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## **The lazy mindreader : a humanities perspective on mindreading and multiple-order intentionality**

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## Chapter 3

### Not afraid of Virginia Woolf: embedding and polyphony in the novel<sup>\*</sup>

Cognitive literary scholar Lisa Zunshine argues in her foundational 2006 book *Why we read fiction* that a certain class of literary novels push readers to the limits of their cognitive abilities. She suggests that this might be why some of us “are afraid of Virginia Woolf”: when reading for example *Mrs Dalloway*, according to Zunshine we have to process complexly embedded mindstates of the type “A *suspects* that B *knows* that C *wants* (etc.)”. I agree that Woolf’s fiction (and *Mrs Dalloway* in particular) is a great object of study for anyone interested in the complexity posed by representing a wealth of different mindstates in one story. However, in this chapter I question whether this complexity is adequately conceptualised as a series of embedded layers. I revisit the excerpt from Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* used by Zunshine to support her claim and analyse the linguistic and narrative “cues” that prompt the reader to imagine a rich “thoughtscape” of character mindstates, which are shown to be mutually related and interlinked in a variety of ways rather than being just embedded. This leads not only to a different view on the excerpt from Woolf’s novel, but also has important implications for how the general relationship between discourse structure and cognitive processing should be formulated.

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<sup>\*</sup> Chapters 2, 3, and 4 were written as independent articles; see also the Reading Guide above.

### 3.1 Introduction

Humans have the capability to form beliefs about the mind-states of others; this is generally referred to as “mindreading”, “mentalising”, or having a “theory of mind”. Since others have such beliefs too, in social contexts involving several human actors, it has been claimed that beliefs about mind-states can become embedded into one another: *A thinks that B intends that C believes [etc.] that X*. This is referred to as “multiple-order intentionality”. This chapter focuses on the representation of multiple, interconnected mindstates in novels, addressing in particular the example used by cognitive literary scholar Lisa Zunshine (2006; 2012): a passage from Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925).

The capability to take others’ perspectives is found in some form in various species of mammals and birds.<sup>48</sup> Especially our close relatives in nature, most notably chimpanzees and bonobos, seem to be capable of assessing what others around them can see and know, and to some extent even what their goals and intentions are. However, when it comes to mindreading, humans are indubitably nature’s champions. Not only are we the only species that can reliably handle so-called “false beliefs”, a landmark passed by any normally developing human individual from around four years of age, but we are also the only ones capable of dealing with tasks that feature multiple, mutually related mindstates at the same time (Dennett, 1987; Dunbar, 2003). Imagine, for example, someone organising a surprise party for her brother. She calls him, pretending that she needs his help with something only he can do next Friday evening, which happens to be his birthday. She has to make sure that he *does not understand* that she *intends* to invite all his friends to her house. Also, she has to make her brother’s friends *understand* that her brother *does not know* about the party, and she might have to *anticipate* that he *may ask* his friends whether they *know* that he will not be available on the night of his birthday, and so on.

This shows that mindreading complexity easily adds up even in quite ordinary situations of everyday social life. Researchers have proposed to

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<sup>48</sup> For an overview see Apperly (2011: 46-56). See e.g. Call & Tomasello (2008) and Yamamoto et al. (2012) for perspective-taking in great apes, De Waal (2013) for a broader view on this skill in mammals, and Clayton et al. (2007) for perspective-taking in crows. See also Heyes (2012) for a critical review of some of the evidence.

measure such complexity in terms of the number of “layers” or “orders of intentionality” involved. Reasoning about what someone else is thinking comprises two orders, reasoning about, for example, what someone else wants you to understand involves three, reasoning about what someone else wants you to think about another’s thoughts involves four, and so on (for a discussion see Chapter 1, Section 1.2; Dennett, 1987: chapter 7). It has been argued that all forms of mindreading observed in non-human animals can be characterised in terms of two such orders at the maximum—their limit is situated at or below “second-order intentionality”. In contrast, humans are capable of handling tasks involving three or more orders, at least from a certain age onwards (see Henzi et al., 2007). Yet human mindreading sophistication is also not unlimited: experiments suggest that the majority of normally developed adults lose track after around five orders of intentionality (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2; Kinderman, Dunbar, and Bental, 1998; Stiller & Dunbar, 2007; Launay et al., 2015).

Dunbar (2005; 2008) has suggested that this limit on the number of orders of intentionality we can typically deal with, in turn constrains the cultural practice of producing narratives: stories are likely to involve up to around fifth order, but not more, due to the cognitive limits on readers’ and writers’ abilities to understand and write such stories. Dunbar also argues that people take a certain delight in being pushed to the boundaries of their cognitive limits, and that it may be a hallmark of literature to do so. Literary scholars, as well as philosophers, psychologists and other cognitive scientists, have indeed used excerpts from literary texts to demonstrate how complex and multi-layered mindreading can get. Arguably the most famous example is Zunshine’s analysis of the passage from Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* in which Hugh Whitbread, with the aid of Richard Dalloway, writes a letter to the Times on behalf of Lady Bruton. According to Zunshine’s analysis, readers of the novel at this point have to understand that “Woolf *intends us to recognize* [...] that Richard *is aware* that Hugh *wants* Lady Bruton and Richard to *think* that because the makers of the pen *believe* that it will never wear out the editors of the *Times* will *respect* and publish the ideas recorded by this pen” (2012: 207, italics in original). Zunshine

labels this task as “sixth-level” intentionality (see also Section 3.3 below).<sup>49</sup> On this basis she suggests that “certain aspects of Woolf’s prose do place extraordinarily high demands on our mind-reading ability” (203-204), which, on the one hand, could explain why some of us are “afraid of *Mrs. Dalloway*” (202), while, on the other hand, she suggests that it may explain why we read such demanding fiction at all: we take a certain delight in pushing our mindreading abilities to their limits and putting them to the test.

In this chapter I suggest to turn the issue around: instead of asking how many orders humans can maximally handle and how this may affect or constrain the stories that can be produced and understood, I ask what readers minimally need in order to deal with a passage such as the one from Woolf’s novel that has been claimed to require such a high degree of mindreading sophistication. The focus is thus not on the presumed *limits* of readers’ capability to cognitively process mindreading, but rather on the *economy* and *expediency* of this capability. Using and extending concepts from cognitive linguistics/stylistics and narratology (building especially on Dancygier, 2012), I will argue that the structure and language of Woolf’s novel prompt a rich *thoughtscape*, a network of interlinked and/or embedded mindstates, and at the same time support the reader in processing this thoughtscape in a natural way. On the basis of this I will reconsider the way in which the relationship between discourse structure and cognitive processing should be conceptualised.

## 3.2 Mindstates in literature

### 3.2.1 An early cognitive literary scholar

Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) features a day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway, a woman from the London high society in the years after the First World War. The story begins with her walking through the city to buy flowers,

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<sup>49</sup> Zunshine’s analysis was originally published in her 2006 book *Why we read fiction* and then reused in 2012. Other examples of such analyses can be found in Dunbar (2008), Corballis (2011), both citing Shakespeare (*Othello* and *Twelfth Night*, respectively), Palmer (2012), and Dennett (1987), all in similar ways. See Chapter 2 above for more examples and for a discussion.

in preparation of one of her regular, fashionable parties taking place that evening. Much of the day is spent thinking about choices she has made in her life and people she has met. She encounters some of these people while wandering around or preparing the house and eventually sees most of them at the party. For an important part, thoughts of the past are triggered by a remarkable encounter between Clarissa Dalloway and Peter Walsh, a lover from her youth, who disappeared to India decades ago after she had declined his wedding proposal. From his letters she knew he was planning to come back to England one of these days, but his sudden visit greatly surprises her.

