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Team Narration: A New Narrative Form for the Novel

by

Brian Stine

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Dr. Alan Johnson  
Major Advisor

---

Dr. Matthew Levay  
Committee Member

---

Dr. Mark K. McBeth  
Graduate Faculty Representative

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## Team Narration: A New Narrative Form for the Novel

### Thesis Abstract—Idaho State University (2022)

I propose a new multiple-person narrative form for the novel, which I shall refer to as “team narration.” Many novels feature two or more narrators who occupy the narrative space from different perspectives, e.g., embedded narration and parallel narration. Team narrators, in contrast, share the same perspective and participate together in each scene as third-person narrators. While this form has heretofore not been featured in novels, it is both recognized and practiced in other narrative modes (albeit by different names), including broadcasting, face-to-face conversation, and film. I submit that this narrative form could also be applied to the novel. Furthermore, I suggest that team narration might offer writers several affordances not readily available by the other currently used, multiple-person narrative forms.

Keywords: multiple narrators, multiperspectivity, polyphony, plural narration, narrative forms, narrative technique

## Introduction

Over a half-century ago, literary critic Wayne Booth wrote that “Perhaps the most overworked distinction [in narrative theory] is that of person” (150). Nevertheless, I shall attempt to work it even a bit further in the following pages. Narrative perspective has been a fertile field for scholarly research in recent years. Not only has there been renewed interest and research in many of the traditional narrative forms, e.g., third-person omniscient narration, but also new investigation and research into nonstandard narrative forms such as we-narration and unnatural narratives. Herein, I propose a new form of multiple-person narration for the novel, which, absent a formal term, I shall refer to as “team narration.”<sup>1</sup> (Although team narration could, in theory, consist of any number of narrators greater than one, I will limit my discussion to the simple and more practical case of two narrators.)

Most narratives feature a single narrator, typically using either the first-person or third-person point of view or perspective (Booth 149-150; Margolin 115). While other forms certainly exist, not only authors but scholars too have tended to focus on the two most prevalent single-narrator forms: homodiegetic and heterodiegetic (Genette 243-245; Phelan 110-112; Richardson, “I etcetera” 312).<sup>2</sup> However, for centuries writers have occasionally employed two or more narrators to communicate their story, e.g., Plato and Chaucer. Multiple-person narration in the modern novel can be traced back to the eighteenth century. Some of the earliest examples are the classic epistolary novels which were composed of a succession of letters, often from multiple correspondents. Later novels featured other forms of multiple-person narration as the device increased in popularity. Authors of crime novels, in particular, took advantage of the affordances offered by multi-person narration. Readers were invited and challenged to piece

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<sup>1</sup> Other terms could be concurrent, joint, cooperative, coordinated, or simply co-narration.

<sup>2</sup> Genette argues strongly against the use of the terms “first-person” and “third person” and suggests instead his terms “homodiegetic” and “heterodiegetic.”

together clues from different witnesses and events to solve the crime. Writers such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and William Faulkner further developed the multiple-narrator form, advancing stream of consciousness and other new and innovative literary techniques.

Brian Richardson claims that “One of the most significant omissions in contemporary narrative theory is the absence of sustained accounts of multiple narration. For the most part, narrative theory generally proceeds as if all novels were written entirely in the first person or third person” (“I etcetera” 312). While contemporary scholars may have neglected multiple narration, contemporary fiction writers certainly have not.<sup>3</sup> Many novels have been written in a multiple-person narrative form. However, extending on Richardson’s claim, I would suggest that another omission in contemporary narration is the absence of multiple-person narratives where narrators share the same perspective and space. Although there has been some recent growing interest and research into many of the multiple-narrator forms featured in both early and contemporary literature, there has been very little research into potentially new multiple-person narrative forms. Yet, such narrative forms exist outside literature. However, those forms have largely been ignored by both literary scholars and creative writers.

While the publishing industry is constantly seeking new, exciting, and innovative stories in terms of plot and characters, writers and educators recognize the constant need for new and innovative storytelling methods and techniques. This is especially true in the young-adult and middle-grade fiction markets, where young readers yearn for narratives that both excite and entertain. This yearning has encouraged innovation and experimentation in young-adult and middle-grade novels with regard to narrative form, particularly as it pertains to multiple-person narration. Melanie Koss observes, “A content analysis of current YA novels ... identified a trend

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<sup>3</sup> While Richardson’s statement implies narrative theory also omits second-person narration, his article “I etcetera: On the Poetics and Ideology of Multipersoned Narratives” focuses entirely on multiple-person narratives.

away from the typical first-person point of view, usually embodied by a teenage narrator. Today's multiple-narrative perspective novels are characterized by multiple voices, narrators, points of view, structures, and perspectives" (74). Young readers, spurred by technological advancements and changes in the ways and methods narratives are delivered over various forms of electronic media (websites, text messages, emails, blogs, video, instant messaging, etc.), want similarly new and dynamic narrative approaches in their novels. Indeed, about one in four young adult novels is now written with some form of multiple perspective (Koss and Teale 568).

Multiple-person narration can offer several advantages over traditional single-person narration. As one scholar explains, "Multiple voices ... [as a] stylistic device can add that extra depth in plot and character development. The shifting perspective can quicken the pace of the novel, building momentum so that many readers are compelled to read the book in one sitting" (Capan). Added depth can be derived from the use of additional narrators, who can each serve as an extension of the characters, often with their own personalities and quirks. Many readers enjoy variety in narration, even within a novel, and some readers can even identify one of the narrators as their favorite "character" in the story. As Capan states, variance in perspective and voice acts to accelerate the pace of a plot, and any conflicting perspectives and narrations can add a quasi-mystery element to the story, as readers are asked to sift between the varying accounts and conclude what really occurred, similar to the role of a jury in a court trial.

Fiction readers, writers, and publishers are always looking for the next new thing. The public seeks entertainment and engagement.<sup>4</sup> Writers seek "novel" characters, plots, language, and, yes, new and interesting forms. Book publishers seek increased sales and profits. From the

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<sup>4</sup> As Stephen King puts it, "Book-buyers aren't attracted ... by the literary merits of a novel; book-buyers want a good story to take with them on the airplane, something that will first fascinate them, then pull them in and keep them turning the pages" (160).



publishing community, the call is for “old but new”—novels that build and expand on past successful formulas. New narrative forms offer the potential to satisfy all three needs.

For writers, multiple-person narration is typically synonymous with multiple-perspectivity (Hartner); however, my proposed form of team narration allows—even necessitates—that narrators share the same perspective and scene presence. Thus, team narration falls outside the usual multi-person narrative constructs. As a potential new narrative form, team narration could open new opportunities for creative writers as well as educators and scholars. Team narration in the novel could add an additional layer of entertainment and interest as the two narrators would likely banter and discuss, insult and argue. The side narrator might serve as a proxy for the reader, posing questions to the main narrator.<sup>5</sup> For writers, team narration could afford new ways and opportunities to provide readers additional clues and information, either through bantering or questions and answers between the narrators. In addition, team narration could generate new novels for publishers that might be the same in terms of plot and themes but different in terms of presentation—“old but new.” In summary, team narration could be a new and exciting evolution in the narrative form for writers, readers, and scholars of the novel.

However, team narration is not new. Outside literature, different forms of multiple narration occur where the narrators can share the same perspective (both vantage point and perception). For example, scholars in the field of linguistics define and identify co-constructed narratives as face-to-face conversations involving two or more narrators where-in narrators append words, phrases, or even entire sentences to the words of the previous speaker (Clancy and McCarthy 431). The two speakers (narrators) participate together to communicate, usually

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<sup>5</sup> This might be compared to the concept of metafiction in postmodern literature, as readers of a team-narrated novel might question the roles of the narrators—are they fictional characters themselves, objective observers, entertainers, or traditional narrators (whether reliable or unreliable)? This is not to suggest that team narration is postmodern in the conventional theoretical sense; rather, it simply possesses some similarities to certain aspects of metafiction.

from the same experience and perspective. They typically build on one another's narration, completing or extending phrases and accounts. The effect is a co-constructed, co-narrated, or collaborative storytelling event. Even more closely related to team narration is the linguistic concept of collaborative telling (also referred to as co-telling or co-narration), wherein two speakers collaboratively relate a story or experience to an audience of one or more listeners. Areas of scholarly interest in co-narration include sequentiality, prefaces, responses, and interpersonality as the two narrators interact and coordinate as they relate their story (Norrick, *Conversational Narrative: Storytelling* 105-116). This multiple-person narrative form within face-to-face storytelling is very similar to my proposed narrative form of team narration for the novel.

Another example of team narration outside literature occurs in broadcasting. In sports broadcasting, rarely does one broadcaster “narrate” a sporting event alone. Rather, there are usually at least two announcers: one who serves as the play-by-play commentator, also referred to as the anchorman, and one who serves as the color commentator, also known as the analyst or expert commentator (Arthurs 44-45). The result is a dual-mode of sports announcing, referred to as the duality model, where one announcer performs most of the narration, and the other announcer offers occasional side commentary (Balzer-Siber 25, 45-46; DeNu 255-259). Occasionally, the two announcers will figuratively step outside the game they are announcing and banter between themselves, even introducing material unrelated to the game being broadcast. They often take on the role of entertainers and comedians.

Jim Henson’s film *The Muppet Christmas Carol* employs dual narrators to relate Charles Dickens’ classic holiday story, *A Christmas Carol*. The duo acts as third-person narrators, much like my proposed team narrators. They share the narrator role as a team in each scene. Henson’s

narrators, Gonzo and Rizzo the Rat, offer commentary, pose questions to the audience, and add an element of irreverence and humor to the story (Davis 99, 101). The collective effect is an added dimension of entertainment and nuance, which is well-suited to a film targeting young viewers. Again, this is a very similar narrative form to the team narrative form I am herein proposing for the novel.

So, why do these other narrative modes occasionally feature this same-perspective form of multiple-person narration when novels do not? Could this type of narrative form be used in novels? What would be the challenges? What might be some affordances? My thesis will attempt to answer these and other questions, often referencing team narration as employed in some of my own (unpublished) novels.

## Chapter One: Multi-Narrator Forms in Literature

In the study of narrative, the terms multiperspectivity and polyperspectivity are often used to refer to storytelling that employs multiple narrators (Hartner). Other terms commonly referenced include heteroglossia, dialogism, and polyphony—terms and concepts introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin. He defines polyphony as “A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses ... with equal rights and each with its own world” (6). James Phelan introduces the term “serial narration” to describe storytelling when multiple characters narrate a story (197), although his term might cause some confusion with serially published novels, many of which themselves use multiple narrators (Valint 17-18). The term polyphony, as well as its near-synonyms, describes narration where multiple narrators possess different viewpoints, different vantage points, and different perspectives. While many authors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries practiced and experimented with the multiple-narrator form, creating many different versions of it, no version deviated from the “different-perspective” form. Since my proposed “team narration” form does deviate from that requirement, I will use the more generic term “multiple-person narrative” to discuss the use of multiple narrators.

