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► **To cite this version:**

Sylvie Patron. Two Books on the Representation of Consciousness in Narrative: An Essay in Comparative Narratology . Poetics Today: International Journal for Theory and Analysis of Literature and Communication, Duke University Press, 2017, 38 (4), pp.695-715. <hal-01659981>

**HAL Id: hal-01659981**

**<https://hal-univ-diderot.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01659981>**

Submitted on 11 Dec 2017

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## Two Books on the Representation of Consciousness in Narrative: An Essay in Comparative Narratology

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### Abstract

Two books on the representation of consciousness in narrative have recently been published in the United States and the Netherlands (in a series devoted to French language and literature), *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English* (2011), a collection edited by David Herman, and *La représentation de la vie psychique dans les récits factuels et fictionnels de l'époque classique* (*The Representation of Mental Life in Factual and Fictional Narratives in the Classical Period*, 2015), coedited by Marc Hersant and Catherine Ramond, respectively. Reading them one after the other is an interesting experience, because there are numerous divergences, and these raise important questions concerning especially the relationship between narratology, or narrative theory, and history. This essay aims to deepen this experience and to offer a comparative analysis of the two books. The geographic and cultural backgrounds of the authors, the corpora they use, and the different analytic approaches and references all justify the interest of such a confrontation between the reflections of Herman and his collaborators and Hersant and Ramond's team. This confrontation will also serve as an occasion to reflect on the stakes of these two practices of narratology or narrative theory.

**Keywords:** fictional and factual narratives, representation of consciousness, fictional minds, exceptionality thesis, enactivism

### Preliminary Remarks

There is no evidence that *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English* (2011), a collection edited by David Herman,<sup>1</sup> influenced *La représentation de la vie psychique dans les récits factuels et fictionnels de l'époque classique* (*The Representation of Mental Life in Factual and Fictional Narratives in the Classical Period*, 2015), coedited by Marc Hersant and Catherine Ramond,<sup>2</sup> even though Herman's collection was published four years earlier than Hersant and Ramond's. The work of the most widely published authors in Herman's book (Monika Fludernik, Alan Palmer, Lisa Zunshine, Herman himself) also seems unknown to Hersant and Ramond's contributors. Conversely, there is no trace of the work of the French authors in the parts of Herman's collection that cover the same period. The situation is not quite symmetrical, however, as their work is not widely known outside specialist circles even in France.

The aim of Herman's (2011: 1) book is to examine "trends in the representation of consciousness in English-language narrative discourse from 700 to the present." It is organized into four parts, each containing two or three chapters. The first part is devoted to Old and Middle English narrative, the second to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century narrative, the third to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century narrative, the fourth to modernist and postmodernist narrative (from the last two decades of the nineteenth century to the very beginning of the twenty-first century). Within the parts the chapters, numbered 1–9, all indicate the period before in title: "700–1050: Embodiment, Metaphor, and the Mind in Old English Narrative" by Leslie Lockett, "1050–1500: Through a Glass Darkly; or, The Emergence of Mind in Medieval Narrative" by Fludernik, "1500–1620: Reading, Consciousness, and Romance in the Sixteenth Century" by F. Elizabeth Hart, and so on. The intention is clear. It demonstrates the exhaustive nature of the volume (all periods are covered) and the value of a collaborative work (each period is entrusted to a specialist). However, the fact that the periods form a continuous succession, without any gap or overlap, seems to be an easy option rather than a well-thought-out design. Also in an area such as the representation of consciousness in narrative, a series of synchronic cross sections showing how these questions and practices are expressed at a given point in the history of the British Isles would have been more insightful. Conversely, one only needs to compare Herman's collection with Hersant and Ramond's to realize that the trends in the representation of consciousness referred to in Herman's chapter 4, "1620–1700: Mind on the Move" by Elizabeth Bradburn; chapter 5, "1700–1775: Theory of Mind, Social Hierarchy, and the Emergence of Narrative Subjectivity" by Zunshine; and chapter 6, "1775–1825: Affective Landscapes and Romantic Consciousness" by David Vallins, are far from exhausting an especially rich and evolving subject area.

Hersant and Ramond's collection compiles the proceedings of a conference at the University of Lyon III in France in October 2012. With a much narrower periodization than Herman's book, Hersant and Ramond's collection focuses on the "classical period," referring to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries up to the French Revolution (although one article by Stéphanie Genand on Germaine de Staël goes beyond this point). Hersant and Ramond (2015: 5, 8) also use the expression "récits d'Ancien Régime" (ancien régime narratives) in their introduction. The twenty-six articles in the volume are divided into four thematic parts. The first, "Approches théoriques et poétiques" ("Theoretical and Poetic Approaches"), brings together contributions that articulate ongoing debates in France today on specific questions raised by the narratives of the classical period. The second, slightly ambiguously titled "L'écriture factuelle: Une tentation de la fiction?" ("Factual Writing: A Temptation of Fiction?"), is devoted to factual narratives (history, memoirs, witness reports) and the way they represent, or not, the inner lives of the protagonists. It can be mentioned here that the topic of factual narratives is not examined or even raised in the Herman collection, which focuses almost exclusively on fictional narratives.<sup>3</sup> The third part of the Hersant and Ramond book, "Les formes de la fiction: Une vie psychique sous contrôle?" ("The Forms of Fiction: A Mental Life under Control?"), is devoted to fictional narratives, in particular hybrid ones: the narratives of Théophile de Viau, between fiction and nonfiction, the *nouvelles historiques* genre (historical novels, such as *La princesse de Clèves* by Madame de Lafayette), and