As Peter Walsh leaves the house, point of view stays with him for a while, after which it shifts to various other settings and events somehow related to Clarissa and her party. Narration in the novel is thus also “wandering”, in the sense that the story is related by an omniscient narrator who constantly shifts from the perspective of one character to another, across different settings in time and place as well as within one setting. As a result, readers benefit from what could be called a “360-degree view” of the represented situations and events. In this way, we are enabled to build an increasingly profound understanding of all kinds of relationships between the characters, including shared knowledge of the past (and possibly different perspectives on things that happened), aspects of personalities (and different perspectives on these aspects), affections, intrigues, worries about what others may think of oneself, worries about what others may think that one thinks about them, and so on.

All of this warrants that the novel is an excellent choice for an analysis of mindreading and mindstates in fiction. This has not gone unnoticed by scholars interested in cognitive literary analysis: Mrs Dalloway is a popular guest at *their* parties (see, for example, Dancygier, 2012; Oatley, 2011; Vermeule, 2010; Vandelanotte, 2009). However, these scholars are not the first to unveil the relation between Woolf’s work (or literature more widely) and the representation of the workings and states of the human mind. It is a characteristic of modernist fiction more generally to be fascinated by people’s inner lives (Korsten, 2005: 227-249) and when reading what Virginia Woolf had to say about this herself one is easily tempted to call her an early cognitive literary scholar. Consider the following passage from an essay, which she originally read as a lecture in Cambridge in 1924:



My first assertion is one that I think you will grant—that every one in this room is a judge of character. Indeed it would be impossible to live for a year without disaster unless one practised character-reading and had some skill in the art. Our marriages, our friendships depend on it; our business largely depends on it; every day questions arise which can only be solved by its help.

[...] But it is the art of the young. In middle age and in old age the art is practised mostly for its uses, and friendships and other adventures and experiments in the art of reading character are seldom made. But novelists differ from the rest of the world because they do not cease to be interested in character when they have learnt enough about it for practical purposes. They go a step further; they feel that there is something permanently interesting in character in itself. When all the practical business of life has been discharged, there is something about people which continues to seem to them of overwhelming importance [...] And this I find is very difficult to explain: [...] what the impulse is that urges them so powerfully every now and then to embody their view in writing.

[...] I believe that all novels, that is to say, deal with character, and that it is to express character—not to preach doctrines, sing songs, or celebrate the glories of the British Empire, that the form of the novel, so clumsy, verbose, and undramatic, so rich, elastic, and alive, has been evolved. (Woolf, 1924: 2-11)

By just replacing a few instances of the term “character” by the terms “mind” or “mindreading”, one can read a doctrine fitting seamlessly in the theories of various present-day cognitive scientists and scholars. Woolf would be taking a position close to Hutto’s “narrative practice hypothesis”, stating that every human being is in fact a teller of folk-psychological tales in the practice of daily social interaction, whereas some individuals take this skill beyond routine and make a living out of it (Hutto, 2008; see also Chapter 1, Section 1.1.4). She would line up with cognitive literary scholars such as Palmer (2004) and Herman (2009), whose work gives expression to the idea that the construction of human “minds” is the central feature of fiction. Virginia Woolf would probably agree that literature can be seen as an environment for experimenting, or even as a

training ground for practicing how to assess other's inner lives, as argued by Zunshine (2006), Boyd (2009); Vermeule (2010), and Oatley (2011, who also cites parts of Woolf's 1924 lecture). And she would be fascinated, but not in the least part surprised, by the results from controlled experiments showing that reading fiction can enhance performance on various sorts of mindreading tests (e.g. Kidd and Castano, 2014; Djikic et al., 2013).

### 3.2.2 Zunshine's "sociocognitive complexity"

Considering all this, I argue with Zunshine that the passage from *Mrs Dalloway* about the writing of a letter to the *Times* suits an analysis in terms of mindreading well. However, in what follows I will question three assumptions Zunshine makes in her approach: (i) that this passage (or the novel more generally) confronts readers with a form of complexity adequately conceptualised by counting layers of embedded mindstates; (ii) that these embedded layers pose a highly demanding cognitive processing task at the limit of these readers' abilities; and (iii) that their appreciation of the literary work is somehow affected by this layered complexity. With regard to the targeted passage (cited at the beginning of this chapter) she writes:

To grasp the full meaning of this passage . . . we first have to process several sequences that embed at least five levels of intentionality. Moreover, we have to do it on the spot, unaided by pen and paper and not forewarned that the number of levels of intentionality that we are about to encounter is considered by cognitive scientists to create "a very significant load on most people's cognitive abilities" (Zunshine, 2012: 207)

The analysis of *Mrs Dalloway* was first published in Zunshine's 2006 monograph *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* and repeated in the 2012 *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies* of which she is the editor (2012: 193-213). She builds on it in more recent work, in which she introduces the term "sociocognitive complexity" to refer to "patterns of embedment of mental states

within mental states in fiction” (2012a: 13).<sup>50</sup> She suggests that different genres may implicitly expect different levels of “sociocognitive literacy” (i.e. aptitude to deal with embedded mental states) from their readers: for example, Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* may in its original form expect readers to deal with fourth- or fifth-order intentionality, whereas the same story in a comic-book adaptation or study-guide synopsis might be “downgraded” to second order, thus anticipating lower sociocognitive literacy as appropriate in these genres (2012a: 17). In addition, in several publications Zunshine links the levels of intentionality to perceived literary quality, arguing that there may be a “literary sweetspot” at which the number of embedded layers is optimal: given a particular reader’s sociocognitive literacy there can be too few embeddings, taking the challenge away, or too many, posing too high a cognitive load, both leading to lower appreciation of a text (for an experimental approach see Whalen, Zunshine, and Holquist, 2012; for more discussion see Zunshine 2012; 2012a; 2011; see also Dunbar, 2005).

Zunshine’s approach of analysing literary texts in terms of levels of embedded intentionality has found its way into the work of other scholars across both the humanities and sciences. To mention just a few examples: Vermeule integrates it in her argument on “why we care about literary characters” (2010: 62-71) and Palmer builds on it in his 2012 analysis of “storyworlds and groups” (181-186). Carney, Wlodarski, and Dunbar (2014) report experimental evidence partly supporting Zunshine’s claims, but add that according to their findings readers seem to value higher levels of embedded intentionality more in “familiar” contexts, such as love stories, compared to

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<sup>50</sup> Zunshine emphasises that high sociocognitive complexity does not necessarily involve multiple characters, but can easily occur within the realm of just one character’s thoughts, for which she gives the example of Robinson Crusoe imagining what God would think of him thinking about...etcetera (2012: 13). She seems to leave aside that “God” could be seen as another character here. Of course, “God” in this passage only seems to “exist” within the realm of Crusoe’s mind, so on the level of the story’s here-and-now there might indeed be only one character. However, it should be noted that it is a crucial aspect of embedded mindstates in any context that they are projected *within the scope* of the first one (see also Chapter 1, Section 1.2). So if we are told that A intends that B thinks C wants to get married, and nothing else, all we know is something about A’s mindstate, regardless of whether B and C are present in the here-and-now of the story—after all, we are told neither what B thinks nor what C wants, we only know what A *thinks* that B thinks that C wants. This may seem a straightforward issue, but as I will argue in Section 3.3 below, this issue of scope is actually one of the problematic aspects of Zunshine’s approach.

contexts where they need to process lots of specific, “unfamiliar” information, as in for example espionage stories.