Often when readers and students think of multiple perspectives and multiple narrators, authors such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner come to mind. Perhaps surprising to many people, the use of multiple narrators to communicate a story actually dates back many centuries. Possibly the earliest occurrence of multiple narrators is Plato’s *Symposium*, a work consisting of a series of speeches by notable Greek philosophers and leaders. A much later example is Chaucer’s poem *Parliament of Fowls*, which also consists of a series of debates and dialogues. However, the “modern” multiple-narrator form did not fully emerge until the epistolary novels of the eighteenth century. Notable examples include Samuel Richardson’s

*Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748),<sup>6</sup> Tobias Smollett's *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771), Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778), and Pierre de Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782). Each of these novels is composed of a succession of letters from several correspondents. Such narrative forms were popular, and their usage extended into the nineteenth century and was frequently employed in Victorian literature. However, epistolary novels have their limitations. The real-life practice of letter writing was expensive, time-consuming, and perhaps most significantly, limited by the level of literacy. Consequently, both real and fictional letter writers in the eighteenth century were mostly limited to the upper classes, greatly limiting the range of narrators, characters, and types of narration available to authors of epistolary novels (Valint 27). As literacy rates increased throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, epistolary novels could both include a wider range of characters and reach a larger audience, as exemplified by the Gothic novel trifecta of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. As the employment of letters and other documents as the dominant form of multiple-person narration increased and novels themselves increased in popularity as a literary mode, innovative writers sought out new styles and forms of multiple-perspective narratives beyond epistolary works. Such new styles and forms were championed by authors such as the aforementioned James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner, among others. Therefrom evolved the more modern and familiar forms of multiple-person narration we read and write today.

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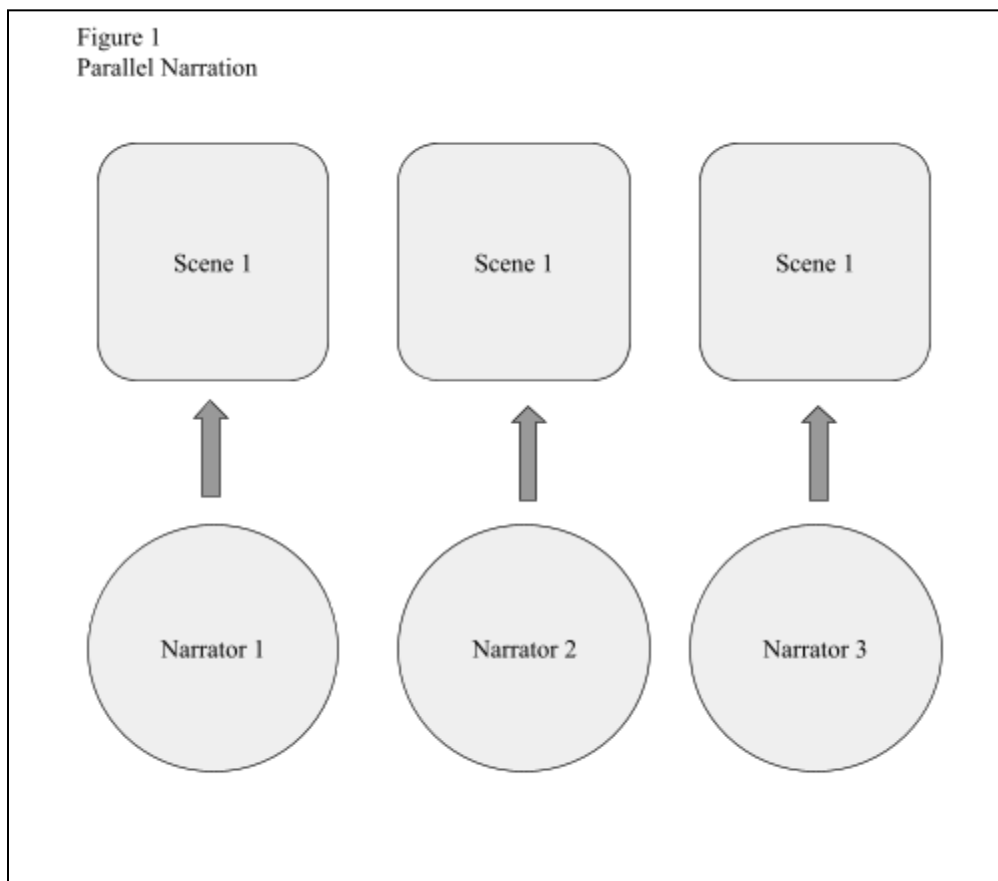
<sup>6</sup> The full titles are *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* and *Clarissa; or, The History of a Young Lady: Comprehending the Most Important Concerns of Private Life. And Particularly Shewing, the Distresses that May Attend the Misconduct Both of Parents and Children, In Relation to Marriage*. Often shortened to *Clarissa; or, The History of a Young Lady* or more simply *Clarissa*.

Modern multiple-narrator forms in novels have been classified into three categories: parallel narration, embedded narration, and group narration. Each of these forms is described and diagrammed in the following sections.

### Parallel Narration

Parallel narration occurs when multiple narrators tell their unique versions (perspectives) of a scene or incident, often providing conflicting or nuanced accounts that contrast with the versions presented by the other narrators. For example, a particular scene might be told (narrated) by one narrator, then retold by a second narrator, then a third, etc. (see Figure 1). This results in the same event being viewed differently by different characters (Mullan 56).

The challenge (or opportunity) for the reader is to compare, relate, and analyze the different versions of the same scene. The effect is similar to a courtroom trial, where multiple



witnesses provide testimony—their accounts of what they witnessed. In the courtroom “case,” the jury, similar to readers of a parallel-narrated novel, must compare, relate, and evaluate the different versions of the event in order to determine the “truth” as to the occurrence and what actually transpired (Stawiarski 96). Obviously, this leads to issues relating to the reliability of the narrators (Booth 158-159, 168-209, 300-380).

Patrick Hogan notes that parallel narration can be classified as either conjunctive or disjunctive (184). Conjunctive parallelism occurs when multiple narrators participate in the same story world, such as in William Faulkner's classic novel, *The Sound and the Fury*. The courtroom analogy is an example of conjunctive parallelism. Disjunctive parallelism, on the other hand, occurs when the narrators participate in different storyworlds, such as in *The Canterbury Tales*. Clearly, conjunctive parallelism offers more opportunities, challenges, and nuance versus disjunctive parallelism, as it requires readers “to integrate them [individual narrated accounts] in inferring the story, thematic concerns, and normative emotions” (Hogan 184). Conjunctive parallel narration by multiple narrators challenges readers who must compare and analyze the different accounts like a good detective in a good crime novel. Indeed, most crime novels employ at least some elements of conjunctive parallelism.<sup>7</sup>

As noted, Faulkner's novel *The Sound and the Fury* is widely considered a classic example of parallel narration.<sup>8</sup> The story is divided into four narratives, each of which has a different narrator: Benjy, Quentin, Jason, and a third-person omniscient narrator. Although each narrative takes place on a different day, much of the narration concerns events that took place several years earlier. Some of the recounted events overlap, resulting in differing accounts and

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<sup>7</sup> For example, *The Moonstone* by the nineteenth-century English author Wilkie Collins.

<sup>8</sup> Several of Faulkner's works use various forms of multiple-person narration. *As I Lay Dying* is another prominent example of parallel narration.

the need for the reader to interpret the “parallel” narrations. Hence, one can readily recognize the similarity to a trial with several witnesses to the same event.

The first section of *The Sound and the Fury* is narrated by Benjamin "Benjy" Compson—a cognitively disabled 33-year-old man who is described as an “idiot” who “can’t talk” (Faulkner 9, 21, 32). Much of this section is presented in a stream of consciousness, using standard fonts as well as italics to mark shifts in the narration.<sup>9</sup> The stream of consciousness form combined with Benjy’s limited cognitive capacity make this section challenging for many readers as the narrator recounts his family’s history, and in particular, the Compson’s daughter, Caddy. The second section is narrated by Quentin Compson, the smartest of the four Compson children. While his narration occurs in a single day at Harvard University, it nevertheless covers much of the history of the Compson family. Although the central theme is his family and his sister, Caddy, the entire section gradually progresses toward his suicide. Similar to the earlier two sections, the third section, narrated by Jason Compson, occurs in a single day. Yet, as with the other sections, Jason narrates from his unique point of view the story of his life and that of his family. Unlike the earlier sections of the novel, the fourth and concluding section is narrated in the third-person omniscient form. The primary focus is Disley, the matriarch of the Compson’s servants. Similar to the other narrators, this section’s narrator presents the Compson family from Disley’s perspective. Collectively, the four sections of the novel give a more complete picture of the Compson family. Each narrated section provides a different, subjective, and often unreliable perspective on the events of the past. Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* is a classic example of parallel narration.

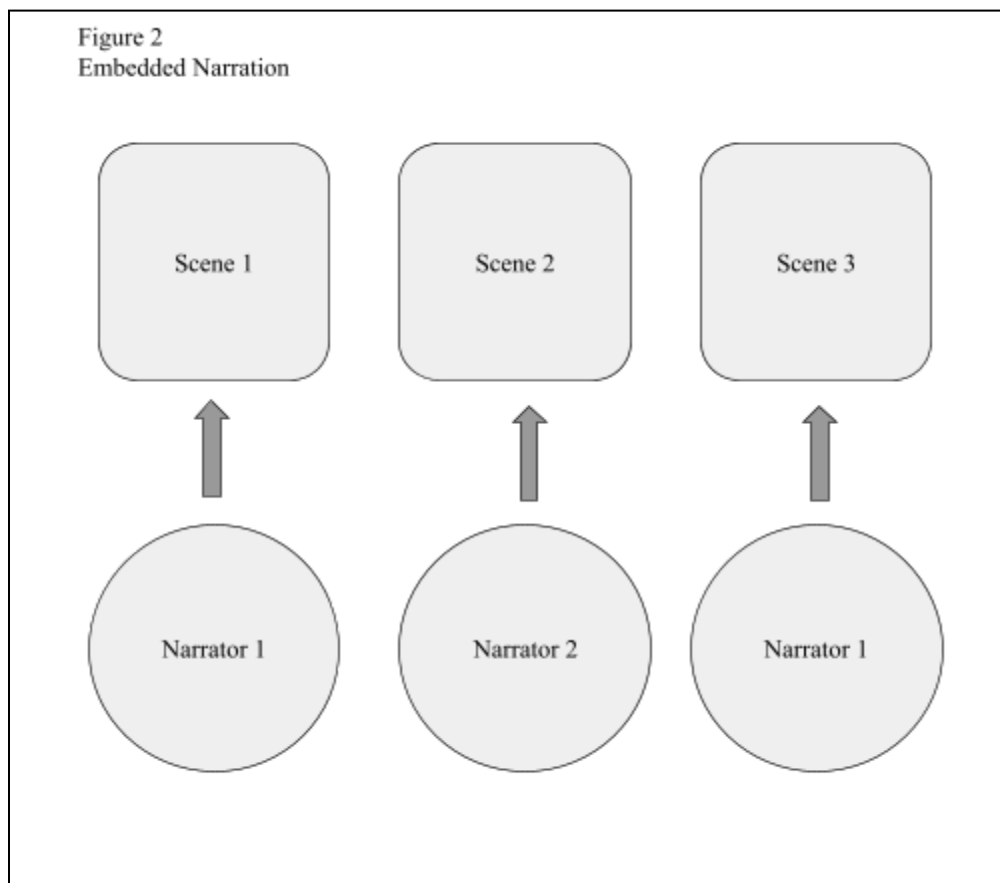
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<sup>9</sup> Originally, Faulkner wanted to use different colors to mark the chronological shifts. In 2012, the Folio Society printed an edition in fourteen different colors in accordance with Faulkner’s original intent.