memoir novels. The fourth part, “Types d’intériorité représentés” (“Types of Interiority Represented”), focuses on the different types of interiority represented in factual and fictional narratives and the new or specific approaches to the Self elaborated there, religious approaches, medical approaches, approaches to the Self through the sensation of touch, “psychoanalytic” approaches in spirit if not in letter. Within these parts the articles are arranged in the chronological order of the topics explored. A passage in the introduction briefly identifies the themes that shape the specificity of the period under consideration, the birth of the “modern individual”—“an idea that is necessarily a little schematic but to which Rembrandt’s series of self-portraits or the emergence of a project like the *Confessions* [by Jean-Jacques Rousseau] gives a sort of meaning, nevertheless”—and its connection with the development of certain narrative genres, factual and fictional. “While the major works of Ian Watt or René Démoris turned the eighteenth-century novel into a sort of poetic laboratory for this ‘individualism,’ the rise of the memoir genre, throughout what historians call the modern period, also played an important role” (Hersant and Ramond 2015: 13; all translations are ours). The Hersant and Ramond collection also is distinguished from the Herman book in the attention it gives to factual and fictional narratives in which consciousness (mental life, inner life, interiority, etc.) is not represented or its representation is reduced to a bare minimum (see “La transparence extérieure: Les *Mémoires* de Mme de la Guette” [“External Transparency: Madame de la Guette’s *Memoirs*”] by Hélène Merlin-Kajman, and “Trouble dans le sujet: La vie psychique de Justine” [“Subject Trouble: The Mental Life of Justine”] by Ramond, among others).<sup>4</sup>

The reach of the Herman (2011: 2) collection extends far beyond its contribution to English literary history: “The book chapters collectively outline new directions for studying fictional minds—not only across different epochs of English-language narrative, but also (by extension) vis-à-vis the world’s many narrative traditions.” The Hersant and Ramond collection remains a work of literary history even if it is a novel approach to the subject informed by a number of theoretical considerations. It is part of a broader research program called *Récit et Vérité à l’Époque Classique* (Narrative and Truth in the Classical Period) that aims to conduct “a comparative study of the forms and themes of the fictional and non-fictional or ‘historical’ narrative in the broad sense in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries” (Hersant and Ramond 2015: 5). The first phase of this program was devoted to reported speech in factual and fictional narratives of the classical period.<sup>5</sup> The third phase is currently underway and concerns portraits in narratives.<sup>6</sup> Between the two, the book examined here ties in with certain aspects of the question of reported speech, the thoughts of characters in classical narrative often being presented as speech in the form of direct speech. It shows the interest of a structured and ongoing dialogue between specialists of factual narratives (Hersant himself is in this group)<sup>7</sup> and specialists of the fictional narratives of the period under consideration.<sup>8</sup>

In the two following sections I will compare where the Herman and the Hersant and Ramond books stand with regard to the relationship between fictional minds and minds outside fiction (Herman) and/or the question of the relationship between representations of minds in factual and fictional narratives (mostly Hersant and Ramond, Herman to a lesser extent). First, I will focus on Herman’s introduction, which functions as a manifesto. I will

treat separately Herman's introduction and the book's subsequent chapters, which I think are representative of new directions in the study of fictional minds without necessarily reflecting all of Herman's theses or antitheses. I will propose a more global approach to the Hersant and Ramond book, since the introduction is shorter (thirteen pages instead of Herman's thirty-six) and less radical in scope and since some articles illustrate particularly well the intentions expressed in the introduction.

## **Against the Exceptionality Thesis**

The bulk of Herman's introduction is devoted to refuting what he calls the Exceptionality Thesis (Herman's capitals). According to the Exceptionality Thesis, "readers' experiences of fictional minds are different in kind from their experiences of the minds they encounter outside the domain of narrative fiction" (Herman 2011: 8). It is described in a clearer or more familiar way later in the passage as the thesis of the specificity of fictional narratives (it would be better to say third-person fictional narratives) in the way they represent the minds of characters: "the purportedly unique capacity of fictional narratives to represent the 'I-originary' of another as a subject, in [Käte] Hamburger's parlance" (ibid.). "I-originary" is a technical term that Herman does not explain (he uses it on several occasions without quotation marks, which has the effect of divesting it of the technical character it has in Hamburger's work). Herman (ibid.: 9) goes on to explain that he does not dispute the existence, established by the work of Hamburger and Dorrit Cohn after her,<sup>9</sup> of certain language patterns that are unique or distinctive to fictional narratives. What he disputes is "the further inference . . . that only fictional narratives can give us direct, 'inside' views of characters' minds, and that fictional minds are therefore *sui generis*, or different in kind from everyday minds." The relationship between these two propositions is not self-evident. It is not because fictional narratives give direct access to fictional minds or represent them "from the inside"—however we understand this expression—that these minds are *sui generis* or different in kind from everyday minds. The assertion that fictional minds are *sui generis* or different in kind from everyday minds is not found as such in the work of Hamburger, Cohn, or Ann Banfield (nor it is found in the Hersant and Ramond collection, which draws extensively on these works).<sup>10</sup> This, however, is the most clear-cut formulation of the Exceptionality Thesis, according to Herman. The refutation of this thesis is carried out in two stages, first in relation to the readers' experiences of fictional and everyday minds, then in relation to the accessibility of everyday minds. It draws on recent works in the sciences of mind (philosophy of mind, cognitive psychology, and developmental psychology, among others).

The first argument against the Exceptionality Thesis, or the Mediation argument (Herman's [ibid.: 18] capitalization), consists in the assertion that "encounters with fictional minds are mediated by the same heuristics used to interpret everyday minds." These heuristics are in particular those that allow us to attribute mental states to other people, to see these states as possibly different from ours, and to draw conclusions from this. They

correspond to what has come to be called “folk psychology” or “theory of mind.” Herman refers to the two positions concerning the nature of the theory of mind: “theory theory,” which insists on the protoscientific organization of the theory of mind, and “simulation theory,” which does not appeal to laws and deductions but stresses the ability to simulate, which is to say re-create, replicate, or imitate inside oneself the mental states of others. The idea that there is a set of strategies and heuristics for knowing and understanding everyday minds and that authors and readers also use them when confronted with fictional minds is relatively uncontroversial. It does not seem linked to any particular position on the question of the relationship between representations of minds in factual and fictional narratives. There is, for example, a version of the theory of mind at the beginning of Merlin-Kajman’s article in the Hersant and Ramond (2015: 85) collection.