In what follows I will offer an alternative analysis of the passage of *Mrs Dalloway* targeted by Zunshine. The concepts from narratological theory and cognitive linguistics on which I build will first be introduced briefly in the next section.

### *3.2.3 The broader picture: coordination of embedded viewpoints*

Both linguists and literary scholars have taken an interest in the issue of how mindstates, which they often refer to as “viewpoints” or “perspectives”, can be represented in discourse. Literary scholars, mostly within the fields of narratology and (its more recently emerged branch) cognitive poetics, make use of typologies of several forms of “speech and thought representation” (STR), distinguishing for example between direct discourse, indirect discourse, and free indirect discourse (see e.g. Dancygier, 2012; Vandelanotte, 2009; Bal, 2009; Fludernik, 1993). Linguists have rather been concerned with studying the grammatical and semantic means used to realise such forms of STR (see e.g. Dancygier & Sweetser, 2012; Evans, 2010: ch. 4; Tomasello, 2008: ch. 6; Verhagen, 2005).

In recent years, attention has been drawn to structurally different roles played by different linguistic instruments for coordinating viewpoints, across languages and modes of communication as well as within languages and modes. In English, as well as in most other Middle- and Western-European languages, sentence embedding is one of the common ways of attributing propositional content to a subject’s point of view.<sup>51</sup> In prototypical cases, a verb of cognition or communication (boldface below) is specified by an embedded clause, for example:

- (1) Mrs. Dalloway **said** she would buy the flowers herself.

(*Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf, 1925: 3)

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<sup>51</sup> In Chapter 4 I distinguish complementation constructions from several other (though related) patterns that involve sentence embedding. Here, however, I will simply refer to the broad category as “embedded sentences”.

- (2) She **imagined** the party would be crowded.

(*Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf, 1925: 47)

- (3) I **think** I can **imagine** how stunned you must have been.

(Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and his years of pilgrimage, Murakami, 2014: 51)

As can be observed in ((3)), an important feature of the grammatical operation of sentence embedding is that it can be performed recursively. Using this form of viewpoint coordination one can thus stack up large numbers of viewpoints in a single sentence, as is done in Zunshine's paraphrase cited in 3.1 above: "Woolf *intends us to recognize* [...] that Richard *is aware* that Hugh *wants* Lady Bruton and Richard to *think* [...etc.]". However, it is important to note that sentence embedding is only one of many ways of coordinating multiple viewpoints in language, and that it creates a very one-dimensional relationship between these mindstates that easily gets opaque. This relationship will be the topic of Sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.4 below.

In the practice of representing multiple mindstates in discourse, sentence embedding is generally used in combination with an array of other linguistic elements capable of viewpoint coordination (see also Chapters 4 and 5 below). Sweetser (2012: 4-6) provides a classification that includes deictic expressions of place and time, usage of determiners, pronouns and address forms, connectives and evidential markers, presuppositions, and markers of emotion and affection. These elements all differ in how they prompt readers to construe the relationships between the represented mindstates. In the next sections and throughout Chapter 4, I will demonstrate how a polyphonic thoughtscape of interlinked (but not necessarily embedded) mindstates is in the actual text represented using a mix of different elements of viewpoint coordination—or reversely: how the text uses a clever mix of such elements to prompt readers to imagine a polyphonic thoughtscape, rather than a string of embedded layers.

### *3.2.4 A first example: embedding of perspectives in a novel*

Complex mindreading situations tend to emerge gradually in the course of a story rather than being packed into one sentence. Narrative discourse is characterised by, what I have in the previous chapter termed, “expository strategies” capable of conveying highly complicated “thoughtscapes” in a natural and manageable way. An example from Murakami’s recent novel *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and his years of pilgrimage* (2014) illustrates this nicely, and arguably even provides meta-fictional reflection on the paradoxical nature of the construction of viewpoints in novels: such viewpoints can in some sense be related in very complicated ways, whereas their construction proceeds almost unnoticed most of the time. In Murakami’s novel, the main character Tsukuru and his friend Haida regularly have long conversations in the evenings. One night, Haida starts telling a story that his father always used to tell. Throughout the novel, narrating is done in retrospect by a narrator who provides insight in Tsukuru’s inner life. The events of the novel are thus seen through Tsukuru’s eyes—or in other words: Tsukuru acts as the primary focaliser. Normally the narrator does not directly access mind-states of other characters, but lets the reader construe them where necessary through what Tsukuru thinks or what he hears that others say, which is indicated by quotation marks. However, the quite long story Haida tells about his father is first related through a few sentences between quotation marks, but then continues in unquoted form:

- (4) ‘When my father was young, he spent a year wandering around Japan,’  
Haida began. ‘This was at the end of the 1960s [...] I guess people need that  
sort of stage in their lives.’  
That winter Haida’s father worked as general handyman at a small hot  
springs resort in Southern Japan. He really liked the place and decided to  
stay for a while.  
(60-61; quotation marks and tab space in original)

The structure of the story at this point can in some sense be analysed as follows: the narrator provides insight in what Tsukuru hears his friend Haida say.

Haida, in turn, tells what his father said in the past. Haida's father, at that time, was telling what he experienced during an episode earlier in his life, which comprises dialogues occurring at that time and memories of yet earlier times. All in all, five to six layers are in some way active at the same time, while the text simply presents first- and second-order thoughts and feelings of the form "He really liked the place and decided to stay for a while".

The embedding of all these viewpoint layers has gradually taken place in the course of the story's unfolding. Even though it is possible to pinpoint the emerged scaffolding in an analysis, to the average reader only a few details about the entire configuration are relevant to make sense of the presented events. In principle, a cue prompting these details every now and then is enough to keep the configuration sufficiently active in the reader's minds to let the story move on (e.g. "Another person with a color, Tsukuru thought, but said nothing and listened to the rest of the story", 62). However, the layers can still get mixed up despite such cues, as Murakami lets his readers realise when he at some point no longer writes "Haida's father", but "Haida", at places where he is clearly referring to the character of Haida's father in the story Haida is telling to Tsukuru. Just when attentive readers start asking themselves whether this is an inelegant mistake or perhaps something they should try to interpret, the narratological bushfire is smothered:

- (5) Haida stopped and glanced at the clock on the wall. [...] He was, of course, Haida the son, but Haida the father had been his same age in this story, and so the two of them began to overlap in Tsukuru's mind. It was an odd sensation, as if the two distinct temporalities had blended into one. (65)

Murakami clearly takes his place next to Woolf in the category of writers who are at the same time acute literary scholars: he first makes his readers go through the same "odd sensation" that Tsukuru undergoes, thereby blending all the different layers even further, and then he inserts a remark that prompts reflection on what has just happened on a narratological level, even using the technical term "blending" (see Section 3.3.3 below).