### Embedded Narration

Whereas parallel narration entails multiple narrators describing the same scene or event, other forms of multiple-person narration involve different narrators describing distinct events in some frame or serial sequence. Such a framing technique is referred to as embedded narration. Embedded narration is the most common form of multiple-person narration (Hogan 183). Embedding is a narrative structure that contains or frames one story within another story; hence, it is often referred to as the “story within a story,” “Chinese box,” “Russian doll,” or embedded narrative structure (Nelles, “Stories Within Stories” 339). A character in one narrative section later becomes a narrator of a second section, and another character later becomes another narrator, and so on, in a form of nesting or embedding that is closely related to framed



narratives.<sup>10</sup> Considered collectively, the series of narrators and their narratives connect and comprise the entire novel. Figure 2 illustrates the typical structure of embedded narration. Nelles suggests dividing the form into two types based on the extent of their embedding (“Embedding” 134-135). Unlike Hogan, Nelles’s definition classifies Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* as a loose form of embedded narration rather than parallel narration, wherein a “slender frame story” sets the stage for the collection of individual tales (Hogan 184; Nelles, “Embedding” 134).<sup>11</sup> *Arabian Nights* is perhaps the classic example of the framed or “story within a story” structure of embedded narration.<sup>12</sup> More a collection of short stories rather than a novel, Scheherazade, the principal narrator, tells a new story every night in order to avoid or postpone her death. In each of her stories, new stories are embedded. Scheherazade narrates a story within which a character narrates a second story which includes a character who narrates a third story, etc. *Arabian Nights* includes both framing and embedding, where the embedded stories are pieced together within an overarching frame (Bal 52-53).

Much of the discussion and study of embedding ensues from Gerard Genette’s work on narrative levels. He introduces the term extradiegetic to describe the first or outer level of narration. Narrations within the outer level he labels intradiegetic narrators, and narrators within the second or diegetic level he calls metadiegetic narrators (Genette 227-229). Nelles suggests distinguishing between what he calls vertical embedding from horizontal embedding, the distinction being the type of shift in narrative level. Horizontal embedding refers to a shift in the narrator but not the narrator level, whereas vertical embedding refers to a shift in the narrator level (“Embedding” 134-135). Other related narrative forms include braided narratives and short

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<sup>10</sup> See *Reading Frames in Modern Fiction* by Mary Anne Caws for a survey and discussion of frame narratives and theory.

<sup>11</sup> Hogan suggests *The Canterbury Tales* uses elements of both parallel and embedded narration (184).

<sup>12</sup> *Arabian Nights* is also known as *The Thousand and One Nights*.

story cycles, both of which consist of separate short narratives which share common and overlapping characters and narrators. The narrators and characters typically interact and intermingle between stories, with the narrator of one story becoming a character in another story, etc. The different narrators present different perspectives that intertwine to form the overall novel (Bancroft 262-263).

A classic example of embedded narration is the aforementioned Shelley's iconic novel, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. Her novel begins with a series of letters that the sea captain Robert Walton writes to his sister, followed by a series of his journal entries. Walton relates the story of Victor Frankenstein in his letters, and soon Frankenstein's story overwhelms Walton's letters, and with "the quick transition from epistolary correspondence to first-person narrative, the reader potentially forgets the presence of the letter[s]" (Gardner 2). A series of embedded narratives follows, beginning with narration from Walton, followed by Frankenstein, then the Creature. While many readers recognize these three nested narrators and their narratives, several smaller "metadiegetic narratives" are presented by Shelley, including the stories of the De Laceys, Safie, and Safie's mother. To complete the framing, Shelley's novel, which begins with letters, ends with letters. Together, the series of embedded narratives, like a series of embedded dolls, forms the compelling tale of Frankenstein.<sup>13</sup>

### Group Narration

The third type of multiple-person narration is group narration (also referred to as collective narration and multiplicity), wherein the narrator is a collective rather than a single individual. Richardson states that "'We' narration is instead a supple technique with a continuous history of over a century that continues to be deployed in a considerable number of texts,

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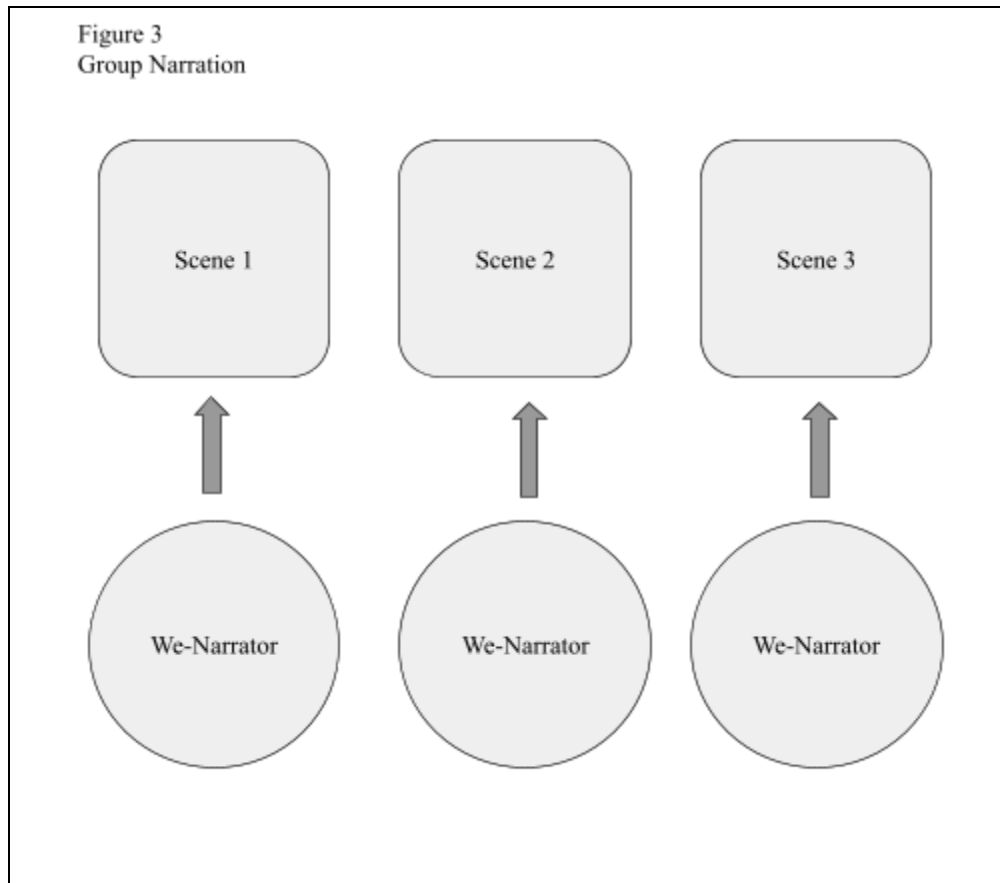
<sup>13</sup> See *Framing the Frame: Embedded Narratives, Enabling Texts, and Frankenstein* by Gregory O'Dea for further discussion of embedding in *Frankenstein*.

particularly those that emphasize the construction and maintenance of a powerful collective identity, including feminist and postcolonial works” (*Unnatural Voices* 55-56). Uri Margolin, on the other hand, suggests that “we” narratives have been rare (115). The difference in their views as to the frequency of “we” narratives can be explained by their distinct definitions of “we” narratives. Margolin restricts the definition of group narration to novels told primarily (or entirely) in the first-person plural form, whereas Richardson is less restrictive (Marcus 46). Interestingly, although group narration occurs infrequently in literature, group narrative forms are common in other modes of narration (which we shall see is similar to team narration). Some examples of group narration outside literature include petitions, declarations, proclamations, group and committee reports, company announcements, and public prayers (Margolin 116).<sup>14</sup>

Hogan suggests group narration consists of three forms (248). The first he calls instantiated group narration, wherein an individual represents an “instantiation” of a larger group of people. The second form is distributed group narration, wherein different individuals represent different subgroups of a larger group of people. The third form he terms collective voicing, wherein the narrator is the collective group, speaking as a unit. The latter is perhaps the most obvious and common form, where the narration is given in the first-person plural form by a single voice representing the entire group (Bekhta 164-165). In its purest form, there are no “I’s” in we-narration; rather, a single voice speaks on behalf of the entire group. The narrator is the collective. Figure 3 illustrates the simple structure, which, not surprisingly, is almost identical to the traditional and familiar first-person point of view.

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<sup>14</sup> For example, “We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union ...”; “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal ...”; “Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation ...”; “Our business is growing, and it’s transforming. Over the last two years, we’ve grown revenue about 17 percent and profit 31 percent ...”; “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name ...”



Several notable authors have employed first-person plural points of view, including Joseph Conrad, William Thackeray, William Faulkner, Thomas Mann, as well as many of the Greek playwrights (Margolin 133). A striking example of group narration is the Joshua Ferris 2007 novel *Then We Came to the End*.<sup>15</sup> The book begins:

WE WERE FRACTIOUS AND overpaid. Our mornings lacked promise. At least those of us who smoked had something to look forward to at ten-fifteen. Most of us liked most everyone, a few of us hated specific individuals, one or two people loved everyone and

<sup>15</sup> A more widely-known story using a form of we-narration is Faulkner's Gothic short story "A Rose for Emily." The final paragraph reads, "Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. One of us lifted something from it, and leaning forward, that faint and invisible dust dry and acrid in the nostrils, we saw a long strand of iron-gray hair."

