what I will do—recuperate Robbe-Grillet’s narration and extrapolate a mental agent from it, perhaps a “pathological narrator,” who, in turn, might reveal something about the processes of sense-making and signification both within and outside the storyworld. Narratological concepts under trial are (1) naturalization, signification and interpretation, all being principal concerns in classical-narratological discussions; as juxtaposed with (2) immersion, deictic shift, “sense-making” and narrativization, notions that infiltrate current narratological discourses.

Failure as Agency

Contrary to some interpretations, *La Jalousie* should not be conceived as a mere *chosisme*, as an insipid monitoring of physical things, surfaces and architecture. As a description of perception, it also brings about a mind that adjusts to its environment. Moreover, as many critics have noted, the description of the immediate is interrupted by retrospection and hallucinatory visions. Already at the beginning of the novel, textual traces of a cognizer start to emanate. After a report on the movements of a shadow

across a terrace (“Now the shadow of the column...”), a character referred to as “A...” enters the line of vision. Several details pertaining to A... attest that we are entering the storyworld *in medias res*. We are told that “[s]he still has on the light colored, close-fitting dress with the high collar that she was wearing at lunch when Christiane reminded her again that loose-fitting clothes make the heat easier to bear.” The references to earlier events and to characters without introduction are conventional indexes of character focalization. The sense of an interrupted flow of temporal existence is already created with the opening word “now” (*maintenant*). However, there are also introductory elements at the beginning of the narrative that contrast the frame of internal focalization and point more towards an authorial narrator who leads his readers inside the unknown storyworld: “This veranda is a wide, covered gallery surrounding the house on three sides.” Is this a description or a perception? One page further, the inventory “eye” is gradually beginning to gain discursive presence as well.

This exercise is not much more difficult, despite their more advanced growth, for those sectors of the plantation on the opposite hillside; this, in fact, is the place which offers itself most readily to inspection, the place over which surveillance can be maintained with the least difficulty (although the path to reach it is a long one), the place which the eye falls on quite naturally, of its own accord, when looking out of one or the other of the two open windows of the bedroom. (*Jealousy* 41)

The reader learns that in the storyworld, surveillance is something to be maintained, and places are mapped and evaluated as to the views they provide. The exposing “in fact” (*en effet*) marks the presence of a reflexive consciousness: as if there was someone making an argument for the naturalness of such stalking activities. Immediately after the quoted passage, A... appears for the second time. She is observed to read a letter and then to start writing one. Then a sensuous description emerges from the undergrowth of senseless listing of material minutiae.

The lustrous black hair falls in motionless curls along the line of her back which the narrow metal fastening of her dress indicates a little lower down. (42)

The perceiver resumes his passive mode—till he brings along a fourth character, Franck. “Franck is here again for dinner, smiling, talkative, affable” (42–43).

Now this, finally, could be a start of something thematically motivated, tellable and significant. Yet one is to learn that in *La Jalousie*, there is hardly any valid sequencing or causality that would postulate a start anywhere, neither in discourse nor in story time; just as the recurrent perception of the “deafening racket of the crickets” that can be heard—we are told—nightly in the garden surrounding the veranda: “as if it had

never ceased to be there ... for no beginning can be perceived at any one moment" (101). However, the descriptions of A...’s dress, “lustrous hair,” and the easy-going neighbor Franck coming for dinner “again” will inevitably launch interpretations that go beyond outlining the veranda and the balustrades of the colonial mansion, or counting the rows of banana trees – mental actions that nevertheless take up a majority of the narration.

On what grounds can we extrapolate the reading process from the textual evidence, and how does this constructed readerly mind relate to the husband-qua-perceiver-or-narrator? This agent—let us call him “the husband,” not the “narrator” as in most analyses—embodies a *failure* of both narratological reader constructs. As Reader 2, he appears as incapable of immersion and of deictic orientation inside the storyworld. Moreover, due to the famous lack of psychological evaluation, intentionality, motivation and coherence in *La Jalousie*, the husband also fails in his role as Reader 1, as the one who would make the disunited bits and pieces *signify*. Seymour Chatman, in his short analysis of *La Jalousie*, points to Robbe-Grillet’s “intentional ‘failure’ to mention crucial events” (57). Yet I would emphasize that it is ultimately a readerly failure that makes the husband a narrative agent and a fixed point of psychological motivation; it is the failure to navigate, make sense and interpret that makes the assumed performers of these tasks—the husband and the narratological Reader—discernible.