The bottom-line of the brief analysis of this first narrative example is that layers of embedding can stack up easily and sometimes go almost unnoticed in

the course of the unfolding of a novel's plot, and that they are usually cued by a mix of quite different linguistic and narrative elements in the text. In order to follow the story, readers have to keep some details in mind of the layered configuration that has emerged, but at least in this case they do not seem to be required to go to extreme lengths in terms of cognitive effort. All they need to know here comes down to questions of the type: "Are we speaking about Haida-the-father or Haida-the-son here?", and would be quite misrepresented by questions of the form: "Does Murakami *intend* that we *think* that Haida-the-son *intends* Tsukuru to *understand* that Haida-the-father *thinks*...(etc.)?" It seems to follow that embedding of viewpoints *per se* in this case is not the factor responsible for complexity or, for that matter, warranting literary quality: it would hardly be problematic, nor would it be a guaranteed literary master move, if the story about Haida-the-father would gradually develop into another story told by *his* father (who would be Haida-the-grandfather), even though the number of embedded layers at that point would theoretically reach seven or eight.

In the next section I will analyse the passage from *Mrs Dalloway*, and propose a different conceptualisation of the complexity involved in representing multiple mindstates in the discourse of this novel.

### 3.3 Viewpoint layers in *Mrs Dalloway*

In this section I will contrast Zunshine's paraphrase (as cited earlier in the Introduction) to the corresponding excerpt from Woolf's novel itself:

(6)

Hugh produced his fountain pen; his silver fountain pen, which had done twenty years' service, he said, unscrewing the cap. It was still in perfect order; he had shown it to the makers; there was no reason, they said, why it should ever wear out; which was somehow to Hugh's credit, and to the credit of the sentiments which his pen expressed (so **Richard Dalloway** felt) as Hugh began carefully writing capital letters with rings round them in the margin, and thus marvellously reduced



Lady Bruton's tangles to sense, to grammar such as the editor of the *Times*, **Lady Bruton felt, watching** the marvellous transformation, must respect.

(Woolf, 1925; boldface added)

(7)

(i) Woolf *intends*

(ii) us to recognize [...]

(iii) that Richard *is aware*

(iv) that Hugh *wants*

(v) Lady Bruton and Richard to *think*

(vi) that because the makers of the pen *believe*  
that it will never wear out

(vii) the editors of the *Times* will *respect and*  
*publish* the ideas recorded by this pen.

(Zunshine, 2012: 206-207; italics in original, numbering and indents added)

Whereas the narrative in ((6) is perfectly readable, also when seeing it for the first time, the paraphrase in ((7) is highly opaque. As argued in Chapter 2, sentence grammar is well capable of handling up to two or three orders of intentionality, but if more orders are involved, “narrative takes over”. Here, however, I am interested in the lower-level linguistic and narratological phenomena that realise viewpoint construction and management, rather than in these broader expository strategies. To that effect, I will compare the narrative passage cited in ((6) and the paraphrase cited in ((7), looking at differences in their construction of (what is supposed to be, in some respect) the same situation by applying Dancygier’s (2012) framework of “narrative spaces”. Choices made on the level of these linguistic and narratological phenomena influence the way in which several viewpoint layers become mutually embedded and interlinked. As will turn out, this affects not only meaning, but also the ease (or difficulty) with which the emerging network of perspectives can be processed.

### *3.3.1 The first three layers*

The paraphrase, which Zunshine forms to analyse the passage from the novel in terms of orders of intentionality, comprises seven viewpoint layers.<sup>52</sup> The first two concern the relationship between the author and the reader: they refer to the basic communicative situation of reading a novel. However, rather than being coordinated by linguistic cues *in* the text, these viewpoint layers come implicitly with the genre. Although readers who open a novel may in a very abstract sense be “aware” that the text written on the pages contains a story that the author *intends* them to *believe*, in the actual practice of reading these layers are not as much activated as is suggested by Zunshine’s paraphrase. For a reader (or a literary critic setting aside for a moment all axioms that come with the “death of the author”; Barthes, 1967), it is at any point in the text possible to stop reading and consider explicitly what the author may have intended one to believe by writing, for example, that someone carries a bunch of flowers “like a weapon” (*Mrs Dalloway*: 102). But this does not mean that the minds of readers are burdened with the cognitive load of this task during the average reading process. Thanks to their experience with the basic communicative situation of the novel, they can, as it were, start processing from beyond the levels (i) and (ii) in ((7) (see also Dancygier, 2012a, for the idea of the basic communicative situation as a *frame*).

Layer three of ((7) brings one of the novel’s characters into play: Richard Dalloway. Abstracting from the positions of the author and reader, Zunshine thus reconstructs the scene from his point of view: after all, the nature of embedding clauses as is done in (7) is such that every next clause falls under the scope of the former. To some extent, the text does indeed give rise to this choice: the remark between parentheses “so Richard Dalloway felt” (boldface in (6)) invites readers to see Hugh writing the letter from Richard’s perspective. Or, in narratological terms: it is true that Richard acts as the focaliser of a part of the scene. However, note that in the original passage, this is only the case for a short moment. Focalisation was with Lady Bruton before, and is passed back

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<sup>52</sup> Zunshine herself suggests that this paraphrase is sixth-level intentionality; her italics suggest that she takes (i) and (ii) as one level. However, this is not consistent with counting in other paraphrases she provides (2012: 207-207). Since “*intends us to recognize*” contains an extra embedding, I decided to count this as two orders, which brings us at a total of seven.

to her immediately after Richard has briefly taken the floor, witness the clause “Lady Bruton felt, watching the marvellous transformation” in (6).

This is an important observation: whereas the nature of sentence embedding makes all subsequent layers dependent on Richard’s perspective, in the original novel’s text, as perspectives shift, these layers become interlinked in various ways *without* necessarily being embedded into one another.

### 3.3.2 Shifting perspectives

In *Mrs Dalloway* an omniscient narrator thus provides a wealth of insight into the inner lives of various characters, resulting in a “360-degree view” of the novel’s thoughtscape. In order to fully understand and, for that matter, enjoy the passage cited in ((6), in the novel on page 96, some knowledge of the previous 95 pages is needed. After all, lots of details about the characters, including their sympathies and antipathies towards one another, will by this time have been established. For example, if we limit ourselves to the excerpt as cited in (6) only, it appears that narration starts from a “neutral” position, as if there were a camera recording from above:

(8) Hugh produced his fountain pen

Indeed, in narratological terms one would say that it is the omniscient narrator “witnessing” Hugh’s action and reporting it to the reader. However, for readers who have just read what happened before this point, everything Hugh does and says here is already viewed in a specific way by Lady Bruton and Richard Dalloway. Earlier that afternoon, Richard and Hugh had arrived for lunch at Lady Bruton’s house, where they were in some sense invited on false pretences: in fact Lady Bruton wanted their help with the writing of a letter to the *Times* to publicly express her thoughts on a political matter. Before lunch is eventually served, readers already share in Lady Bruton’s thoughts about Hugh and Richard, including her opinion that Hugh “had been remarkably kind” (yet she forgot on which occasion) but that she preferred Richard, who was “made of much finer material” (91). This information, combined with knowledge that the readers have acquired before of who these characters are and how they think

about each other, clearly invites the attribution of more sophisticated thoughts than can be explained from analysing only the textual cues within the boundaries of (7). In the current and following sections I will nevertheless look at the cited passage in relative isolation, concentrating on the linguistic phenomena coordinating the different viewpoints involved in the depicted scene. Eventually, in Section 3.4, a wider view on the text will be taken into account.