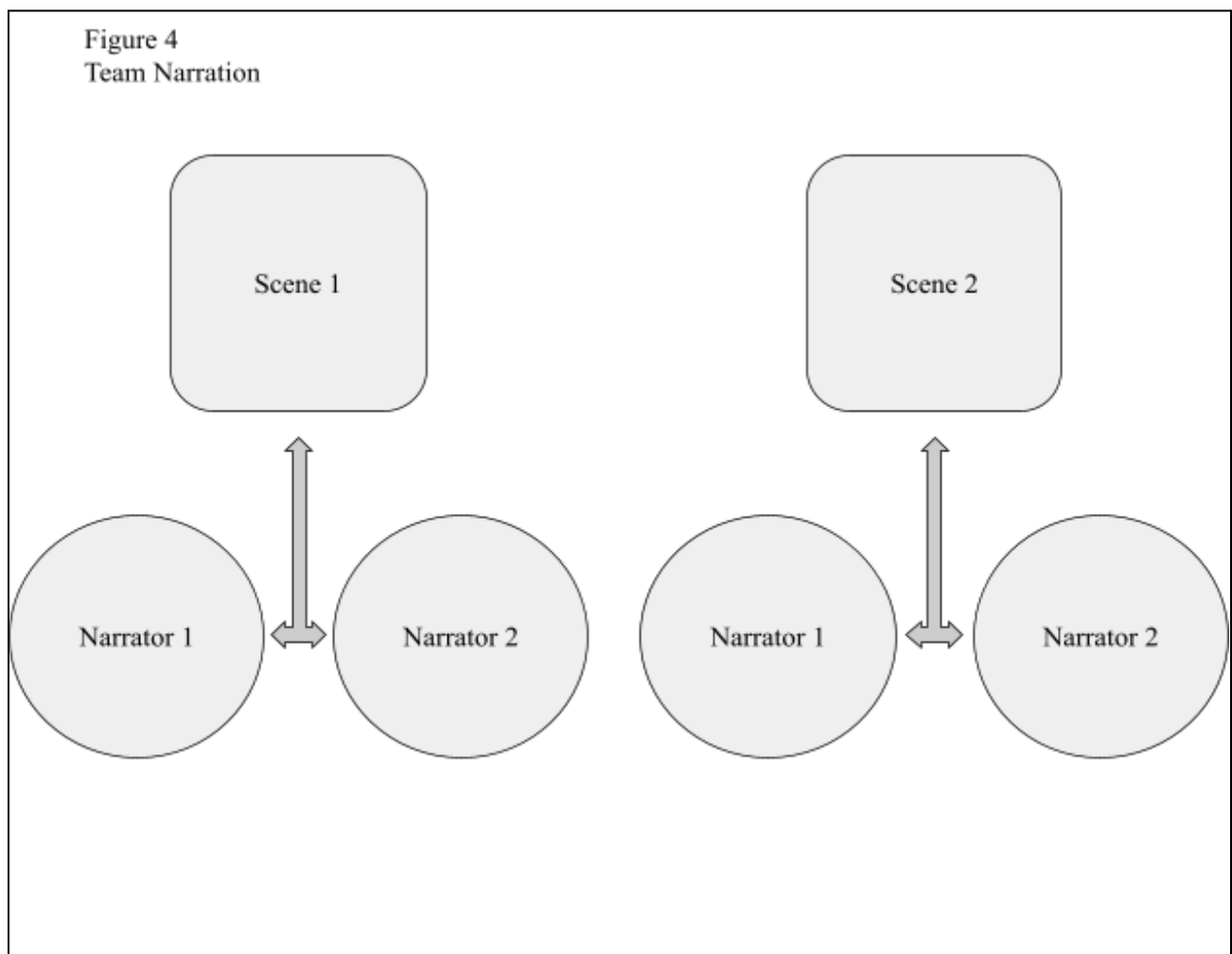
everything. Those who loved everyone were unanimously reviled. We loved free bagels in the morning. They happened all too infrequently. (3)

Readers realize from the beginning the voice is different from most novels. As Alikei Varvogli observes, “The collective narrative voice challenges our often-unquestioned assumptions about the novel as a genre: that it has a protagonist, and that, whether in first-, second-, or third-person singular, the novel is in one way or another concerned with conveying that protagonist’s experience” (702-703). Readers expect the traditional first-person or third-person narrative point of view. Yet, the narrative voice in *Then We Came to the End* is neither shocking nor awkward. Indeed, the we-narration form seems the obvious choice as the most appropriate narrative vehicle to capture the dynamics of working in a large corporate environment and “to investigate ideas of corporate belonging, office life as familial substitute, and American consumerism” (Maxey 210). The we-narrative form itself encapsulates the “we versus them” (or it) conflict in the corporate world. Alison Russell observes, “the author [Ferris] captures perfectly how contemporary cubicle workers are torn between the satisfaction of being a part of ‘the team’ and the Emersonian (and very American) directive to be, above all, a nonconformist—that individual who should rise above coworkers to distinguish himself or herself as exceptional, if not simply different” (319). One of the themes of the novel is the dynamic (the conflict) between the corporation and the employee group, a battle between two “we” collectives. The plot itself concerns an advertising office as it struggles during an economic downturn. The office workers worry about the present and the future as they go through the routines and rituals of office life. The business slows, and layoffs begin, exacerbating the employee’s worries and concerns. They realize they are all vulnerable, both as individuals and as a group. Layoffs continue, until at the end, “We were the only two left. Just the two of us, you and me”—the final lines of the novel (Ferris 385). The

large, collective “we” has become a duo. While the novel is comedic, it nevertheless tries to capture and describe the serious challenges and struggles of employees in the corporate environment.

### Team Narration

Missing from all the references to the different multiple-narrator forms is any discussion of what I have termed “team narration.” I define team narration as a form of multiple-person narration wherein the narrators share the same perspective and participate together in each scene as third-person narrators. Although they share the narrator role, they do so as separate individuals—distinct third-person singular narrators (see Figure 4). While in sports there is no



“I” in the word “team,” in team narration, the “I’s” are essential. The individual team members participate in the narration of every scene. They might alternate or take turns, or one might play the role of lead narrator and the other side narrator. Narrating as a team, they share the same space and perspective.

Given that background, let us look at some modes outside literature that recognize and use a form of multiple-person narration that is similar to team narration.



## Chapter Two: Multi-Narrator Forms in Modes Outside Literature

Outside literature, multiple-person narrator forms of communication are common rather than rare, the norm rather than the exception. The concept of “team narration,” absent in literature, exists in several other modes and fields, albeit under different names. Some of the primary modes where team narration is found include broadcasting, linguistics, and film.

### Broadcasting

While the idea of two narrators participating and narrating simultaneously seems foreign in literature, the use of multiple narrators is common in broadcasting; hence, the term broadcast team. Nowhere is the use of team narration more prevalent in broadcasting than in sports. Indeed, it would seem foreign, strange, and awkward if a sporting event were broadcast with any form other than a team. Today rarely does one broadcaster “narrate” a sporting event alone; rather, there are usually at least two announcers—one who serves as the play-by-play commentator, also referred to as the anchorman, and one who serves as the color commentator, also known as the analyst or expert commentator (Arthurs 44-45). This dual mode of sports announcing is referred to as the duality model (Balzer-Siber 2, 6), where one announcer provides most of the narration, and the other offers occasional side commentary (Balzer-Siber 25, 45-46; DeNu 255-259). Consider the following transcript of an actual baseball game<sup>16</sup>:

[Announcer One] — Here’s Melky Cabrera who singled and knocked in a run his first time, switch hitter batting right. I mean, by all rights Ponson should still have the lead. Wilson made an error. I mean, errors are all part of it. Cabrera takes low. I, I guess both managers—we’ve been saying this—are probably thinking the same thing: hey, 5-5 I’ll take it. Get me through five and then we’ll piece it together with the bullpen.

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<sup>16</sup> At the time, this was the longest nine-inning Major League Baseball game on record. The New York Yankees beat the Boston Red Sox 14 to 11 on Aug. 18, 2006 in 4 hours and 45 minutes.

[Announcer Two] — Yep.

[Announcer One] — No, uh, wait, you've gotta get a couple of scoreless innings to do that heh heh heh. The 1-0, Cabrera bluffs bunt takes a strike. Ran his hands up.

[Announcer Two] — Well, as you, as you said John, John Lester has found something here. He's got the side in in order in the third, struck out Fasano.

[Announcer One] — Now he's retired five in a row. And the 1-1 is low and the count 2 and 1. Now the left-hander to the plate fouled back, first base side of home plate, the count 2 and 2. Johnny Damon is on deck and Lester ready to deal 2-2 to Cabrera swung on and fouled, first base side, out of play. Tomorrow's game is a Fox game, so instead of starting at 1:05, it'll start at 1:25. We'll be on there at 12:40 with a long pre-game.

[Announcer Two] — (*Yawns*)

[Announcer One] — Here's the 2-2 fouled at home plate Now, here's Lester's 2-2. Swung on, lined like a bullet! Base hit, center field! Oh, is Lester lucky! That ball coulda taken his head off! He just got out of the way. Well that would shake me up, I don't know if it's gonna shake Lester up, though. Vicious line drive right through the box.

[Announcer Two] — Well, he's walking all the way back to the shortstop position.

[Announcer One] — That missed his head . . . Oh. . . .ooooohhhh, man. Ah, if that if that missed his head by two inches that's a lot. He ducked way down and he's 6'4" so he's a big big kid. Oh my goodness, that could've been awful.

[Announcer Two] — Oh boy, is that scary? It was even worse on the replay.

[Announcer One] — Here's Damon, who is 2 for 2 and has five hits in the double header and 5 RBIs and a home run. Damon takes outside and the count 1 and 0.

[Announcer Two] — John talked about tomorrow afternoon, Josh Beckett and Randy Johnson.

[Announcer One] — And I think both teams are hoping that they'll have better pitching on their team.

[Announcer Two] — Oh.