The second argument, the Accessibility argument, concerns everyday minds. Some works in the philosophy of mind and developmental psychology suggests that crucial aspects of understanding others’ minds are lodged in the process of embodied interaction itself. They insist on the involvement of immediate, nonmentalizing forms of embodied practice and support Herman’s (2011: 18) assertion that “everyday minds can be experienced in ways that the Cartesian premises of commentators like Hamburger and Cohn disallow.” Herman echoes here the dominant anti-Cartesianism of cognitive science and of the philosophy of mind, where what matters is not the position actually defended by René Descartes on a given question but rather the possibility of conceptualizing a given thesis or position in Cartesian terms (“Cartesian premises,” “Cartesian dualism,” etc.). He is, however, quite right in suggesting that the theory of Hamburger and her followers is based on a dated conception of the knowledge and understanding of minds outside the domain of narrative fiction.<sup>11</sup>

The problem that arises here is that the works that support the second argument are radically opposed to the ones that support the first in their original disciplinary field. Moreover, Herman makes no attempt to hide this fact: “Recently, however, analysts have called into question both theory-and simulation-based models of folk psychology”; “The second argument disputes the claim that . . . we must at best ‘theorize about unseen belief’ or ‘mind-read’” (ibid.: 15); “work questioning theory- and simulation-based approaches take issue with the privileging of third-person over second-person contexts in research on folk psychology” (ibid.: 16). Consequently, the first argument concerning both everyday and fictional minds, the Mediation argument, is not strengthened but weakened by the presentation of the second, the Accessibility argument of everyday minds. The same applies to the attempt to establish a unified theory of understanding minds based on the notion of theory of mind or mind reading.<sup>12</sup> We may add that the second argument says nothing about fictional minds, one of the essential characteristics of these minds being precisely the fact that they are not encountered in contexts of second-person interaction.

Herman radicalizes his position to the point that it becomes unacceptable. Everything happens as though there is no difference in nature between actual and fictional minds or as though these differences are only secondary. Herman could simply have written that a group of works, sometimes contradictory among themselves, invites us to qualify the apparent opposition between the inaccessibility of the mental states of others and the transparency of

the mental states of characters or certain characters for authors and readers of fictional narratives. He could also have stayed within certain acceptable or even unanimous positions that are also found in his introduction, for example, “A binarized model that makes fictional minds external and accessible and actual minds internal and hidden gives way to a scalar or gradualist model, according to which minds of all sorts can be more or less directly encountered or experienced—depending on the circumstances” (ibid.: 9); or: “Yet acknowledging (the cognitive benefits of) the ontological divide between fiction and nonfiction is consistent with hypothesizing that the same protocols for engaging with minds cut across this divide. In outlining that hypothesis, my aim is to underscore the importance of bringing to bear on fictional narratives the full battery of tools being developed in mind-oriented research” (ibid.: 12). But this would have prevented the radicalization of the thesis and would not have culminated in the assertion of the fundamentally nonexceptional nature of fictional narratives in their representations of minds. “The Exceptionality Thesis,” “the Mediation argument,” and “the Accessibility argument” are all terms designed to be picked up, commented on, and potentially discussed.<sup>13</sup> The introduction also contains a provocative remark regarding certain authors grouped under the “unnatural narratology” banner: “the Exceptionality Thesis, as developed by theorists like Hamburger and Cohn, and extended in more recent works on modes of fictional narration that are taken to be ‘anti-mimetic,’ or to challenge real-world understanding of (for example) the nature of consciousness” (ibid.: 11).<sup>14</sup>

The Mediation and Accessibility arguments are hammered out in “Synopsis of the Chapters” even though Herman acknowledges that “the authors themselves do not cast their analyses in these terms”: “The two chapters in part I of the volume, ‘Representing Mind in Old and Middle English Narrative,’ provide support for both Mediation and Accessibility” (ibid.: 18); “Monika Fludernik’s chapter on Middle English narratives likewise gives support to both the Mediation and Accessibility arguments” (ibid.: 19); “The two chapters devoted to nineteenth-century representations of fictional minds develop other strands of the Mediation argument” (ibid.: 21); and so on. I think the authors of the chapters are much less radical than Herman, which is confirmed by the general tones of the chapters and by some more discrete clues.<sup>15</sup> I will come back to some of the chapters in the Herman book in more detail in the last section.

### **Between Exceptionalism and Similarism; or, A Well-Tempered Exceptionalism**

Reading the two books one after the other highlights the absence in the Hersant and Ramond collection of (capitalized) formulas, refutations, and radicalization of positions. The introduction is characterized rather by a careful, nuanced approach. This can be seen, for example, in the presentation of the *Récit et Vérité à l’Époque Classique* program: “One of the principles of the program . . . is to conceive [the] relationship [between factual and fictional narratives] in dialogical terms, in the Bakhtinian sense . . . , without setting up a hierarchy between the two elements in dialogue and without making the *a priori* assumption that the

essence of narrative is fiction” (Hersant and Ramond 2015: 5–6). We can also see it in the presentation of the book itself: “Beyond the potential formal indicators of the opposition, this volume thus attempts to wonder, through the question of the representation of inner life, about what could be called a culture (or cultures?) of the history/fiction boundary in the classical period” (ibid.: 13).