After the narrator has told us how Hugh produced his pen, a form of indirect discourse is used to relate a comment on this pen made by Hugh.<sup>53</sup> Linguistic cues signalling viewpoint management (in narrative space theory referred to as *space builders*, see below) are printed in boldface:

- (9) his silver fountain pen, which had done twenty years' service, **he said**,  
unscrewing the cap  
(boldface added here and in 10-12 below)

It should be noted how the transition from the narrator's voice to Hugh's voice and back is ingeniously cued here. First it is clear that the narrator is speaking, describing Hugh's action from a third-person perspective: "Hugh produced his fountain pen". The sentence then continues with a further specification of this pen, "his silver fountain pen, which had done twenty years' service", which could in principle still be a comment added by the narrator. However, when the inquit-formula "he said" follows next, it becomes clear that the narrator *only now* takes over again. As a consequence, readers have to do a "double take" on what they have just read, realising that it must have been Hugh saying that his silver fountain pen had done twenty years' service while unscrewing the cap (in fact, the reader may well realise by the end of the sentence that the addition of "silver" should already have been a cue of the perspective of the slightly pompous Hugh). In a way, this is a "special effect" highlighting the wandering

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<sup>53</sup> More precisely, (9) is an example of what I will term an "inquit-construction" in Chapter 4, named after the inquit-formula (in this case "he said") that attributes the propositional content (in this case "twenty years' service" or "silver fountain pen, which had done twenty years' service", depending on interpretation) to the perspective of a particular discourse participant (in this case Hugh).

nature of narration here: the need of doing a double take may remind readers that perspectives are constantly shifting.<sup>54</sup>

Next, the text continues as free indirect discourse, within which Hugh reports, in turn using indirect discourse, what the makers of the pen have said:

- (10) It was still in perfect order; **he had shown** it to the makers; there was no reason, **they said**, why it should ever wear out;

From here perspective seems to shift back to the narrator, but in the same way as with Hugh's voice in (9), readers have to do a double take as soon as they reach the comment between parentheses, which makes it clear that they had been reading about Richard's thoughts:

- (11) which was somehow to Hugh's credit, and to the credit of the sentiments which his pen expressed (so **Richard Dalloway felt**) as Hugh began carefully writing capital letters with rings round them in the margin, and thus marvellously reduced Lady Bruton's tangles to sense,

Finally, this is seamlessly followed by the shift towards Lady Bruton's viewpoint:

- (12) to grammar such as the editor of the *Times*, **Lady Bruton felt, watching the marvellous transformation, must respect.**

To summarise, the excerpt from the text in (6) in fact describes three "scenes":

- (a) the present in Lady Bruton's house: Hugh composing a letter to the *New York Times*, based on a series of opinions (the "tangles") produced by Lady Bruton;

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<sup>54</sup> See in this context also Coulson's discussion of "frame shifting" (2001). Moreover, note that in narratology the phenomenon of blending different levels of narration is known as metalepsis (De Jong, 2009; Genette 1972). In its classic form, it involves a narrator becoming a participant in the world of the characters, or one of the characters interfering with the narrator's business of telling the story. The "double take" that readers are cued to do in (9) is arguably a clever variation on this form.

- (b) the past of the fountain pen: it having been in service for twenty years and Hugh showing it to the makers; and
- (c) the imagined future: the editors of the *Times* receiving and reading the letter.

Various means of viewpoint coordination are used to let the readers “experience” aspects of these scenes from different perspectives: indirect discourse and free indirect discourse serve to represent speech by Hugh and by the makers of the pen; indirect thought, supported by inquit-formulas using the verb “to feel”, attribute observations to the viewpoints of Richard Dalloway and Lady Bruton; and indirect thought is used to include the presumed opinion of the *Times* editors. As will be detailed in the next section: rather than evoking a series of embedded perspectives viewed from one single vantage point, the text prompts readers to imagine what I have termed a thoughtscape, a network of different perspectives that are interlinked and partly embedded in a variety of ways.

### *3.3.3 Narrative spaces and blending*

The three scenes distinguished at the end of the previous section differ in their setting in space and time, participants, and the viewpoints from which they are perceived and narrated. The writing of the letter (a) is the “actual” setting at that point in the novel’s plot, within which the other two scenes are evoked by character’s words and thoughts. The twenty years’ service of the pen and the event of showing it to its makers (b) are referred to by Hugh. The editors receiving and reading the letter (c) can be seen as a hypothesised future event within Lady Bruton’s thoughts.

The configuration of these scenes as prompted by the text must somehow imply the embedding of mental states: after all, there are characters (Hugh; Richard; Lady Bruton) thinking of persons (the makers of the pen; the editors of the *Times*) having a particular thought or opinion (that the pen will not wear out; that the letter is respectable). However, focussing on embedding *per se* does not provide an adequate picture of how all the mindstates involved in the passage cited in (6) are mutually related and interlinked. For a detailed analysis supporting this claim I will rely on Dancygier’s *narrative-spaces framework* (2012;

2008). This framework offers a version of mental space theory (Fauconnier, 1997; 1985) tailored for narrative texts. Like a mental space, a narrative space is a hypothetical subdivision in a language user's mental activities, prompted by linguistic expressions, and used in the process of meaning construction. However, whereas mental spaces typically form "ad hoc"-structures that are constantly modified or replaced in the course of interaction, configurations of narrative spaces can persist throughout an entire story once they have been prompted. Each narrative space is characterised by a particular set of features such as time, space, cultural norms, language spoken, or participants involved in either narration (narrators/focalisers), action (characters), or both (Dancygier, 2012: 35-37). These features are open to further elaboration by all kinds of local linguistic choices, such as use of sentence embedding, grammatical features such as tense or modality, use of pronouns, typographical cues (e.g. quotation marks), etcetera.

For an important part, construction and elaboration of narrative spaces has been argued to take place through *blending* (Turner and Fauconnier, 1995; Coulson, 2001). The general idea of blending is that two inputs with an established conceptual structure and content are integrated into an emergent *blended space* or *blend*. The blend has properties inherited from the inputs, as well as new structure and content of its own. Once a narrative space has been prompted and possibly further structured and enriched, it can as a whole be blended with another narrative space. The result of all the construction and blending processes is what Dancygier refers to as the *emerging story*: this is what the reader understands after having read and processed the text up until a particular point. The emerging story is thus a "moving end result".

As an example, consider this excerpt from the very beginning of Murakami's novel *Norwegian Wood*:

(13)

I was 37 then, strapped in my seat as the huge 747 plunged through dense cloud cover on approach to Hamburg airport.

[...] Once the plane was on the ground, soft music began to flow from the ceiling speakers: a sweet orchestral cover version of the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood". The melody [...] hit me harder than ever.