[Announcer One] — Now the 1-0. Lined deep down the right field line toward the Pesky Pole it is gone! There's a two-run home run for Johnny Damon having a day that he'll never forget for the rest of his life! He's homered in both games! He has six hits! He has seven RBIs! A two-run Damon dinger and the Yankees take a 7-5 lead! (Goldsmith 40-41)

While reading the game transcript might seem awkward, hearing the actual broadcast seems quite natural since the duality model has been employed for so many years in sports broadcasting. Indeed, today a radio or television broadcast of a sporting event would seem awkward if it were not narrated by at least two narrators. Several features and characteristics are apparent in the broadcast excerpt. Announcer One is clearly the lead or play-by-play narrator, and Announcer Two serves as the side or color commentator. Announcer One performs the actual narration of the game, whereas Announcer Two provides anecdotes and short comments. Yet, they never seem to talk on top of each other or overlap their narration. Indeed, close inspection reveals a nearly formulaic relationship between the announcers as they participate in their individual roles as play-by-play announcer and color commentator. Balzer-Siber observes:

What is extremely striking for a live broadcast is that there is virtually no speech overlap. As mentioned in the literature review, the roles and responsibilities are relatively defined between play-by-play announcer and color commentary. In terms of floor-taking, that

means that turns are to some extent negotiated. Once a significant action on the field is completed, such as a shot, corner or free kick, the color commentary will take over with a brief analysis. (45-46)

Although the “plot” they narrate is unpredictable to both the audience and the narrators, the broadcast team narrates the “story” in a very natural and conversational style as they describe the action of the game. The play-by-play announcer provides the details of the game, serving as the lead “narrator.” In contrast, the color commentator offers statistics, side commentary, and information and anecdotes not necessarily germane to the specific story at hand. At times, again, if closely scrutinized, the narration and interaction between the two announcers can appear almost preplanned and scripted, as if a professional writer had written their speaking parts. This effect is, no doubt, the result of their training and experience from broadcasting hundreds if not thousands of sporting events.<sup>17</sup> Occasionally, the two announcers will step outside the game they are announcing and banter between themselves, even introducing material unrelated to the game being broadcast. In addition to serving in the role of game reporters, they often take on the role of entertainers and comedians as well.

The roles of the two announcers are quite different. Early in the history of sports broadcasting, a single announcer narrated the entire sporting event. Later, the duality model evolved. The second announcer, the color commentator, was often a former sports player rather than a professional announcer, causing Howard Cosell to remark, “Put an ex-jock in the booth, and their cliché-ridden presentation of a game is the least of their sins. As a result of their lack of training, most of them are blessedly lost when trying to establish a storyline... and often they are ignorant of the human perspective” (134).<sup>18</sup> Color commentators are not trained announcers but

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<sup>17</sup> Vin Scully announced more than 9,000 major league baseball games.

<sup>18</sup> Cosell coined the term “jockocracy” to describe the increasing role of former athletes in sports broadcasting.

rather sports experts who serve to educate and elucidate. They help facilitate the story's flow by filling in dead spots with side stories and anecdotes. Similar to a good narrator in a novel, the color commentator helps maintain pace in a sports broadcast (Fuller 6).

Besides sports broadcasting, the team approach is regularly utilized in the TV and radio broadcasts of other events as well. Political conventions, political debates, and news broadcasts, in general, more often than not provide media coverage with a team of two or more announcers, often referred to as broadcasters, journalists, commentators, or analysts. Similarly, broadcasts of parades (e.g., the Rose Parade and Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade), New Year's Eve, Fourth of July, and other popular events are most often hosted by a team rather than a single individual. Society has come to accept and anticipate "team narration" when listening to or viewing a news or entertainment event. Any other "point of view" would today be considered unusual and even awkward and uncomfortable for the audience.

Teams seem particularly common and adept at comedy. Consider all the famous comedy teams, for example, the Marx Brothers, the Three Stooges, Laurel and Hardy, Amos and Andy, Abbott and Costello, Cheech and Chong, Dan Rowan and Dick Martin, and the Smothers Brothers. Most of these were duos, but two of these teams consisted of more than two members. Typically, team members had unusual names that might be considered funny in and of themselves. Often, the lead actor played the role of the "straight man," while the second actor played the role of the "sidekick." One of the most memorable comic skits is "Who's on First" by Abbott and Costello. The skit begins as Abbott narrates an experience:

Abbott: Well Costello, I'm going to New York with you. You know Bucky Harris, the Yankee's manager, gave me a job as coach for as long as you're on the team.

Costello: Look Abbott, if you're the coach, you must know all the players.

Abbott: I certainly do.

Costello: Well you know I've never met the guys. So you'll have to tell me their names, and then I'll know who's playing on the team.

.....

Abbott: ... Well, let's see, we have on the bags, Who's on first, What's on second, I Don't Know is on third...

Costello: That's what I want to find out.

Abbott: I say Who's on first, What's on second, I Don't Know's on third.

Costello: Are you the manager?

Abbott: Yes.

Costello: You gonna be the coach too?

Abbott: Yes.

Costello: And you don't know the fellows' names?

Abbott: Well I should.

Costello: Well then who's on first?

Abbott: Yes.

Costello: I mean the fellow's name.

Abbott: Who.

Costello: The guy on first.

Abbott: Who.

Costello: The first baseman.

Abbott: Who.

Costello: The guy playing...

Abbott: Who is on first!

Costello: I'm asking YOU who's on first. (Abbott and Costello)

Abbott plays the role of the straight man, the team member who is serious and reflective.

Costello, in contrast, plays the role of the sometimes goofy and uniformed sidekick. He interrupts Abbott's narration to begin the back-and-forth banter that leads the audience far astray from Abbott's original story. In fact, Abbott never returns to his original story, but instead, Costello becomes increasingly confused and frustrated by Abbott's answers and explanations, leading the narration to a series of humorous questions, answers, and banter. I will discuss more on the use of humor in team narration later in the paper.

### Linguistics

Within the field of linguistics, we find several types of language structures similar to the narrative form of team narration. For example, linguistics identifies co-constructed narratives in face-to-face conversations, where "Co-construction is viewed as any conversational event where a second speaker jointly creates a formal artefact [sic] (e.g. a word, phrase, clause or sentence) or a functional artefact [sic] (e.g. a proposition, a speech act, a narrative, a trope) across turn-boundaries, in collaboration with a previous speaker or speakers" (Clancy and McCarthy 431). In other words, two or more speakers (narrators) participate together to communicate, usually from the same experience and perspective. They typically build on one another's narration, completing or extending phrases, sentences, and accounts. Consider the following conversation:

127 J: .hhh She picked up her boo:ks, put away<sup>19</sup>

128 her stu:f,.hh an' started to walk out the

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<sup>19</sup> While this section of quoted dialogue includes diacritics and suprasegmentals, my reference and use of the dialogue does not relate to the markings or their features.

- 129            doo:r with me, >but< then she said,  
 130            No:. I'm only teasing, and went  
 131            ba:ck.  
 132                            (0.2)  
 133    J:        .hhh But uh:, yeah, from  
 134            that point o:n. he was RE:ally upset.  
 135                            (0.3)  
 136    J:        .hhh  
 137    P:        Jo:hn. I'd be >pissed at you< too.  
 138    J:        Yea:h, I know you [ wou:ld be.  
 139    P:                            [ ( )  
 140    P:        I wou:ld be.  
 141    J:        I: know you would be.  
 142    P:        And you- (.) make sure you apol:ogize.=  
 143    J:        =Oh, I told-1:, (0.4) I said I'd better  
 144            leave no:w, so you guys can stu:dy, an'(.)  
 145            .hh I'll talk to you, when I get  
 146            h(hh)o:[:me. hm eheh  
 147    P:                            [So where are you no:w. >ak-< school?  
 148    J:        No, I'm over af- uh:m Pat and James, a friend  
 149            of mine, awl:: actually Pat's apartment.        (Ford 45-46)

Besides the awkward formatting for non-linguists, note the awkwardness when reading the transcript of the conversation. The language is full of short, choppy phrases, interruptions, and



repetition. Although transcripts of conversations often, if not usually, appear awkward, choppy, and lurchy, with interruptions, overlaps, pauses, and turns, the conversations themselves often are flowing and smooth (Ford 30). This is normal human conversation—how people talk. While unnatural on the written page, it is quite real and natural in hearing. The speakers often repeat part of what was just said or utter a word indicating agreement, as in the lines:

137 P: Jo:hn. I'd be >pissed at you< too.

138 J: Yea:h, I know you [ wou:ld be.

139 P: [ ( )

140 P: I would be.

141 J: I: know you would be

Participants in the conversation use turn-taking techniques to avoid long gaps and silences. Speakers exhibit an “ability ... to react and respond without delay when it is their turn to speak or when they wish to self-select for the next turn” (McCarthy 5). “Latching” is present, a term that denotes when speakers time their comments and responses to coincide precisely with the end of a word, phrase, or sentence of the other speaker, avoiding both overlaps and gaps (Norrick, *Conversational Narrative: Storytelling* 23). Participants utilize words such as yeah, well, right, hmm, and others to signal to the other participant(s) when they want to speak next (as in lines 133 and 138). Some words serve as turn-opening indicators, while others serve as turn-closing indicators. In addition to single words, participants in conversations tend to draw from a set of short phrases and expressions, using them almost automatically to regulate the pace and flow of the conversation (McCarthy 4-7). These signal words and phrases appear frequently and consistently in conversations. Hence, we have developed a lexicon of idioms and sayings we

commonly employ over the course of normal conversation in the conversational version of team narration.

Even more closely related to team narration than co-construction is the linguistic concept of co-narration (also referred to as collaborative telling and co-telling), where two (or more) people collaboratively relate a story or experience to one or more other people. Areas of scholarly interest in co-narration include tellability, sequentiality, and interpersonality as the narrators interact and coordinate in the transmission of their story (Norrick, *Conversational Narrative* 105-116). Tellability refers to the relevance of an intended narrative and how the speaker must establish a platform as well as how other narrators must justify their contributions as well as any interruptions. Sequentiality refers to the system used by the narrators to know whose turn it is to speak. Similar to co-construction, individual words, phrases, questions, and pauses can all serve as turn signals. Interpersonality refers to the ability of listeners to understand what the speaker communicated. Consider the following example of co-narration from a recorded interview of an elderly couple sharing stories with their family:<sup>20</sup>

FRANK: Anyway, they used to have get-togethers.

BEA: Young people.

FRANK: Young people from surrounding towns would get together for a young people's meeting, and they'd stay at different families' homes and that sort of thing.

Pretty exciting, really! But, one thing we did, we'd all have a candle, and we'd go light our candle at the candle that represented Jesus, and we'd form a big circle and sing that atrocious hymn, "Follow the Gleam." It's a hideous thing. But anyway, I had the—I was so carried away with religious intensity, I thought, "If I set my hair on fire with this

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<sup>20</sup> See Norrick (*Conversational Narrative*) for several additional examples of co-narration.

candle, I'll go right to heaven." But fortunately, being a practical New Englander, I had a second thought, which is, "It'll probably hurt," so I didn't do it.

[audience laughter]

FRANK: But it was painful.