By refusing to give an a priori privilege to fictional narratives in literary studies, Hersant and Ramond adopt a form of antiexceptionalism, if we can use this term in a different sense from Herman’s. In contrast, the Herman collection seems to perpetuate the a priori privilege given to fictional narrative in literary studies, because it makes almost no room for nonfictional narratives (which suggests that we are always somebody else’s exceptionalist in a certain sense). We can also compare Herman’s and Hersant and Ramond’s stands vis-à-vis the works of Hamburger, Cohn, and to a lesser extent Banfield.<sup>16</sup> We have seen that Herman associates these works with the promotion of the Exceptionality Thesis and for this reason rejects them completely (or almost completely, since he still recognizes the importance of their linguistic contributions). By contrast, Hersant and Ramond allow them to enter into dialogue with the new literary history they seek to develop. Their introduction starts with “what . . . Cohn has called, in an important essay, ‘transparent minds’, and which is often considered to be one of the most important distinctive features of fictional narrative, at least when the main enunciative instance gives access to the interiority of others” (Hersant and Ramond [ibid.: 8] provisionally leave to one side the question of the enunciator’s representation of his or her own interiority, which has a different theoretical status). This would be an expression of the Exceptionality Thesis, according to Herman. But for Hersant and Ramond (ibid.), this distinction is immediately nuanced: Hamburger “does not however believe in a formal and absolute criterion,” as shown by her remarks on certain sentences in historical narratives (and one might add, in everyday narratives, as found in a letter, for example). Hersant and Ramond’s aim is to test this thesis on the narratives of the ancien régime: “Having made these qualifications, a question remains: did the people of the Ancien Régime period, whether on the side of creation or reception, see the access of the enunciator to the interiority of characters in his or her narrative as a specifically fictional feature?” Another hypothesis would be that they could “tolerate this feature as something problematic, but not enough to jostle the pragmatic status of the narrative” (ibid.: 9). Hersant and Ramond add that this question is especially relevant in narrative genres that tend to blur the line between fiction and history, or at least render it problematic, such as the *nouvelles historiques* and all the subgenres of first-person fictional narrative that involve a fictional truth pact: epistolary novels, memoir novels, pseudomemoirs (such as the *Mémoires de M. L.C.D.R.* [1688] by Courtilz de Sandras). The answer to the question involves the careful examination of as many and as varied narratives as possible.

According to Hersant and Ramond (2015: 6), the binarized model which opposes fictional narratives, providing privileged access to the characters’ interiorities, and factual narratives, refraining from doing so, must give way to a more flexible model, which takes into account the way each author “situate[s] him- or herself in relation to a tacit pact associated with the genre practiced.” For Hersant in particular, two authors play a decisive role. The first is the Duke of Saint-Simon, famous for his *Memoirs* and whom Hersant also



refers to in connection with another text (see “Saint-Simon omniscient de lui-même: La ‘Note Saint-Simon’ des *Notes sur tous les duchés-pairies*” [“Saint-Simon Omniscient about Himself: The ‘Saint-Simon Note’ in the *Notes on all the Duchy-Peerages*”). Briefly put, Saint-Simon represents the possibility of transgressing the genre-based pact: “Saint-Simon describes the catastrophe of the Princesse des Ursins at the time of her disgrace while going into the smallest details of her interiority in the same way as would have done what was once called the ‘omniscient narrator’” (ibid.: 9); “In a completely disconcerting way, Saint-Simon constantly oversteps boundaries, crudely flaunts what he claims to want to hide” (ibid.: 148); “And the crux of this tension is the access the faux historian has to the interiority of his character [the character of Saint-Simon himself in the ‘Saint-Simon Note,’ which is written in the third person], whom he reveals with all the self-assurance of what is still sometimes called in fictional narratives . . . an ‘omniscient narrator’” (ibid.: 149). The second author who plays a decisive role is Voltaire. Voltaire practiced the two genres that Hersant considers to be the furthest from each other in the spectrum of narrative genres in the ancien régime period: the tale and the historical narrative. He also reinforced, more and more strongly over the decades, the formal differences that he saw as resulting from the status of these two genres. Hersant and Ramond (ibid.: 7) cite Voltaire in their introduction for his differentiated use of the device of direct speech: “We know that for Voltaire, history is the domain of what is ‘given as true’ and, by contrast, what he calls fable is the domain of what is ‘given as false.’ This ‘given as’ suggests an essential contract that binds the author/reader relationship as soon as the position of the text on either side of the history/fiction divide becomes clear, in an era which nevertheless cultivates ambiguity.” This is why “in Voltaire’s work, the rarity and brevity of direct speech in his historical texts or his *Memoirs* contrasts with its unrestrained proliferation in the Tales” (ibid.).<sup>17</sup> Finally, at certain points in his article “Saint-Simon omniscient de lui-même” Hersant compares the “Saint-Simon Note” and Voltaire’s *Commentaire historique sur les œuvres de l’auteur de la Henriade* (*Historical Commentary on the Works of the Author of the Henriade*), in which Voltaire occupies the same enunciative position as Saint-Simon without giving in to the temptation of “omniscience” and without compromising his referential seriousness or credibility (ibid.: 148).