Access Denied

We will first look at the elements in *La Jalousie* that thwart readerly processes foregrounded by postclassical theories—processes that primarily pertain to orientation and ordering. David Herman represents these processes in a useful nutshell:

[M]aking sense of a story entails situating participants and other entities in emergent networks of foreground-background relationships. Story comprehension also entails mapping the trajectories of individuals and objects as they move or are moved along narratively salient paths. (8)

Obviously, all this is what *La Jalousie* does not encourage. Determined by Robbe-Grillet’s narrative *modus operandi*, the represented spaces are anti-immersionist, reducible to surfaces and abstract schemes (Morrissette; Barthes). Anti-immersionism does not only concern the reader, for the husband does not seem to *inhabit* the narrated universe either. He does not walk around searching for a place to watch over his wife; rather, he seems to move from one fixed spot to another via teleportation, quite

in the manner of Star Trek transporting, rematerializing sometimes on the veranda, sometimes at the bedroom window or in the dining room. In this regard, Marie-Laure Ryan's characterization of *Dans le labyrinthe* holds true for *La Jalousie* as well:

...setting is painstakingly described through a linear accumulation of details, but space is neither apprehended nor organized by a human consciousness, and details flow by the reader's mind without coalescing into a stable geography. The text does not fail to achieve, it actively *inhibits*, spatial immersion... (*Narrative* 124)

Ryan's analysis of Robbe-Grillet's spatial poetics is apt, yet she ignores one agential level in her description: unlike in *La Jalousie*, in *Dans le labyrinthe*, there is an "I" at the beginning of the narrative. The amorphous description is preceded by the utterance "I am alone here now, under cover." Yet Ryan states that "space is neither apprehended nor organized by a human consciousness."

Such a contradictory reading opposes the cognitive principles of primacy and recency effect as outlined by Sternberg and Perry, and later elaborated by Jahn ("Frames"): once the reader has established a narrative frame ("A-ha, this is a person telling about himself and his immediate perceptions"), he will hold on to it as long as he can, up to a point when it breaks under the weight of contradictory evidence ("Well, at least *this* is something he can't possibly see / remember / understand / perceive"). If, in the course of reading, the primary frame proves erroneous, it will be replaced with a frame that is in accord with the latest textual evidence (thus, "recency"). Consequently, if there is an "I" and a "now" at the very beginning of the narrative, their flimsy existence inevitably casts a shadow of primacy over the subsequent narration, at least for a while. If this is the case, then it would be an overstatement to claim that the narration "actively *inhibits*" spatial immersion. Indeed, when reading *Dans le labyrinthe*, the reader will necessarily reframe the narrative situation (from personal to impersonal³), just as the novel, famously, loses the sense of embedment when the description of the surrounding world is replaced by a storyworld within a framed picture hanging on the wall. However, *Dans le labyrinthe*, *La Jalousie* as well as several other literary narratives persuade me to think that a crucial reading strategy is the simultaneous maintenance of contradictory frames (cf. Mäkelä).

3 The need for a readjustment of the narratorial frame emerges once again later in the novel as we are informed that a certain doctor playing a minor role in the narrative is in fact its narrator.

In fact, recent narratological applications of blending theory are, in a way, also pointing towards this conclusion (Fludernik, “Naturalizing”; Alber in this volume). To naturalize Robbe-Grillet’s narration as “musings or speech of a pathological narrator”, as Culler has it, would arguably constitute a blend, a marriage of perception and (textual) invention. Indeed, the pedantic wall-to-wall description of the material storyworld literalizes the idea that “a work of fiction creates the world to which it refers by referring to it” (Cohn, *Distinction* 12–13). Thus the analogy between art and madness would result in a conventionally metaphorical frame of considering both as forms of non-referential world creation. My only quarrel with blending-theoretical applications is that they assume the reading of contradictory narrative signals to be an assimilative process that results in a new, stable frame, a well-amalgamated blend. Such a theory does not account for the persistent uncanniness resulting from two opposite impulses: in the case of *La Jalousie*, the impulse to internalize the perceptual stances and the impulse to dehumanize them. I suggest, instead of labeling the husband merely pathological or the descriptions radically anti-human and anti-immersionist, that the perceptual position and its disturbing Thirdness in *La Jalousie* signifies readerly failure.