BEA: It was.

FRANK: I was—religion, religion could be a very painful disturbing thing.

BEA: It was. It was. Because it [sic] that, it was that old New England morality, and it was no lo—it was not a god of love, it was still a god of wrath.

FRANK: Well, we were the victims of Adam's fall, and we were being punished for Adam. I had nothing to do with it. I wasn't that fond of apples, actually. But that was it. It was the curse on the human race, because of what Adam had done. And we were paying for it. And boy were we paying!

BEA: And we were brought up in this awfully stern tradition. (Borland 442)

In this excerpt of a much longer narrative, Frank starts out as the lead narrator. He begins the story by establishing its tellability as part of his throat-clearing preface. Bea's role is both as a listener and a limited co-narrator. Her early contributions are primarily short phrases to convey agreement as an active listener. In this excerpt, Frank performs most of the narration, while Bea serves as a supporting narrator. If we were to see the later sections of the narrative, we would actually see a bit of a role reversal, as Bea takes over the role of lead narrator. Borland observes how in this example, as well as in most co-narrated stories, the narrators display similar patterns of repetition and variation despite their different narrative styles (442). Yet, although the overall narrative might seem to have its own voice, the narrators do have distinctive voices. Each

co-narrator brings to the narrative process their unique personality and voice. Some might be serious and reflective, while others might be comic or snarky.

This multiple-person narrative form of face-to-face storytelling is very similar to my proposed narrative form of team narration for the novel. In both modes, multiple narrators relate a story to an audience. In both modes, “co-tellers have had access ... to some common previous event” (Norrick, “Conversational Storytelling” 137). The two co-narrators share the same point of view—the same perspective and space. One significant difference, however, between co-narration in everyday conversation versus team narration in a novel is the role of the audience. Readers of a novel do not interact with the narrators, whereas listeners of a conversation do interact. In conversation, the audience acts as a type of co-author, affecting the direction, structure, and pace of the narrative, often through a combination of questions, comments, and gestures. Listeners may interrupt, add details or ideas, or even heckle (Norrick, “Conversational Storytelling” 136-137). This active participation on the part of listeners tends to engage them more than if they are simply passive listeners. While in team narration, one or more narrators can pose questions, add comments, etc., as a surrogate for the audience (readers), they cannot know the exact specific questions, comments, etc., of actual individual readers. Consequently, the concept of audience co-authorship is unique to face-to-face storytelling. Despite these differences, co-narration in conversation is very close to my proposed form of team narration for novels. Similar to its presence in broadcasting, a form of team narration occurs frequently both in linguistic studies and in common conversation.

### Film

Film is closely related to novels and other forms of literature (short stories, novelettes, and novellas), in that every film starts out as a piece of literature—namely, a screenplay. In fact,

many acclaimed authors also wrote screenplays (e.g., F. Scott Fitzgerald, Margaret Atwood, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, Truman Capote, and Michael Chabon). Film, more so than broadcasting and common conversation, tells a story, “that simple and fundamental aspect of the novel” (Forster 43). Film involves an organizing plot, theme, characterization, and action—features also found in and defining of the novel (Harmon 374).

Co-narrators have been used in film, albeit rarely. Indeed, any form of direct narration is relatively rare in film. Nevertheless, film is well “adapted” to employ team narration. We shall later see that one of the most significant challenges of using team narration in novels is how the reader can distinguish between the multiple narrators. Film has an inherent advantage over the novel in that the viewers can distinguish between characters and narrators by their unique voices and appearances. (This also applies to broadcasting.) One early instance of multiple-person narration occurs early in the popular 1946 Frank Capra film *It’s A Wonderful Life*. At the beginning of the film, the angel Joseph gives the angel-in-training Clarence a brief overview of George Bailey’s life that led to his current dire situation. Together, they observe and review some of George’s life, narrating some of the scenes for the audience. For example:

EXT. MAIN STREET – BEDFORD FALLS – SPRING AFTERNOON

MEDIUM SHOT

Five or six boys are coming toward camera, arm in arm, whistling. Their attention is drawn to an elaborate Horsedrawn [sic] carriage proceeding down the other side of the street.

MEDIUM PAN SHOT

The carriage driving by. We catch a glimpse of an elderly man riding in it.

CLOSE SHOT

The boys watching the carriage.

GEORGE

Mr. Potter!

CLARENCE'S VOICE

Who's that – a king?

JOSEPH'S VOICE

That's Henry F. Potter, the richest  
and meanest man in the county. (Goodrich)

The format, standard screenplay manuscript format, might be unfamiliar to many people. Perhaps equally unfamiliar is the narration provided by two of the characters. The narrators, Joseph and Clarence, are not seen as they “act” purely as narrators, introducing the evil Mr. Potter to the audience in this scene. This style of narration occurs early in the film and again for a few minutes about midway through the film. Together, Joseph and Clarence narrate, comment, question, and tease as they perform their narratorial roles. The remainder of the film proceeds as most films proceed—sans outside narration, as Clarence transitions from a narrator to a character.

Another example of a film that employs an even more pronounced form of team narration is Jim Henson’s film *The Muppet Christmas Carol*. The film’s creators faced the challenge of producing something new and effectual to a story that has been revised and adapted so many times before. The added challenge was that Henson and the screenplay writer, Jerry Juhl, were experimenting with a novella that not only had other people experimented with but that Dickens himself had experimented with during its original writing—combining elements of the fairytale, the ghost story, the conversion narrative, along with the Christmas traditions (Napolitano 79).

One area that Jerry Juhl experimented with (besides the extensive use of puppets) was narrative technique. He employed two narrators, the Muppet puppets Gonzo (playing the role of Dickens) and Rizzo the Rat, in a radical departure from previous adaptations of the novella—a departure that provided the film an added dimension (Davis 99). The film begins with the narrators introducing themselves:

Narrator: Hello! Welcome to The Christmas Carol. I am here to tell the story. My name is Charles Dickens.

Rizzo: And my name is Rizzo the Rat. Hey. Wait a second. You're not Charles Dickens.

Narrator: I am too!

Rizzo: Dickens was a famous novelist? [sic] A genius!

Narrator: Oh. You're too kind.

Rizzo: Why should I believe you?

Narrator: Well. Because I know the story of A Christmas Carol like the back of my hand.

Rizzo: Prove it!

Narrator: All right.

Narrator: There's a little mole on my thumb and. Uh. A scar on my wrist... From when I fell off my bicycle.

Rizzo: No. No. No. No. Don't tell us your hand. Tell us the story.

Narrator: Oh. Oh. Thank you. Yes. Jacob Marley was dead to begin with.

Rizzo: Wha- Wha... Pardon me?

Narrator: That's how the story begins. [sic] Rizzo. Jacob Marley was dead to begin with, as dead as a doornail.

Rizzo: It's a good beginning. It's creepy and kind of spooky.

Narrator: Oh. Thank you. Rizzo.

Rizzo: You're welcome. Mr Dickens.

Narrator: In life, Marley had been a business partner ... with a shrewd moneylender named Ebenezer Scrooge. You will meet him as he comes around that corner.

Rizzo: Where?

Narrator: There.

Rizzo: When?

Narrator: Now. (Scrooge enters the street) There he is. Mr Ebenezer Scrooge.

(Juhl)

Unlike the previous example of *It's A Wonderful Life*, this script is displayed in a format that is often used when publishing a script to be read as a printed text. Whereas with standard screenplay manuscript format the character names appear near the center of the page above their dialogue, this format more closely resembles standard prose, with standard indents for the character names. The lead narrator in *The Muppet Christmas Carol*, "Narrator," is "played" by Gonzo (also known as The Great Gonzo or Gonzo the Great), a puppet character from the Muppets. The second narrator is "played" by Rizzo the Rat, another puppet character from the Muppets. Rather than narrating by voiceover, the two puppet characters often appear in the film. Readily apparent in the opening lines are the interruptions, questions, and banter between the two narrators, narrating characteristics that are found in co-narration from linguistics. Rizzo



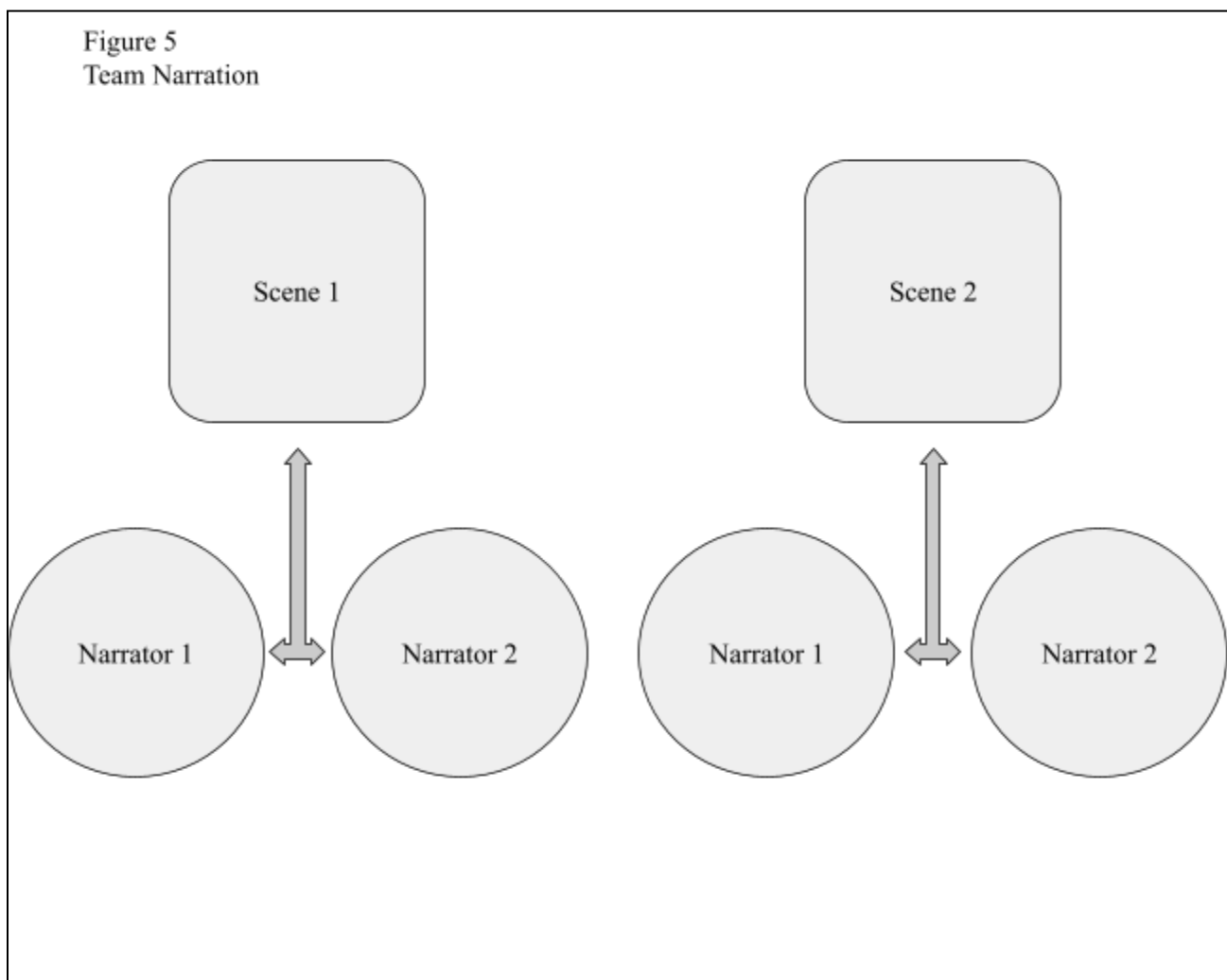
frequently questions Gonzo, both questioning his narration as well as questioning the story's plot and characterizations. Much like some dramas, Gonzo breaks the fourth wall, acting on behalf of the audience in his questioning of the story.