In the first section of the book Béatrice Guion’s article “‘Fouiller dans les cœurs pour deviner les pensées’: La réception des Histoires de Davila et Varillas” (“‘Searching Hearts to Guess Thoughts’: On the Reception of Davila and Varillas’s Histories”) follows Hersant and Ramond’s introduction. Guion starts by situating Cohn’s thoughts in relation to those of the classical period: “The classical period was not unaware of these questions concerning the respective boundaries of history and fiction, precisely in relation to the representation of interiority” (ibid.: 44). This is demonstrated via the positive and negative appraisals of the works of the two historians, who each claimed to have written a “secret history,” which is to say a history intended to reveal the secret machinations behind public, political, and military actions: Arrigo Caterino Davila’s *The History of the Civil Wars of France* (translated into English from the Italian in 1644, into French in 1657) and Antoine Varillas’s *Histoire de Charles X* (1683) and *Les anecdotes de Florence; ou, L’histoire secrète de la maison de Médicis* (*Anecdotes of Florence; or, The Secret History of the House of Medici*, 1685). It is interesting, moreover, to note that Varillas uses the expression “*vie intérieure*” (inner life) in

the preface to *Les anecdotes de Florence* to characterize the secret history and anecdotes as opposed to general history (ibid.: 46). Guion concludes that “it is because of the place they gave to the representation of interiority that Davila and Varillas’ histories were reproached for being fanciful fictions” (ibid.: 56). Added to this reproach was a condemnation of a more ideological sort, from the Jesuits in particular, concerning the type of interiority (the “passions”) represented.

The articles by Hersant and Guion and Merlin-Kajman’s “La transparence extérieure,” Francine Wild’s “La représentation de la vie psychique dans les *Historiettes* de Tallemant des Réaux” (“The Representation of Mental Life in Tallemant des Reaux’s *Historiettes*”), Marie Capel’s “L’usage de la première personne en prose chez Théophile de Viau: La ‘vie psychique’ en régime de feintise” (“The Use of the First Person in Theophile de Viau’s Prose Works: ‘Mental Life’ in the Domain of Feigning”), Ramond’s “Trouble dans le sujet,” and others all lend credibility to the idea of a culture (or several cultures) of the history/fiction boundary in the classical period. Hersant and Ramond also maintain in their introduction that the inner lives represented in the factual and fictional narratives of the classical period are not the same. First-person fictional narratives deal with certain dimensions of inner life that autobiographies and memoirs only incorporate later on. Conversely, some types of inner experience remain irreducibly attached to factual narrative, whether ones to do with spirituality or even mysticism or the passion for status expressed by Saint-Simon, for example. On these two points we can refer to the two articles on Pierre Marivaux’s *La vie de Marianne*, “De l’amnésie au souvenir jailli: Le savoir de l’oubli dans *La vie de Marianne*” (“From Amnesia to the Pouring Forth of Memory: Knowledge of Forgetting in *The Life of Marianne*”) by Jean-François Perrin and “Topoi et topiques dans *La vie de Marianne*” (“Topoi and Topics in *The Life of Marianne*”) by Fabienne Boissieras, “La vie psychique dans le témoignage religieux des Lumières” (“Mental Life in Religious Testimony during the Enlightenment”) by Michèle Bokobza-Kahan, and “Vie psychique et mystique jésuite: L’exemple de Jean-Joseph Surin” (“Mental Life and Jesuit Mysticism: The Example of Jean-Joseph Surin”) by Adrien Paschoud, among others.

## **The Problem of the Omniscient Narrator**

Several citations have already alluded to the problem of the omniscient narrator in third-person fictional narratives.<sup>18</sup> Hersant and Ramond take a clear stance in relation to the ongoing debate in France between communicational theories of narrative (including narratology) and noncommunicational or poetic theories inspired by the works of Hamburger, S.-Y. Kuroda, and Banfield.<sup>19</sup> For the first group of theories communication between a narrator and a narratee is constitutive of all narratives, whether factual (involving an actual narrator or author) or fictional (involving a fictional narrator substituted for the author), whereas for the second group there can be fictional narratives without a fictional narrator on the condition that there is an author considered the creator of the narrative. For the first group the only justification for the narrator’s knowledge of the characters’ minds or interiorities is

provided by omniscience. For the second there is no need for such justification. Furthermore, there are arguments (linguistic, pragmatic, reader oriented) which disqualify the concept of the omniscient narrator.

The problem of the omniscient narrator has already been encountered in the first volume of the *Récit et Vérité à l'Époque Classique* program in relation to reported speech, concerning in particular the internal monologues of *Candide*, which are presented as direct speech: "In this scenario, which seems to be irreducibly fictional, the very notion of 'reported speech' loses meaning, because how can a narrator, of whatever sort, claim to 'report' what a character has not said but thought." For Hersant and Ramond (*ibid.*: 7–8), the internal monologue is thus not "reported" by a narrator but "created" by the author of the fictional text—"and the significant difference lies, here again, on the level of the tacit pact with a reader who is not fooled by this invention and thus does not in any way believe in a real relationship between the creative enunciative instance and the narrated world." The problem is restated in relation to the representation of interiority (beyond the specific question of internal monologues presented as direct speech): "In a third-person fictional narrative, access to the characters' interiorities cries out the fact that the author *invents* these interiorities and does not in any way *report* them. There is thus no 'omniscient narrator'—an idea considered as a critical aberration by all supporters of poetic theory—but rather an author who is all-powerful with regards to his or her creation" (*ibid.*: 9).<sup>20</sup> It can be seen through these citations that it is not a matter of simply replacing the narrator with the author (which would not contravene the communicational theory of narration). The lack of "belie[f] in a real relationship between the creative enunciative instance and the narrated world" and the lack of belief in an "omniscient narrator" reporting the characters' interiorities involve a whole conception of the reader's relationship to the fictional narrative, on which the noncommunicational or poetic theories of narrative are based. Hersant and Ramond also criticize communicational theories for minimizing or even completely neutralizing the distinction between first- and third-person fictional narratives. In the organization of fictional genres in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, this is a distinction of primary importance. By contrast, some elements of Hamburger's theory, in particular the concept of feigning in first-person fictional narrative, greatly illuminate the prefatory discourses of eighteenth-century novels and the topos of the found manuscript.<sup>21</sup>

Reading the Hersant and Ramond collection highlights the unproblematized use of the term and concept of the omniscient narrator in the Herman collection: "In the second case, the character's conscious experiences do not form a story within a story but are rather (mental) events reported by the primary narrator" in Fludernik's "1050–1500: Through a Glass Darkly" (note the verb "reported") (Herman 2011: 71); "For example, (4.1) can be read as an omniscient statement by the narrator" (*ibid.*: 84); "The narrator omnisciently remarks that Horn has had a lot of grief in his life, but not as much as at this moment" (*ibid.*: 85); "but it is more plausible to take the line as the omniscient narrator's empathetic remark that gives utterance to his anguish about the impending disaster" (*ibid.*: 87); "It is a heterodiegetic narrative told by an omniscient narrator and focalized through Crouchback" (*ibid.*: 280). None of the contributors seems surprised by the strange working of the omniscient narrator's mind, which is ultimately far removed from what is normally understood by theory of mind

or mind reading.<sup>22</sup> The contributions in the Herman collection also reflect the neutralizing of the distinction between first- and third-person fictional narratives, which characterizes communicational theories of narrative.