I bent forward, my face in my hands to keep my skull from splitting open. Before long one of the German stewardesses approached and asked in English whether I were sick.

“No,” I said, “just dizzy.”

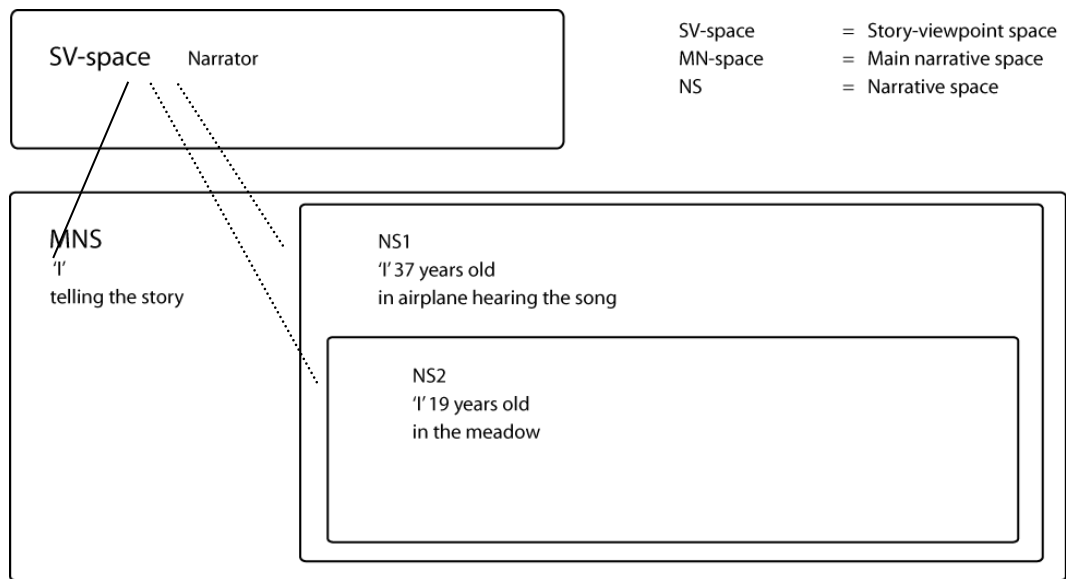
[...] She smiled and left.

[...] The plane reached the gate. People began unfastening their seatbelts and pulling luggage from the overhead lockers, and all the while I was in the meadow. I could smell the grass, feel the wind on my face, hear the cries of the birds. Autumn 1969, and soon I would be 20.

(Murakami, *Norwegian Wood*, 2000)

This story excerpt stages an “I”-narrator describing a past event: landing at Hamburg airport when he was 37 years old, and within that event being reminded of a moment even further back, from when he was almost 20. In Dancygier’s terms this can be described as a structure with three narrative spaces, where the first space includes the second and the second includes the third. Through the first words (“I was 37 *then*”) a narrative space is prompted comprising the “I” at the moment of telling the story. No other details about this first space are mentioned. Subsequently, a second narrative space is prompted within the first one, comprising two participants (the “I” and the stewardess), a particular spatio-temporal setting (some day 18 years after 1969 in a plane landing at Hamburg airport), first-person narration, and past tense. A few sentences later, the episode from further back (a day in a meadow in 1969) is inserted in the form of a memory (in conventional narratological terms this would be referred to as a *flashback* or *analepsis*). This means that another space is prompted within the two existing ones. The result on the level of the emerging story is a blend of the three narrative spaces: while the remembered episode from 1969 comes into focus, the setting of being in the plane at Hamburg airport also persists in some form, as does the here-and-now of the “I” telling the story of when he was 37. The reader understands the text as having a layered structure, where each part is set against the background of the other. Schematically:





**Figure 1** – Schematic depiction of the narrative-spaces configuration prompted by excerpt (13). Following Dancygier, I assume a separate space for the narrator, called the story-viewpoint space (SV-space; 2012: 64-75). It can be seen as an “overarching” narrative space, housing the vantage point that has all the other spaces in its scope. The solid line indicates identity: the narrator in the SV-space is identical to the primary focaliser (“I”) in the MN-space. The dashed lines between the narrator in the SV-space and “I-37-years-old” and “I-19-years-old” indicate that focalisation at some point shifts to these perspectives.

Note that usage of the blending framework is especially adequate here, because the story at the end of the excerpt in ((13)) has neither just the content and structure of the initial “now” of telling the story, nor just that of the situation in the plane or that of the day in the meadow, nor is it simply the sum of the three—it has elements of all three spaces, as well as newly emerged properties of its own: “Norwegian Wood” is now no longer just a Beatles song, but it is charged with aspects from the main character’s personal history.

This example captures an important feature of stories in general: at any point between their beginning and ending they exhibit a unique emerging story, a particular structure and content unique to this point in the narrative. At the same time, this emerging story results from all the elements that contributed to its construction and development so far. In other words: any point in a story is somehow dependent on the set of preceding points in it. Still, it is clear that the complexity at any particular point does not equal the sum of

all the complexities of the earlier points. Some aspects are introduced and remain a clearly visible part of the emerging story until the ending, others modify the emerging story in some persisting way without remaining visible in their initial form, and yet others affect the emerging story only temporarily or fade away as the story progresses (in blending theory, the process in which some aspects of the input spaces are transferred to the blended space while others are, sometimes temporarily, dropped, is referred to as *compression*—see Dancygier, 2012; this concept will be used more extensively in Chapter 4).

### *3.3.4 Back to Mrs Dalloway*

With this introduction to the narrative-spaces framework in mind it is time to return to *Mrs Dalloway*. Following the logic explained above, the following schema can be drawn:

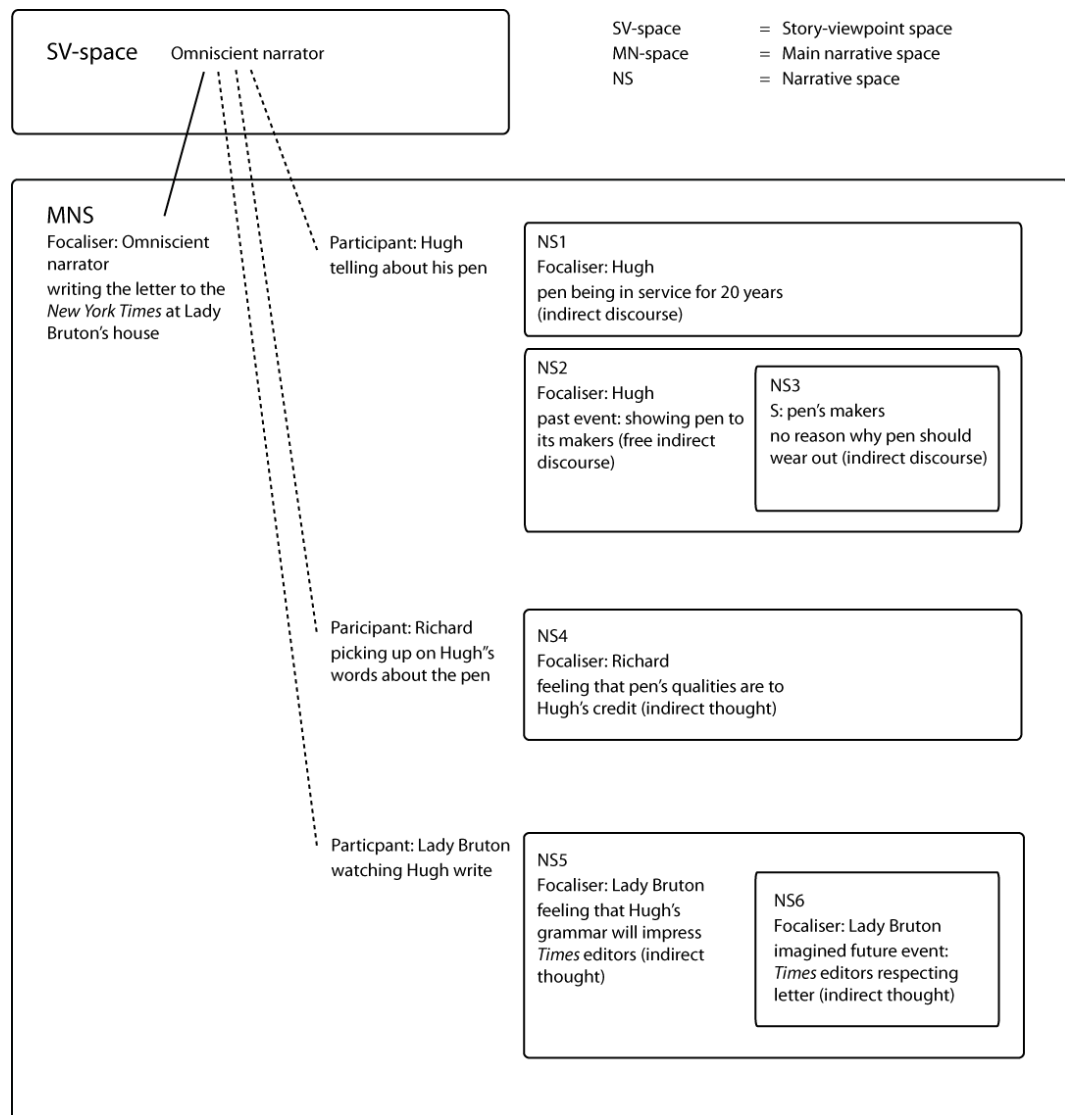


Figure 2 - Schematic depiction of the narrative-spaces configuration prompted by excerpt (6).

As in Figure 1, the solid line indicates identity: the omniscient narrator in the SV-space is identical to the primary focaliser in the MN-space. The dashed lines between the narrator in the SV-space and the characters participating in the MNS indicate that focalisation sometimes shifts to their perspective, with their thoughts and inner lives being accessed by the narrator and presented to the reader. This is what distinguishes them from the makers of the pen and the editors of the *Times*, who are also characters, but hold only thoughts and

opinions that are attributed to them; that is: their inner lives are presented under the scope of the viewpoints of Hugh and Lady Bruton instead of being directly accessed by the narrator.

From this schematic analysis of the Woolf-passage, four conclusions can be drawn. First, it can be seen that linguistic choices made on the micro-level either structure an existing narrative space or prompt a new one. For example, NS1 is prompted by the inquit-formula “he said” (boldface in (9)) and NS4 is prompted by the comment between parenthesis “(so Richard Dallow felt)” (boldface in (10)). Secondly, it can be noticed that the narrative spaces have features (spatio-temporal setting, participating characters, point of view) that are partly different and partly overlapping or identical. Thirdly, they can naturally be grouped in what could be called “intermediate-level blends” or “scenes”, which in turn combine into the “highest-level blend” of the emerging story. For example: NS1, NS2, and NS3 together form the scene of Hugh telling about his pen, whereas NS5 and NS6 combine naturally into the scene of Lady Bruton watching Hugh write and consequently imaging what the editors of the *Times* may think. Fourthly, and related to this third point, Figure 2 depicts how some of the spaces are embedded into one another, while others are linked in different ways, and others again are independent of one another. NS1 and NS2 are embedded in the MNS; NS4 is triggered by and provides a perspective on NS1, NS2, and NS3; and NS6 is embedded in NS5, which is embedded in the MNS. Richard’s thoughts in NS4 might be triggered by Hugh’s words in NS2 and NS3, but they are not part of Hugh’s perspective. Also, Lady Bruton’s thoughts and expectations in NS5 and NS6 are particular to her and not shared by anyone of the other characters.

The result on the highest level of the emerging story is indeed an increasingly rich “360-degree view” of the situation in Lady Bruton’s house, with a “camera” that seems to turn smoothly from one position to another. The readers first find Hugh in a focalising and speaking role, and the other two participants in the background. Next, or perhaps rather simultaneously, they see Richard in a more active role, being the focaliser, watching and evaluating Hugh while writing. Finally they see Lady Bruton take the floor, having thoughts about the *Times* editors’ opinion, while the setting of Hugh writing the letter also remains in focus, but Richard’s thoughts are dropped. Once again: all

these viewpoints are *interlinked* in several ways, but this does not mean that they are *embedded* into one another.

Whereas Figure 2 depicts the narrative space configuration as prompted by the original passage, Figure 3 below depicts the paraphrase as formed by Zunshine in her analysis of this passage:

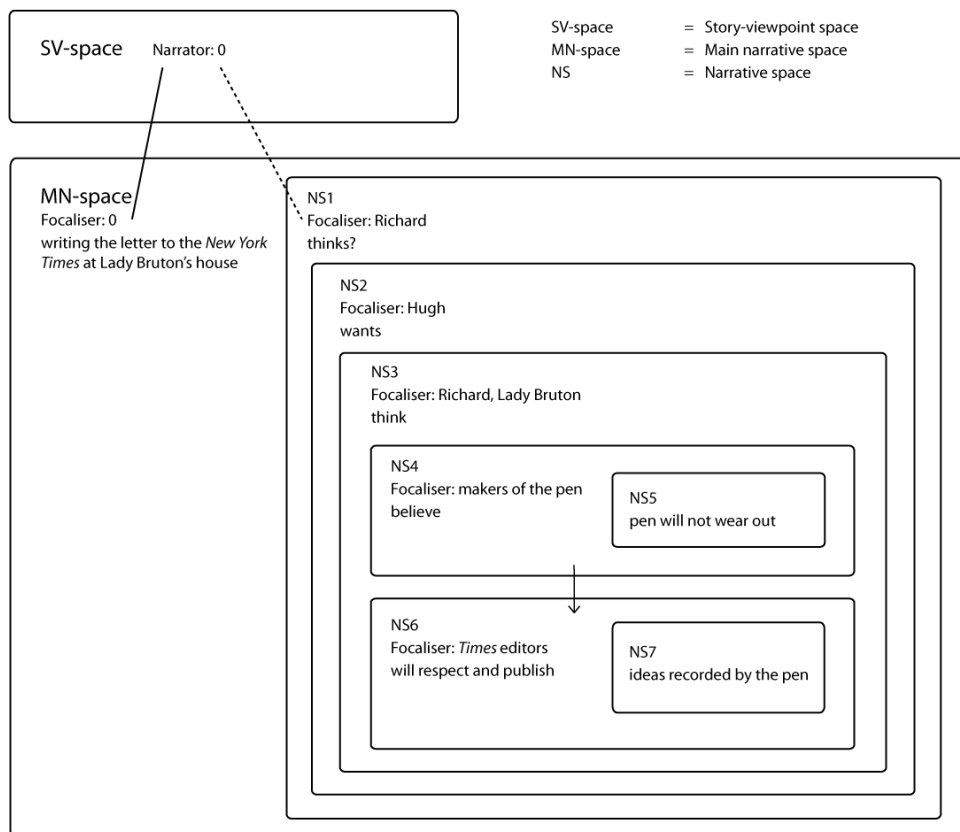


Figure 3 - Schematic depiction of the narrative-spaces configuration prompted by excerpt (7).