A second feature of the film that manifests itself early is the humor that is added by the two narrators. Juhl's dual narrators, Gonzo and Rizzo the Rat, offer commentary, pose questions both to and for the audience, and add an element of irreverence and humor to the story. They question and ridicule each other, the story's characters, and its plot. They serve as a comedy duo, not unlike Abbott and Costello. The effect is an added dimension of entertainment and nuance—entertainment from the added humor (which is particularly well-suited to a film targeting young viewers) and nuance from the ability to engage the audience (similar to the role of the Greek Chorus, which will be discussed later).

This type of narration is very similar to the team narrative form I am herein proposing for the novel. The narrating duo acts as third-person singular narrators. They share the narrator role as a team in each scene. They often banter and dialogue between themselves. Juhl, while not defining this kind of narrative form, he nevertheless implemented team narration in his film. Let me next discuss how team narration might be adapted and employed by novelists.

### Chapter Three: Adapting Team Narration to the Novel

As we have seen, team narration (and similar versions thereof) has been recognized and observed in broadcasting, linguistics, and film. Yet the novel, which is often at the forefront of narrative innovation, has yet to see this form of multiple-person narration. Perhaps the challenges of team narration, which will be discussed in this chapter, have proven too onerous to overcome. Team narration would differ from the other forms of multiple-person narration currently used in novels. The team of narrators would be separate individual, third-person singular narrators (see Figure 5). As mentioned, while in sports, there is no “I” in “team,” in team narration, the “I’s” are critical.



The team members would narrate together in every scene. They might alternate or take turns, or one might play the role of lead narrator and the other side narrator. Narrating as a team, they would share the same space and perspective. Such a narrative form would, naturally, have its disadvantages and its advantages—its challenges and its affordances.

### Challenges of Team Narration

“Novel” writers using team narration might face a number of challenges, including how to distinguish between narrators, the potential jarring effect on readers, the relationship between narrators and characters, and conveying a purpose for using team narration to readers.

#### *Distinguishing Between Narrators*

As previously mentioned, one obvious challenge of implementing team narration in literature is how readers will distinguish one narrator from another. In television broadcasting, the broadcasters’ appearance (e.g., hair and facial features) and voices help viewers distinguish them from one another. In radio broadcasting, their voices suffice. In *The Muppet Christmas Carol*, similar to television broadcasting, both appearance and voice distinguish the two narrators. In a novel, however, neither voice nor visage is available. So, how does a reader distinguish between the narrators? In a traditionally narrated novel, only one narrator narrates a scene. The text consists of either the one-narrator narration or dialogue. With team narration, which narrator is narrating? Character dialogue is distinguished using speech tags. Could speech tags also be used for narrators? Consider my own simple example:

Once upon a time, began narrator 1, there lived a beautiful princess.

How beautiful was she? asked narrator 2. And did she have blonde hair or  
brunette hair? How old was she?

Be patient ... be patient, said narrator 1. We'll get to that. Now, one day, the princess was out walking in the castle garden.

"Oh, I just love this time of year when the tulips are in full bloom," she said, leaning over and breathing in the scent of a cluster of fresh yellow tulips.

The princess was fond of flowers and gardening, said narrator 1, and the king had built the special castle garden for her as a birthday present.

While some form of speech tags might be considered for narrators, one can readily envision the problems and confusion of speech tags for both characters and narrators. Yes, quotation marks could distinguish between character dialogue and narrator narration, yet some readers might consider the shifting awkward. As a general rule of fiction writing, writers try to economize their use of speech tags. Using speech tags to distinguish between narrators, however, would greatly increase the number of speech tags in a novel. Nevertheless, speech tags for narrators would solve the problem of distinguishing narrators.

A second potential method to distinguish between narrators regards format. For example, each narrator's narration could use a separate, distinct font, such as roman style versus italic style, normal versus bold, or Arial versus Times New Roman. However, one can easily see how cluttered and confusing this might be. Color could also be used, where each narrator's narrative could be in a different color, e.g., narrator one in red and narrator two in green (see footnote 9). Publishers, however, would likely balk at this idea. Perhaps a better formatting approach might be borrowed from stage play script format, where certain sections, such as stage directions, are marked in parentheses. Consider the opening scene from Sam Shephard's *Curse of the Starving Class*:

*SCENE: Upstage center is a very plain breakfast table with a red oilcloth covering it. Four mismatched metal chairs are set one at each side of the table ... Lights come up on Wesley, in sweatshirt, jeans and cowboy boots, who is picking up the pieces of the door and throwing them methodically into an old wheelbarrow ... Ella enters slowly from down left ... Wesley keeps cleaning up the debris, ignoring her.*

ELLA: *(after a while)* You shouldn't be doing that.

WESLEY: I'm doing it.

ELLA: Yes, but you shouldn't be. He should be doing it. He's the one who broke it down.

WESLEY: He's not here.

ELLA: He's not back yet?

WESLEY: Nope.

ELLA: Well, just leave it until he gets back.

WESLEY: In the meantime we gotta' live in it.

ELLA: He'll be back. He can clean it up then.

*(WESLEY goes on clearing the debris into the wheelbarrow. ELLA finishes winding the clock and then sets it on the stove.)*

ELLA: *(looking at clock)* I must've got to sleep at five in the morning. (Shepard 135)

While the exact formatting of plays varies from playwright to playwright, publisher to publisher, and even edition to edition, nevertheless, most versions use parentheses or brackets to mark certain sections, such as stage directions, which are also often set in italics. Perhaps the same format could be used to distinguish between narrators in team-narrated novels, where one narrator's narration is in parenthesis, and the other narrator's part is bracketed. Of course, an even better solution might be to adopt the stage play format of preceding each narrative section

with the name (or designation) of the specific narrator. Consider the following example from my own writing (unpublished):

CASSIE: Everyone in Wick knew Auntie—she'd lived there for several decades. They knew her for her old car, her old house, and especially for her cats. In fact, most people referred to her as the cat lady.

DARF: The cat lady? Oh, no—*please* tell me this story isn't going to be about cats.

CASSIE: Okay, D, I won't tell you, then.

DARF: Cassie!

CASSIE: Darf! Wick's Main Street was deserted as Auntie drove into town in her old car. But that wasn't unusual. The town hadn't seen much traffic ever since the main highway had been diverted away from the small town several years earlier.

This format is very close to the format used for both drama and film scripts; hence, it is not entirely unfamiliar to readers. Anyone who has ever read an anthology of literature has more than likely seen this (or a similar) format for a play. Preceding each narrative section by the name of the narrator (or simply Narrator One and Narrator Two) solves the problem of how to distinguish between the narrators.

Other methods of formatting might also be considered to assist readers in identifying which narrator is narrating a given section. Formatting borrowed from other literary modes, however, seems like an obvious and effective method. Whereas in film, TV, and radio, narrators can be distinguished by their visage and/or voice, literary modes are limited to what appears on

the written page.<sup>21</sup> Thus, formatting seems like the only solution to distinguish between narrators, and both stage play and screenplay formatting seem like obvious methods to explore.

### *Jarring Nature of Team Narrators*

Some readers might find the use of team narration disruptive, awkward, choppy, or jarring, particularly because of the formatting methods necessary for the differentiation of the multiple narrators. Indeed, some beta readers of my own works used that precise term—jarring. Rather than deny that the team narrative form might seem jarring to some readers, I will instead point to other varieties of literature—some even very popular varieties—that many (and sometimes most) readers consider quite jarring. Consider the following examples of common modes and classic works:

- As already referenced, stage plays and screenplays can be jarring when read as a printed text. Yet, no one seems to complain or balk at their format. “To enjoy reading a ... screenplay becomes a matter simply of becoming more literate in this form and of achieving an understanding of film grammar and the elements of the script more than anything else” (Thomas 5). Exposure and practice lead to familiarity, comfort, and acceptance.
- Other narrative forms can be equally jarring. For example, second-person point of view and we-narration can both be jarring when first encountered. Novels narrated in present tense can also seem awkward to readers. Yet, these forms are all accepted and read.
- The natural progression in reading levels can be jarring, e.g., when a child graduates from picture books to word books to chapter books.

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<sup>21</sup> I am disregarding graphic novels and other written works that include pictures or illustrations of the characters and potentially the narrators.

- Poetry can be jarring when first encountered or when only occasionally read. In particular, lengthy poems, such as Byron's *Don Juan* or Eliot's *The Wasteland*, can be challenging for readers.
- In addition to stand-alone poetry, prose interspersed with poetry and other forms can feel jarring as the reader must transition from mode to mode.
- The Bible is written in verses, with many versions written in Early Modern English, making it one of the most jarring books to read. Yet, it is widely regarded as the most-read book of all time.
- Shakespeare, regarded as the most popular author of all time, wrote his plays in Early Modern English using a combination of blank verse, rhymed verse, and prose, which modern readers often find awkward and strange.<sup>22</sup>
- Some successful contemporary novels have other features that many readers might consider jarring. Examples include:
  - *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norell* by Susanna Clarke—some pages have more footnotes than text (pp. 584-585).
  - *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko—a mix of prose and poetry combined with non-conventional chapter and scene formatting (pp. 131-139).
  - *Lincoln in the Bardo* by George Saunders—narrated by a collection of historical and fictional characters (over a hundred). Much of the book is written in a stage play format.