### **New Directions in the Study of Fictional Minds**

The Herman collection is distinguished most clearly from Hersant and Ramond's by its use of "parallel discourses" (Palmer 2004: 14) on actual minds, such as cognitive science, evolutionary and social psychology, and neurophenomenology, in its study of fictional minds. They are parallel discourses because they contain a description of minds that is very different from the kind traditionally provided by narratology, but the presupposition of Herman's book is that they can explain how readers encounter or experience fictional minds. The Hersant and Ramond collection also uses parallel discourses, but they are from the period under consideration: treatises on the passions, Florence Dumora's "Critères narratologiques et cas du rêveur" ("Narratological Criteria and the Case of the Dreamer") (Hersant and Ramond 2015: 39–41), and medical treatises, Dominique Brancher's "Opiacées et déshabillés: La psyché sous l'œil de la médecine" ("Opiates and Negligees: The Psyche under the Gaze of Medicine") (ibid.: 327–343).<sup>23</sup> Conversely, they do not show any great awareness of current cognitive science.<sup>24</sup> They also do not consider yesterday's scientific treatises and today's science in relation to each other, as Nicholas Dames does in "1825–1880: The Network of Nerves" in the Herman book.

Herman's (2011: 5–7) collection notes Palmer's criticism of the "speech-category approach" of Cohn and his followers based on the assumption that the categories applied to fictional speech can be unproblematically applied to fictional thoughts or other mental states (see also ibid.: 69–70, in Fludernik's chapter). This approach overestimates the verbal dimension of thought or "inner speech." As Palmer stresses, however, many passages of narrative concerned with the minds of characters do not involve inner speech but rather moods, desires, emotions, sensations, and so on. The minds of characters also contain latent mental states. Palmer thus calls for a broader and deeper concept of the fictional mind beyond the phenomenon of inner speech. Fludernik's chapter builds on Palmer's account as well as her own previous work to rethink prior scholarship on the representation of fictional minds in medieval narrative. Fludernik, for her part, distinguishes thoughts, understood as "units of verbalized mind sufficiently concrete to be articulated in propositional form, as for instance in arguments and actual internal speech" (and in fictional narratives, soliloquies), from "unarticulated, vague half-thoughts that flit across the mind without being captured and pressed into specific syntactic shape" (according to Fludernik, thoughts of this kind are less relevant for medieval narrative than for modernist narrative, for example), "emotions [which] clearly fall outside the verbalized realm (although they are verbalizable), and . . . may include anything from moods and predispositions to more specific feelings such as fear, joy, anger, frustration, or jealousy" (ibid.: 73), and "attitudes, beliefs, and views [which] belong to another category of mind content" (ibid.: 73–74). The last two categories considered are

sensations, on the one hand, and ideas and memories, on the other, both aspects of consciousness that, she says, are difficult to place. Fludernik then examines the modes of representation of these different mental states and processes, verbal and nonverbal, in Middle English narratives. One of her main contributions concerns descriptions of gestures and movements indicative of emotional states of mind, especially disturbance or turmoil, which she also calls “narrative indexes of interiority” (ibid.: 75).

In certain chapters of the Herman book Palmer’s influence can also be seen in the interest in the idea of a collective or interpersonal mind as opposed to the individual minds of characters. This applies to Fludernik’s chapter on medieval narrative, which includes the section “Collective or Group Consciousness.” (The examples are drawn primarily from Capgrave’s *Life of Saint Katharine*, and Fludernik also mentions an example from Geoffrey Chaucer in a footnote). It also applies to Hart’s chapter, “1500–1620: Reading, Consciousness, and Romance in the Sixteenth Century,” although she above all stresses the factors of historical differentiation: “By judging from a comparison between the post-eighteenth century (mostly modern and postmodern) texts that Palmer discusses and the ancient romance, of which Heliodorus serves as a prototypical example, it appears that such embedded multiplicities of consciousness were subject to historical development and furthermore that such embedded consciousness constitutes a relatively *recent* development as an art form” (ibid.: 118). She sees the Renaissance romance as an intermediary stage between the early romance and narratives with more complex inter- and intramental subframes.