The husband’s disengagement with the storyworld is most prominent when both A... and Franck hit his radar. In the following passage, the couple is supposedly expecting Franck for lunch—again—but he does not appear. The husband’s gaze fixes on the view opening from the dining-room window.

Although it is unlikely that the guest should come now, perhaps A... is still expecting to hear the sound of a car coming down the slope from the highway. But through the dining-room windows, of which at least one is half open, no motor hum or any other noise can be heard...

The windows are perfectly clean and, in the right-hand leaf, the landscape is only slightly affected by the flaws in the glass, which give a few shifting nuances to the too uniform surfaces. But in the left leaf, the reflected image, darker although more brilliant, is plainly distorted, circular or crescent-shaped spots of verdure the same color as the banana trees occurring in the middle of the courtyard in front of the sheds.

Franck’s big blue sedan, which has just appeared here, is also nicked by one of these shifting rings of foliage, as is A...’s white dress when she gets out of the car.

She leans toward the door. If the window has been lowered—which is likely—A... may have put her face into the opening above the seat. (70–71)

From a cognitive-narratological perspective, what is especially striking here is the lack of spatial and temporal foregrounding. The characters, their bodies and actions, fade into the “uniform surfaces.” Correspond-

ingly, the temporal shift from the lunch table to Franck and A...’s arrival in the blue sedan in the courtyard (seen from the dining-room window) is unmarked. The flat narrative texture weaves in arguably the most *tellable* event in the “narrative” of *La Jalousie*: A...’s homecoming after she and Franck have been forced to spend a night in a hotel in town due to some engine trouble. A reader who wishes to organize the temporal bits and pieces of the story is first likely to assume that Franck and A... have made several trips to town together, but in the course of narration she is bound to conclude that there has only been one journey to town, and furthermore, that the version with the engine trouble and the night at the hotel is debatable. It may appear that the events of A... and Franck making plans for the journey, the husband waiting for A... to come home late at night and A...’s stepping out of the car the following morning are only *recounted* several times.

The effect of dispossession created by this spatial and temporal dislocatedness is both enchanting and pathetic. The helpless figure of the cuckolded voyeur emerges in contrast to the vigorous character of Franck:

On the veranda, Franck drops into one of the low armchairs and utters his usual exclamation of how comfortable they are. They are very simple chairs of wood and leather thongs, made according to A...’s instructions by a native craftsman. She leans toward Franck to hand him his glass. (43)

Franck is the most *embodied* of the characters; the husband is incorporeal and A... is a metonymic constellation of heavy curls, long lashes and a slender back, but the minute Franck steps into the frame the narrative space becomes, for a short while, adjustable to bodily parameters. When Franck is in the picture, the armchairs are not only a texture of wood and leather thongs, they are *immersive*, the reader may almost feel how they bend as Franck drops into one.

Manfred Jahn suggests that reading a narrative “possibly even *requires* ‘deictic shifts’ to imaginary co-ordinates and places” (“Focalization” 102; my emphasis). *La Jalousie* represents a narratorial or a perceptual agent that, instead of guiding the reader inside the storyworld via experiential mediation (Fludernik, *Towards* 48), thwarts any attempt at such a shift. As a paradoxical consequence, this agent becomes the allegory of the reader who covets mental assimilation with the storyworld. This interpretation resonates with Brian Richardson’s wonderfully apt characterization of *La Jalousie* as “present[ing] an unusual, extreme subjectivity with a minimum of mediation” (8). Yet this internalizing interpretation calls for a double framing: a psychological frame is maintained alongside with the non-immersive, impersonal frame. As Richardson argues, “[t]he work can be viewed...as the epitome of either narratorial objectivity or sub-

jectivity” (8)—the only addition I would like to suggest to this wording is *simultaneously*. Zahi Zalloua translates this structural double bind into a sophisticated thematic interpretation:

Analogous to fascination, jealousy—as it is staged in Robbe-Grillet’s novel—is a figure of dispossession; it is what robs the narrator’s gaze of its habitual sense of power, what makes the narrator’s objectivizing consciousness fail to contain the objects that fall within its horizon of intelligibility. (23)

Thus the mental and bodily failure to capture the storyworld is likened to jealousy. To *contain* a storyworld is a metaphor that goes beyond spatial and temporal orientation.

