implicating one another. The largest frame, the "speech act" beyond the printed page, is the culture text in which authors and audiences are imbedded and to which each level may allude.

Less masterful but still impressive is Lanser's treatment of the poetic choices that engender point of view and her brief consideration of how readers process or recover such choices. She lists no fewer than 35 axes of possibility. Many of these are trivial or obvious, most essentially overlap in the production of distinguishable effects, but none can safely be ignored when one wishes to correlate fully the telling of a story with what is told.

When does one seek that correlation, articulating the processes of communication rather than only performing them? The question asks for the uses of point-of-view study and for its audience. Let's face it: the subject is rather dull, even to those of us who care about such work and value its significance. Lanser proposes three uses. The dreariest would be laborious analysis of some text's effects. Next in line would be empirical studies of how readers actually understand what they are reading. (For several reasons such studies are bound to come. The extant work by educationists and psychologists has ignored nearly everything beyond the rudimentary acquisition of information.) The third would be historical poetics, tracing developments in the protocols of narrative and in the culture text from which the protocols derive authority.

By chance the appropriate audience for The Narrative Act is also threefold. Beginning students will profit from Lanser's having retraced familiar critical routes; she leans most heavily on Chatman, Fowler, Genette, Ohmann, and Pratt. Specialists in poetics and narratology will heed her arguments about textual voice. The audience that might benefit most thoroughly is never addressed as such, however. The Narrative Act would make a fine creative-writing textbook, for while it is directed chiefly to readers and critics, its minute discrimination of choices may be of more immediate moment to budding writers.

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From the title one might anticipate a theoretical work bolstered by literary examples, or at least a textual analysis grounded in contemporary debate. Riggan's book proves to be neither. Inexplicably, the author takes no account of the prodigious work on narrative person produced in the past decade by Genette, Stanzel, Dorrit Cohn, Lejeune, Doležel and Tamir, to name only the most prominent. He invokes instead the withered authority of Booth's Rhetoric of Fiction, a text quoted or alluded to twenty-three times in the two introductory chapters. For the rest, Riggan's theoretical touchstones all derive from the fifties and sixties—Hamburger, Romberg, and Scholes and Kellogg.

Riggan's approach in Picaros, Madmen, Naifs and Clowns follows from his observation that the very nature of first-person narration encourages unreliability. However, for practical reasons, he limits himself to an analysis of "one specific genus of the unreliable narrator: namely, the fictional autobiographer who recounts his own life, or a portion
thereof, in his own voice and in a conscious act of writing” (p. 15). Within this genus, the four distinct types of pícaro, clown, madman, and naïf are isolated as well as characterized with reference to texts in which the values or attitudes of the narrator are at variance with those of the implied author. The presence of this discrepancy—whether explicit or implicit—enables the reader to collaborate with the implied author in producing a corrective judgment both of the depraved, mendacious, self-deceptive or naïve narrator and of the events he relates.

Riggan’s project entails choices on three levels, each of which I shall deal with in turn. The first two—how to delimit and then subdivide the genus—involves problems of definition. The third demands the selection of texts to exemplify these subdivisions.

Nowhere in the book is the cover-term “fictional autobiographer” adequately defined. Instead the phrase is used interchangeably with “protagonist-narrator” to encompass narrators who recount only a portion of their lives. This conflicts with the OED definition of autobiography as “the writing of one’s own history; the story of one’s life written by himself,” a definition which readily describes the activity of Moll Flanders and Tristram Shandy, but excludes the narration in other texts cited by Riggan such as Fowles’s The Collector, Dostoevsky’s Notes from Underground, Poe’s “The Black Cat,” and Gogol’s “Diary of a Madman.” All of the latter fall well short of a comprehensive rendering of a life.