Zunshine’s chapter “1700–1775: Theory of Mind, Social Hierarchy, and the Emergence of Narrative Subjectivity” and Palmer’s “1945–: Ontologies of Consciousness” can be compared for their use of theory of mind (attribution theory in Palmer’s case). Zunshine is concerned with a recurring scenario in the eighteenth-century novel: a protagonist responds to an apparently impoverished stranger’s plea for assistance while being closely watched by an interested observer, such as a secret admirer, a parent, or a friend (Zunshine refers to “scenes of observed benefaction” reconceptualized as “scenario[s] of triangulated mind reading,” ibid.: 164, 180). To account for the popularity of these scenarios, Zunshine first offers historical explanations based on the “sentimental” discourses of the eighteenth century and sociopolitical observations on social and economic organization in the eighteenth century before turning to the concept of theory of mind or mind reading. According to Zunshine, “Our broader interest in fictional mind reading—of which our interest in the three-way mind reading is an important subset—builds both on our evolutionary history and our everyday exercise of our Theory of Mind adaptations” (ibid.: 170). All of her efforts in this chapter are directed toward articulating the historical explanation, reflecting specific sociohistorical problems or contexts, and the cognitive explanation, based on the idea of universal cognitive phenomena. Palmer’s chapter draws on a corpus of four novels considered to be representative of neorealism or antimodernism, modernism, and postmodernism. He uses the approach of attribution theory, defined as the way narrators (or authors?), characters, and readers attribute states of mind to others and to themselves, combined with an approach in terms of “worlds.” At issue is “whether texts with an ontological dominant present particular challenges to attribution theory since processes of

attribution operate in fundamentally different ways for texts that foreground the making and unmaking of worlds” (ibid.: 274).<sup>25</sup>

Herman’s chapter, “1880–1945: Re-minding Modernism,” is distinguished from the previous ones in the way it draws on another paradigm within cognitive science, the enactivist paradigm (which, as we have seen, offers an explanation of social cognition that is completely different in nature and even opposed to that of the theory of mind). The enactive approach to cognition assigns primary importance to the embodiment of cognitive processes. The overall guiding principle of enaction is that the world of lived experience is constituted in the sensorimotor coupling between intelligent agents and the social and material environments they must negotiate. This approach allows Herman to look at the modernist novel in a new way. On the one hand, he disputes the common characterization of this period as the “inward turn” of narrative, namely, a movement away from external, material, and social environments into the interiorities of characters’ psychologies. On the other hand, he proposes an integrative reconceptualization of the modernist novel: “From this perspective, rather than being interpreted as signs of an inward turn or a probing of psychological depths segregated from the material world, modernist techniques for representing consciousness can be seen as an attempt to highlight how minds at once shape and are shaped by larger experiential environments, via the particular affordances or opportunities for action that those environments provide” (ibid.: 249–50). He exemplifies such interactions between minds and the surrounding experiential environments by analyzing scenes in James Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*.

All of these propositions are extremely stimulating, especially for readers who are relatively unaware of developments in cognitive narratology, as may be the case for French readers. However, these propositions do not all succeed in avoiding the pitfall of anachronism. This is highlighted by Eva von Contzen in “Why Medieval Literature Does Not Need the Concept of Social Minds: Exemplarity and Collective Experience” (2015),<sup>26</sup> a passage of which is devoted to the section “Collective or Group Consciousness” in Fludernik’s chapter. For Contzen, it is questionable to what extent the second example Fludernik analyzes is really indicative of a collective consciousness. She sees it rather as a summary of the *opinio communis* (common opinion): “I would describe this and other examples as rhetorical devices of condensation, employed for pragmatic reasons, and not as intermental activity. Instead of distributing the same message over several speakers, the poet condenses the words to a speech in unison” (ibid.: 144). She draws support for this argument from the necessity of reducing the number of speakers and voices in the oral-aural context of medieval reading practices. In her conclusion she states that “the medieval ‘mind,’ . . . is clearly not the kind of mind that underlies Palmer’s model and cognitive narrative theory in general.” She criticizes the “cognitive turn” for having made us believe, “perhaps too rashly, that the workings of the mind as basic human abilities were universal and, crucially, ahistorical,” adding that “with respect to social minds, as far as character depiction and the representation of joint thinking are concerned, this clearly seems not to be the case” (ibid.: 151).

Finally, one may ask what the reflection of Hersant, Ramond, and their collaborators on the question of the relationship between representations of minds in factual and fictional narratives might bring to Herman and his team's reflection on the question of the relationship between fictional minds and minds outside fiction. It introduces a true comparison between factual and fictional narratives in their representations of minds, which is notably lacking in Herman's book. It also makes clear that things are more complicated than one might have thought. One needs to take into account, first, the likely existence of a pact associated with the genre practiced but a pact that can always be transgressed and, second, the historical existence of hybrid forms between fiction and nonfiction and of mystifications associated with genre (from this point of view, the French seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are not unconnected with the current period). This consideration of complexity can be reconciled with Herman's criticism of the Exceptionality Thesis. However, it does not lead to the adoption of the opposite thesis, which could be called the Similarity Thesis, and Hersant and Ramond's team would certainly not be ready to accept the assertion of the fundamentally nonexceptional nature of fictional narratives in their representations of minds. There are obviously differences, related to the modes of representation, to the scale of this representation, but also to the types of interiority represented.

Conversely, what Herman and his collaborators' work brings to that of Hersant and Ramond and their team lies mainly in the new directions of research it opens in the study of fictional minds. This contribution, in my opinion, takes precedence over its contribution to literary history.<sup>27</sup> We have also seen that certain analyses are not free of anachronism. This main contribution can be summed up as: (1) the use of parallel discourses on actual minds for the study of fictional minds, (2) the criticism of the bias toward verbalized thought or inner speech (or the addition brought to the study of thought represented in the form of speech, which is historically documented, by the study of other aspects of thought), (3) the need to study not only the individual minds of the characters but also collective or interpersonal minds when this study is historically and literarily relevant, and (4) the perspectives opened up by the enactivist paradigm in the study of the relationships between characters and between characters and their environments.

Zunshine's analysis of scenes of observed benefaction would gain by being taken up in a comparative perspective, for example, through exploration of the French corpus of the same period. Hersant and Ramond's research team includes a number of distinguished specialists in the eighteenth-century novel, but it would perhaps be equally interesting to take a look at factual narratives of the eighteenth century—memoirs, for example, in which Hersant himself specializes. The articulation between historical explanation, reflecting specific sociohistorical problems or contexts, and cognitive explanation, based on the idea of universal cognitive phenomena, should be reinforced and enriched. I think this articulation is precisely one of the major issues at stake for narrative theory in coming years.