Since the narrator nowhere narrates or focalises independently, and is thus completely off-stage, a “o”-label is given in the SV- and MN-spaces (cf. Dancygier, 2012: 66-68). Furthermore, each of the embedded clauses (abstracting from the author and reader) prompt a new space: “...that Richard is aware that Hugh wants Lady Bruton and Richard to think that because the makers of the pen believe that it will never wear out the editors of the *Times* will respect and publish the ideas recorded by this pen”. The causal link construed through the connective “because” in the paraphrase is indicated in

the figure by an arrow between NS4/NS5 and NS6/NS7. Except for these causally linked spaces, all others are set up *within* the previous space, as a consequence of which all spaces fall under the scope of Richard's viewpoint. This is indicated by the dashed line between him and the SV-space, showing that he is the only agent to which focalisation is "passed" from the narrator. The resulting narrative-spaces configuration in Figure 3 reflects the one-dimensional, opaque "stack" of perspectives as construed by the recursively applied sentence embedding in Zunshine's paraphrase.

### 3.4 Discussion and concluding remarks

As discussed in Section 3.2, Zunshine suggests that Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* exhibits a high degree of, what she refers to as, sociocognitive complexity. She starts from what I have labelled as assumption (i) in Section 3.2.2: that this complexity must be conceptualised as a series of embedded layers. Next, she selects a passage in order to "map [it] out in terms of the nested levels of intentionality" (2012: 206). After having discussed a few smaller "irreducible units" of embedded intentionality (such as "Hugh says that the makers of the pen think it will never wear out") she sets out to "move up to those that capture as much of the whole narrative gestalt [of the cited passage] as possible" (2012: 206). This is the context in which she forms the paraphrase cited in (7) above. Clearly, this paraphrase was not intended to replace the original text: she acknowledges that it is only one way of mapping out the targeted passage. However, and that leads to her assumption (ii), she argues that in order to grasp the full meaning of the passage, readers first have to accomplish the highly cognitively demanding task of processing "several sequences that embed at least five levels of intentionality" (2012: 207).

In fact, the paraphrase does cover a quite subtle aspect of what happens in the cited passage of the novel. By mentioning the age and expensive material of his pen and the opinion of its manufacturers when they saw it, Hugh does more than only sharing information with Richard and Lady Bruton. We can safely

*ascribe to him the intention* of persuading his interlocutors that he is a pro at writing, satisfied only with the best tools to support this profession (or something to that effect). If we do so, we add extra complexity to our understanding of the text while reading: instead of only seeing that Hugh possesses a great pen, we also attribute (what we presume to be) his implied motives for drawing attention to this fact. The text hints that Richard in any case *is* sensitive to this implication, since his feeling that the quality of the pen somehow adds to Hugh's and the letter's credit is put on stage by the lines "which was somehow to Hugh's credit, and to the credit of the sentiments which his pen expressed (so Richard Dalloway felt)". This observation seems to be what Zunshine has woven into the paraphrase: it covers Richard's sensitivity to Hugh's presumed intention to imply his expertise (layer iii-vi in (7)).<sup>55</sup> However, if we stay close to the text, we cannot say whether Lady Bruton has this sensitivity too; we are only informed about *her* positive feelings concerning Hugh's mastery of grammar and *her* expectation that it will gladden the editors of the *Times* too. Also, the text does not mention (or strongly imply) any of Richard's expectations of what the editors will think. This is where my conceptualisation of the text providing a "360-degree view of the thoughtscape" works better than that of the layered structure as suggested by the paraphrase: the latter misrepresents Lady Bruton's idea of the editors' opinion (layer vii in (7)) as following directly from her (and Richard's) understanding of Hugh's presumed intentions behind his remarks about the pen. In the same vein, the text does not mention (or strongly imply) Richard's expectations of what the editors will think, which is thus also misrepresented by the paraphrase. This leads to similar conclusions as drawn earlier: by embedding into one another all the viewpoints held by or ascribed to the characters, the paraphrase does not seem to connect the scenes presented by the text in the right way: it distorts the interlinked though mostly independent nature of the viewpoints.

A perspective on the analysis offered in this chapter that is worth working out in more detail in the future, follows from the work of Bakhtin. One of his

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<sup>55</sup> Incidentally, there is still a difference between Richard seeing through Hugh's intention to brag and Richard being affected and truly impressed by Hugh's bragging—deciding between these two nuances is not possible on the basis of the fragment or the paraphrase. This is different, though, for readers of the entire novel, who will know enough about the two characters to see that the first of the two options is the more likely...

central points is that characters and their perspectives in a novel should be seen as “dialogising voices”, interacting also beyond what is literally written down in the text (see e.g. Mey, 1999: 153-154 and his references to Bakhtin, 1992). They “populate” a text, and even though an author or narrator can give her best attempt to “orchestrate” their voices, she will never be able to fully control them (cf. the concept of “heteroglossia”; Bakhtin, 1992). One important reason for this, according to Bakhtin and his adherents, is that readers will always, consciously or unconsciously, attribute all kinds of thoughts and intentions to characters. It is for sure thinkable that a text can bring a reader in a position where it is both hard to access a particular character’s thoughts and necessary to do so in order to be able to understand the story—in that case, it is also thinkable that reading would be cognitively demanding. However, as far as the literary excerpts analysed in this chapter are concerned, quite the opposite situation seems to obtain: texts are full of elements that make the contents of different mindstates and their mutual relations *accessible* instead of opaque, and, thinking in the way proposed by Bakhtin, readers seem prone to (over)attributing intentional relationships when interacting with the text easily rather than by virtue of hard cognitive effort.

This finally takes us back to assumption (iii) defined in Section 3.2.2 above: that readers’ appreciation of a literary work is affected by the amount of mindreading complexity it contains. Rather than being drawn to fictional texts because it is so hard to figure out what all the characters are thinking that this pushes us to the limits of our abilities, we might just as well conclude that fiction attract us because it takes us relatively *little* effort to get access to rich representation of others’ inner lives, compared to real-life settings where we usually do not get such “360-degree spectator sight”. Like in our daily social environments, in a novel such as *Mrs Dalloway* we are confronted with a rich thoughtscape, constituted by a polyphony of different voices, that underlies all events and interactions. However, unlike in our daily lives, in *Mrs Dalloway* the text provides us with a full panoramic tour of all the mental space we normally don’t get to access so easily. Put differently: as readers of fiction such as Woolf’s, we can sit back in our chairs lazily and enjoy the thoughtscape, while the narrator does most of the mindreading for us.