Missed Links

In the index of a recent, important volume titled *Postclassical Narratology*, edited by Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik, the word ‘interpretation’ can be found. A glimpse at the occurrences of this word attests to the fact that in postclassical narratology, interpretation is analogous to narrativization, in the sense established by Fludernik’s revolutionary natural narratology. Although Fludernik grounds her theory on Culler’s structuralist notion of naturalization, the differences are considerable: Culler states that we can make almost anything *signify* (138). Bluntly put: whereas structuralist narratology was, in essence, all about tracing out the logic of difference and relation, cognitive narratologists are after the automatically privileged “natural” mental model as foregrounded from its synthetic environment. Although the founding fathers of classical narratology, such as Hrushovski and Todorov openly excluded interpretation as a *practice* from the field of narratology, the classical theories nevertheless gravitate toward meaning instead of “story comprehension.” At the core, classical-narratological theories are *relational*. Both Culler and Fludernik speak of sense-making in the sense of form-finding; yet the implied notions of coherence in these theories are fundamentally different: in natural narratology, coherence means experiential familiarity, whereas in structuralist narratology, coherence is the result of a perceivable network of relations between semiotic patterns.

The husband’s failure to “contain” the storyworld in *La Jalousie* should not be regarded merely as a failure to be-in-the-world; he also fails at comprehending the significant relations (not least the relation between his wife and Franck). This is all the more striking because the potentially significant episodes are recounted over and over again, such as the famous “squashing of the centipede”:

The creature is easy to identify thanks to the development of its legs, especially on the posterior portion. On closer examination the swaying movement of the antennae at the other end can be discerned.

...

It is not unusual to encounter different kinds of centipedes after dark in this already old wooden house. And this kind is not one of the largest; it is far from being one of the most venomous. A... does her best, but does not manage to look away, nor to smile at the joke about her aversion to centipedes.

Franck, who has said nothing, is looking at A... again. Then he stands up, noiselessly, holding his napkin in his hand. He wads it into a ball and approaches the wall.

A... seems to be breathing a little faster, but this may be an illusion. Her left hand gradually closes over her knife. The delicate antennae accelerate their alternate swaying.

Suddenly the creature hunches its body and begins descending diagonally toward the ground as fast as its long legs can go, while the wadded napkin falls on it, faster still.

...Franck lifts the napkin away from the wall and with his foot continues to squash something on the tiles, against the baseboard. (64–65)

The husband provides a thorough analysis of the centipede while the vigorous Franck smashes it against the wall. Some cues also suggest that the husband tries to make a joke of A...’s “aversion to centipedes” (while Franck “has said nothing”). The ironic contradiction between the meticulousness of the husband’s perceptions and his incapability to draw the necessary conclusions and take action is related to his bodily insubstantiality and spatial disorientation. His incapability of immersion is reflected in his blindness to the *meaning* of the centipede.

However, in the course of narration, the compulsive *repetition* of the potentially signifying events increases; towards the end of the novel, the pace at which the same elements—such as the centipede, A... not coming home for the night and Franck coming for dinner “again”—are repeated accelerates.

The bedroom windows are closed. At this hour A... is not up yet.