The imprecision surrounding this key term results in an analysis which is generously inclusive. At the same time, it is equally important to examine what Riggan excludes. Firstly, he omits all texts in which the subject of the speech event is not the subject of the narrated event (e.g., Lord Jim, Moby Dick), an omission fully motivated on discursive grounds. However, he subsequently draws a more contentious boundary between unreliable fictions in which the narrator is engaged in “a conscious act of writing” (p. 15) and texts simulating the conditions of a spoken account. Following Gerald Prince’s convincing argument for the artificiality of such a distinction (in “Introduction à l’étude du narrataire”), we should note the similar discursive situations which generate the tendentiousness of the undergroundman’s “written” narrative and Clamence’s “spoken” one in La Chute. Each of these protagonists delivers an intentionally and methodically duplicitous confession in an attempt to manipulate a characterized audience (readers in the Dostoevsky, an auditor in the Camus). Thus, in terms of unreliability, Notes is more akin to La Chute than to the “fictional autobiographies” discussed by Riggan which, although “written,” are either non-confessional, sincere, or marked by the absence of a characterized audience.

These anomalies at the level of genus are matched by inconsistencies in the procedure of classification. The four types are not logically coherent, either amongst themselves or individually. In dividing “unreliable fictional autobiographers” into pícaros, madmen, naïfs and clowns, Riggan employs principles of genre and character which are inconsistent with each other. The pícaro—predictably the most coherent of the four categories—is defined with reference to a historical literary genre, whereas the madman and naïf are characterized merely in terms of the personalities of the protagonists. Although the chapter on the clown opens with a discussion of the court fool, Riggan passes from Tristram Shandy to an analysis of Lolita’s Humbert Humbert only by a forced redefinition of the fool as simply any “clownish persona” or buffoon. As a result, he again resorts to no more than a subjective judgment of character as his definitive criterion.

The texts selected to exemplify the four types might readily be re-classified according to other principles. For instance, does the narrator address an explicitly characterized audience (as in Notes from Underground, Tristram Shandy and Lazarillo de Tormes) or an implicit one (The Collector, The Catcher in the Rye)? Is his untrustworthiness the
result of a calculating and deceitful personality (Notes, Lazarillo) or is it unwitting, simply a form of subjectivity (Huckleberry Finn, "Diary of a Madman," Hedayat's The Blind Owl)? What one seeks without success in Pícaros, Madmen, Naïfs, and Clowns is a justification of the approach chosen. Nowhere is there any defense of its merits over alternative systems. The resultant sense of arbitrary divisions is exacerbated by the lack of clarification regarding the status of the four types. Do they comprise an exhaustive system capable of accounting for all narrators of this "genus," or are they merely sample categories? If the former, what of those personal narrators who are suitably unreliable yet resist all four labels? Dr. Shepherd in The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, and the narrators in Leiris' L'Age d'Homme, Beckett's Molloy, and Hawkes's Second Skin and Travesty are some that come to mind.

On the basis of what Riggan demonstrates in his study, the obstacles to an approach of this kind seem insurmountable. The use of character as a parameter for narrative definition leads to impressionistic classification, strained connections and ultimately an unruly proliferation of categories. When Riggan concludes that "the two principal components of the unreliable first-person's nature as narrator" are "dissimulation and reticence" (p. 173), he immediately has to add the qualification that naïf narrators are noted for their candor. To mend the rift, it is then necessary to posit that in the cases of Huck Finn and Holden Caufield the all-important dissimulation is unconscious. Even setting aside such problems of definition and internal organization, the mere possibility of classifying texts in this way would be a poor justification for a taxonomy. It remains to be demonstrated that the system springs from a clear hypothesis that can account for the discursive characteristics of unreliable narratives in the first-person.

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Hamlet: Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?
Polonius: By th' mass and 'tis, like a camel indeed.
Hamlet: Methinks it is like a weasel.
Polonius: It is backed like a weasel.
Hamlet: Or like a whale.
Polonius: Very like a whale.

—Hamlet, William Shakespeare

To read Randolph Runyon's unusual book Fowles/Irving/Barthes is to feel oneself put in the unsure position of Polonius, and made to wonder: does the cloud really look like a whale? Does Hamlet really think the cloud looks like a whale?

Of course, the subject of Fowles/Irving/Barthes is not clouds and whales. But what it is about is not a lot less arbitrary and amorphous. Runyon argues that it is possible to read the work of three contemporary writers—John Fowles' The French Lieutenant's Woman, The Ebony Tower, and Daniel Martin, John Irving's The World According to Garp and The Water-Method Man, and Roland Barthes' Fragments d'un discours amoureux—as varia-