Herman's team offers no reflection on the narrative genres, factual and fictional, a distinction which, on the contrary, appears to be central to Hersant and Ramond's thought. Conversely, the concept of a pact associated with the genre practiced in Hersant and Ramond's book is never related to a cognitivist or mind-oriented reflection on the referential

status of texts (as when Herman [2011: 2] speaks of “the cognitive benefits of the ontological divide between fiction and nonfiction”). Could one not imagine an articulation between historical and cognitive-universalist explanations on these particular questions?

In a strange way these two books from such different theoretical landscapes complement and mutually elucidate each other, and one finds oneself dreaming of a conference where Herman’s team would meet Hersant and Ramond’s: cognitive narratology, on the one hand, and new literary history, on the other; the effort of theoretical interrogation, on the one hand, the will to diachronization, on the other; the determined engagement with new avenues of research, on the one hand, and the caution and critical spirit of the specialists of the classical period, on the other.

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1. Eyal Segal (2013) reviewed this collection in *Poetics Today*.

2. The translation of *vie psychique* as “mental life” gives a first insight into the noncoincidence of the French and English vocabularies in the field of psychology in the broad sense. The expression *vie psychique* in the title of the Hersant and Ramond book echoes the title of the French translation of Dorrit Cohn’s (1981 [1978]) book. The title of Herman’s book echoes Cohn’s 1978 title.

3. Except in Fludernik’s chapter, where a few pages are devoted to John Capgrave’s *Life of Saint Katharine of Alexandria* (see Herman 2011: 90–92).

4. French authors use the term *esprit* (mind) more rarely in this context.

5. See the section “Les discours rapportés dans les récits fictionnels et historiques des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles” in Hersant et al. 2011: 163–342.
6. See Hersant and Ramond forthcoming.
7. See Hersant 2009, 2015.
8. See, among others, Ramond 2012.
9. The work of Ann Banfield, which also comes to mind, is mentioned in other passages of the introduction (Herman 2011: 3, 7, 32n7).
10. I leave to one side the difference, which is indeed a difference in kind, not in degree, between fictional minds that only exist in a fictional world projected by a text and everyday minds that exist in the real world of reference, because this is not the difference that interests Herman (2011: 12, 33n10) here.
11. In her “L’usage de la première personne en prose chez Théophile de Viau: La ‘vie psychique’ en régime de feintise” (“The Use of the First Person in Theophile de Viau’s Prose Works: ‘Mental Life’ in the Domain of Feigning”) Marie Capel makes the same observation in the Hersant and Ramond (2015: 203, 203n1) book but ascribes this out-of-date character to the influence of Husserlian phenomenology.
12. This point is well developed in Iversen 2013a: 144–48, 2013b: 102–3.
13. See, for example, Brockmeier 2013: 124; Caracciolo 2014a: 30–32, 36, 40, 2014b: 113–14, 2016: 38–39, 41, 63; Ciccoricco 2015: 17–18; Iversen 2013a: 144–48, 2013b: 99, 102; Korthals Altes 2014: 260n8; Nielsen 2013: 69, 2014: 256; Rantanen 2015: 149–51; Richardson 2015: 41; Vincent 2015: 203.
14. See the responses of the “unnatural narratologists” in Iversen 2013a: 144–48, 2013b: 99, 102; Nielsen 2013: 69, 2014: 256.
15. See, for example, Zunshine 2015: 191n7: “For a suggestive rejoinder to the ‘Exceptionality Thesis’, see Stefan Iversen” (reference to Iversen 2013a).
16. Hersant and Ramond (2015: 11) explain why they spend less time on Banfield’s works than on Hamburger’s, which has to do with the weaker and less significant presence of free indirect speech in the narratives of the classical period compared to later narratives. Their book nevertheless contains the previously unpublished translation of a text on Cohn by Banfield, “Les modes de représentation de la vie psychique dans le roman: Un point de vue linguistique” (“Modes of Representation of Mental Life in the Novel: A Linguistic Point of View”) (ibid.: 77–82).
17. Hersant inserts this note: “These famous definitions appear at the beginning of his article on ‘History’ for the *Encyclopedia*” (Hersant and Ramond 2015: 6n4).
18. *Omniscient narrator* is understood here in the sense of a narrator who has knowledge of the characters’ minds or interiorities. The other meanings are not at stake here.
19. For an overview, largely used by Hersant and Ramond, see Patron 2016 [2009]: pt. 2. See also Patron 2015.
20. We can note the resemblance between these formulations and Richard Walsh’s (2007 [1997]: esp. 69, 73). However, there is no evidence that Hersant and Ramond have read Walsh’s book.
21. On related topics in Hersant and Ramond, see “Historien ou narrateur? Vers une approche non-communicationnelle du récit de fiction à l’âge classique” (“Historian or Narrator?

Towards a Non-communicational Approach to Fictional Narrative in the Classical Age”) by Delphine Denis and “Critères narratologiques et cas du rêveur” (“Narratological Criteria and the Case of the Dreamer”) by Florence Dumora.

22. In this respect “unnatural narratologists” are more insightful, since they consider the omniscient narrator an “unnatural narrator” (see, for example, Alber 2016: 87–103).

23. The only parallel discourse not from the period under consideration is psychoanalysis, which is referred to in several articles and which Boissières widely uses in “Topoï et topiques dans *La vie de Marianne*.”

24. This observation is valid for the book as a whole but not for some of its authors in their own works. See in particular Dumora (2005), who draws on numerous scientific works on sleep and dreaming.

25. The idea of an ontological dominant associated with postmodernism is attributable to McHale 1987.

26. Winner of the 2016 James Phelan Award for the Best Essay in *Narrative* in 2015.

27. The same is true for the individual works of some of the contributors to the book. See, for example, Zunshine 2006.