She left very early this morning, in order to have enough time to do her shopping and be able to get back to the plantation the same night. She went to the port with Franck, to make some necessary purchases. She has not said what they were. (119)

The more accelerated the temporal and spatial shifts and repetitions, the more striking becomes the absence of interpretive networking in the perceiver’s mind. Yet disturbingly, some potentially fantasized events, such as A... and Franck in the hotel and their car crashing on its way home, start to emanate from the texture of the repetitions. These sinister fantasies cannot be accounted for as results of logical inferences since

the absence of a *reflective* mind is so tangible. In spite of the intensity of these reoccurring and imagined visions, the novel is an exemplar of underinterpretation. Networking is replaced by repetition and an analysis that dissolves into an inventory of disconnected minutiae. Relationality, the core of structuralism and classical narratology, is missing completely. Thus the husband represents a failure in both cognitive-narratological and structuralist reading. This allegorical position as a reader is reflected in one of the *mise-en-abyme* structures of *La Jalousie*, the characters' reactions to an African novel that Franck and A... are reading but the husband seems to have no interest in. Nevertheless, the husband analyzes *their* interpretations of the novel, apparently discrediting them for their naïve reliance on referentiality.

They have never made the slightest judgment as to the novel's value, speaking instead of the scenes, events, and characters as if they were real... Their discussions have never touched on the verisimilitude, the coherence, or the quality of the narrative... They also sometimes deplore the coincidences of the plot, saying that "things don't happen that way," and then they construct a different probable outcome starting from a new supposition, "if it weren't for that." Other possibilities are offered, during the course of the book, which lead to different endings. The variations are extremely numerous; the variations of these, still more so. They seem to enjoy multiplying these choices exchanging smiles, carried away by their enthusiasm, probably a little intoxicated by this proliferation...

"But that's it, he was just unlucky enough to have come home earlier that day, and no one could have guessed he would." (74–75)

The African novel is an emblem of all the things that A... and Franck share but for the husband, remain unattainable. The fact that the husband has never read the novel, which, however, is a ruling conversation item at the dinner-table, metaphorizes both his inability to attend the storyworld and to make signifying relations. Paradoxically, he seems to criticize A...'s and Franck's interpretations of the novel as too immersive, as being stuck on the level of navigation and ordering of events or on questions of probability. Intoxicated by the "proliferation" of story-logical possibilities, A... and Franck are like a pair of enthusiastic possible-world theorists. All of their readerly concerns are relevant for cognitive narratological studies; they are the concerns of a "general reader" (Reader 2). The interpretive questions raised by the husband, on the other hand, remind one more of the analytical foci of classical narratology: questions of coherence, motivation and *vraisemblance* (the interests of Reader 1). Ironically, however, the clue of the *mise-en-abyme* cannot be found on the level of formal realizations but is revealed in the banal possible-world interpretation blurted out by Franck: "But that's it, he was just unlucky enough to have come home

earlier that day, and no one could have guessed he would.” The African novel is a story of cuckolding, but *La Jalousie* would not necessarily have been if the husband would have *read* the novel.

Conclusion

When I attended my first analytical workshop in Comparative Literature at the University of Tampere—the course was titled “On Interpretation”—my mentor-to-be, Professor Pekka Tammi painted an illustrious metaphor that “clings to the retina” (as the narrator of *La Jalousie* describes the effect of A...’s illuminated profile): he asked us to imagine different interpretations of the same text to be juggling balls and told us to learn how to keep several of them in the air simultaneously.

As today’s narratologists, we might replace balls with frames, and the lesson would remain essentially the same. Cognitive narratology has radically revised the prerequisites of and suppositions about the process of reading narratives. Especially Manfred Jahn has revealed the counter-cognitive logic behind some classical analyses: structuralist narratologists have constructed inhuman readers whose logic of inference has very little to do with the human brain. As Jahn notices, Seymour Chatman has rather self-critically put this unnaturalness in words in the context of his own reading of Joyce’s “Eveline”: “this laborious and unnatural way of reading is not, of course, what the reader actually does but only a suggestion of what his logic of decision must be like” (206; quoted in Jahn, “Frames” 461–63). This inhuman cognizer bears a striking resemblance to *La Jalousie*’s detached husbandly presence and his “laborious and unnatural way of reading.” The smooth, adjustable and naturalizing approach to reading as “navigation” promoted by cognitive narratology is definitely appealing (and properly executed, will inevitably lead the navigator to a “goal”). Yet I believe there are different and even contradictory readerly paths in narratives, and especially in literary narratives. The construction of such ultimately unattainable reader figures is, admittedly, a “laborious and unnatural way of reading.”

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