The challenge of a text being considered jarring, although perhaps an accurate description of team narration (and many other forms and specific works), does not seem to affect either the

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<sup>22</sup> While most sources consider Shakespeare to be the best-selling writer of all time (2 to 4 billion books), some sources list Agatha Christie (2 to 4 billion books) ahead of Shakespeare (TCK Publishing).



critical or commercial success of a work. Indeed, both the most popular book and the most popular author of all time wrote in jarring styles. Perhaps being considered jarring is a positive trait in a novel or author.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the unusual format required for team narration, many readers might find the interruptions by the second narrator jarring and intrusive. Indeed, the term for interruptions by narrators to “explain, interpret, or qualify” is the “intrusive narrator” (Harmon 296; Turco 95-97). Booth observes that while this narrative style has grown less and less popular, “what seems natural in one period or to one school seems artificial in another period or to another school” 42). Literary styles and forms are not static but change as societal tastes and preferences change. Indeed, there was a brief resurgence of narrator (or author) intrusion in twentieth-century metafiction (Turco 97). Yet, this type of intrusion is hardly new, as early Greek playwrights used a very similar narrative technique with their use of the chorus (Booth 99, 208).

#### *The Relationship Between Narrators and Characters*

Some readers, upon encountering team narrators who project some sense of individual personality and “character,” might try to identify or associate them as characters. Familiarity with homodiegetic narration might lead to expectations for some relationship beyond the typical narrator role for the duo of team narrators, given their apparent personalities. Team narrations display a hint of roundness, tempting readers to associate them with characters. Perhaps the narrators are related to one or more of the novel’s characters. Perhaps this is a framed story, and at the conclusion, readers will learn the true identity of the narrators. Perhaps the narrators are part of some overall metafictional structure. Readers not familiar with narrators who exhibit any sort of dimension beyond traditional heterodiegetic narrators might easily search for

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<sup>23</sup> Certainly, some of the most renowned and studied authors and texts were experimental at the time of their writing, e.g., James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and the other modernists.

relationships that were not intended or do not exist. Some beta readers of my own attempts to use team narration did exactly that. Among their comments and questions were “how are the narrators related to the characters” and “who are the narrators exactly?” Such is the risk of new forms and structures. Readers naturally attempt to relate any new idea, character, structure, form, etc., to other novels they have read. New forms can lead to initial confusion and questioning until at least a minimal level of familiarity and comfort is achieved.

### *To What End?*

One objection some readers might charge against team narration is that it seems too gimmicky—different just to be different. As with any “novel” or unusual writing technique, authors should be careful that the effect is more than merely a gimmick. Unusual characters, plots, fonts, forms, formats—all must serve a purpose beyond being different or controversial. However, there might be at least one exception to that charge, namely, with children’s literature. Koss observes, “young adult novels appear to be changing in form and structure, and mirror both the different ways information is accessed and the forms of new literacies appearing in contemporary society ... This suggests that something is occurring in today’s social and cultural environment that is changing how YA narratives are being told and accommodating experimentation in how they are being written” (74). Young-adult literature is one subgenre where experimentation is not only allowed but encouraged. An increasing number of authors of adolescent literature are experimenting with voice and structure, and young readers seem eager to accept the new forms and approaches (Koss and Teale 570).

Nevertheless, both inside and outside children’s literature, form should serve a purpose beyond experimentation and exploration. The following section will address some of the purposes team narration might achieve.

### Affordances of Team Narration

The proposed narrative form of team narration offers the potential for several affordances to both writers and readers. Some of these might include methods to affect pace, provide information (such as alleviate possible plot concerns or clarify), add humor, and entertain with additional side plots and stories extraneous to the primary narrative.

#### *Manage Pace*

Team narration offers writers an additional arrow in their quiver of literary devices to affect and control the “old-fashioned dramatic devices of pace and timing,” where pace refers to the speed at which a novel’s plot is revealed (Booth 272). Writers may strive for a slow pace, to give space and emphasis on the artistry of their writing, or they may use a quick, accelerating pace to build suspense and deliver a page-turner, “a novel, that, because of the fast pace and engrossing suspense, is irresistibly readable” (Harmon 394). Regardless of the pace they desire to achieve, writers have several tools at their disposal to control pacing, including action, length and depth of exposition, length of monologue and dialogue, the length of phrases, sentences, paragraphs, scenes, and chapters, and even word choice. Consider the opening lines of John Steinbeck’s novella *Of Mice and Men*:

A few miles south of Soledad, the Salinas River drops in close to the hillside bank and runs deep and green. The water is warm too, for it has slipped twinkling over the yellow sands in the sunlight before reaching the narrow pool. On one side of the river the golden foothill slopes curve up to the strong and rocky Gabilan Mountains, but on the valley side the water is lined with trees—willows fresh and green with every spring, carrying in their lower leaf junctures the debris of the winter’s flooding; and sycamores with mottled, white, recumbent limbs and branches that arch over the pool. On the sandy bank under

the trees the leaves lie deep and so crisp that a lizard makes a great skittering if he runs among them. Rabbits come out of the brush to sit on the sand in the evening, and the damp flats are covered with the night tracks of 'coons, and with the spread pads of dogs from the ranches, and with the split-wedge tracks of deer that come to drink in the dark.  
(321-322)

This opening paragraph spills over to a second page. Steinbeck, who is noted for his detailed descriptions of setting, opens this story with a beautifully written description of the Salinas River. Specifically, he constructs long, flowing sentences to introduce readers to the setting at a serene, leisurely pace, at least in part to serve as a metaphor for the slow-moving stream itself. Words and phrases help paint a serene, pastoral scene. Steinbeck doesn't want his readers to hurry through this otherwise short work.

Team narration could provide writers with an additional tool to help control the pace of their novels. Consider the following example from my own writing (unpublished):

Narrator A: Erin arrived thirty minutes early. She sat on the floor outside the classroom next to some other students. She opened her notebook and began reviewing her notes once again. Every five minutes she glanced up at the clock on the wall. Then every two minutes. She closed her notes and practiced her yoga breathing exercises when there were five minutes remaining. She was as prepared as she could possibly be.

Narrator B: Prepared? Is that a word?

Narrator A: Yes.

Narrator B: Are you sure? Don't you mean prepared?

Narrator A: I'm sure. Prepared, you know ... from preparation and preparatory.

Narrator B: I've never heard of it.

Narrator A: There are lots of words you've never heard of, B. Erin took her usual seat in the front row. She pulled two pencils and an eraser from her backpack, which she then scooted under the desk.

The interruption by Narrator B (an unnamed narrator in this example) followed by the short section of dialogue between the two narrators serves not only to slow the pace of the novel's action but effectively pause it—a sudden halt to the action. The writer can control the length of the pause by the extent of the banter between the narrators. The effect is similar to a commercial break in a media broadcast. Of course, few media viewers appreciate commercial breaks, and writers would have to be careful about breaking for narrator dialogue in particularly engaging sections of the narration. Nevertheless, team narration offers an additional tool to affect the pace of a story.

### *Provide Additional Information*

Writers have many devices at their disposal to provide additional information to readers to supplement narration and dialogue, such as letters and narrator commentary. Team narration can provide an additional means to supplement narration, as the second narrator can interrupt the narration with questions, requests for clarification, or simply their own commentary on a character, scene, or other issue. This “rhetorical intrusion in fiction” is similar to one of the roles of the chorus in Greek theater (Booth 99). In addition to their role of singing and dancing between scenes, the Greek chorus could also narrate offstage action, comment on action, and even summarize and moralize (Moble 24-25). Consider the opening scene from *Oedipus Rex*:

CHORUS

strophe 1

Sweet-voiced daughter of Zeus from thy gold-paved Pythian shrine

Wafted to Thebes divine,  
 What dost thou bring me? My soul is racked and shivers with fear.  
 Healer of Delos, hear!  
 Hast thou some pain unknown before,  
 Or with the circling years renewest a penance of yore?  
 Offspring of golden Hope, thou voice immortal, O tell me.

antistrophe 1

First on Athene I call; O Zeus-born goddess, defend!  
 Goddess and sister, befriend,  
 Artemis, Lady of Thebes, high-throned in the midst of our mart!  
 Lord of the death-winged dart!  
 Your threefold aid I crave  
 From death and ruin our city to save.  
 If in the days of old when we nigh had perished, ye drave  
 From our land the fiery plague, be near us now and defend us!

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antistrophe 2

Wasted thus by death on death  
 All our city perisheth.  
 Corpses spread infection round;  
 None to tend or mourn is found.  
 Wailing on the altar stair  
 Wives and grandams rend the air--

Long-drawn moans and piercing cries

Blent with prayers and litanies.

Golden child of Zeus, O hear

Let thine angel face appear! (Sophocles)

Sophocles relies on the chorus to provide much of the backstory for the play, describing in detail the terrible plague that has been “plaguing” Thebes. The chorus is able to instill in the reader (theater-goer) the threat and intensity of the situation much more than the characters could do alone. While broad usage of the chorus waned with the waning of ancient Greek drama, remnants of the chorus can still occasionally be seen in operas, musicals, and even modern film.<sup>24</sup>

Team narrators, and in particular, the side narrator, can serve a similar role as the Greek chorus. The second narrator, interrupting the main narrative flow, can narrate, comment, and perhaps even moralize. In addition, as Coleridge observed, the chorus is positioned to serve as the ideal representatives of the audience itself (12-13). So too can the side narrator. They can serve on behalf of the reader, posing questions and pointing out potential flaws and inconsistencies. In effect, they can serve to clarify and explain any ambiguities or apparent plot errors. For example:

Narrator A: Erin set her mug down over Tiger Woods’ face on the golf magazine and returned to the kitchen, where she quickly prepared some dry cat food mix for Felix.

“There you go.” Felix glanced at the bowl of cat food, then walked away. “What, not hungry?”

Narrator B: But wait, didn’t she already feed him earlier? I think you may have got that wrong, A.

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<sup>24</sup> For example, consider Woody Allen’s film *Mighty Aphrodite*.

Narrator A: Did I? Or did Erin?

Narrator B: What do you mean?

Narrator A: Erin ate her Grape-Nuts while gently rocking back and forth in her rocking chair. The house was quiet except for the crunch of Grape-Nuts and an occasional creak from the chair.

The writer wants to avoid confusion over a possible plot error. Here, the second narrator, asking on behalf of the reader, questions the narration. Narrator B's response clarifies that the character Erin has made the error rather than the writer. Thus, in this example, the second narrator serves as kind of a one-person Greek chorus.

### *Add Humor*

Writers often incorporate humor into their novels, even when the novel itself is not comedic overall. Situations can be humorous, as can characters through their actions or dialogue. Perhaps a side character is a cliché character such as a buffoon, absent-minded professor, intervening mother-in-law, or one of the many other standard, flat, comedic, stock characters (Forster 67-73). Most novels include at least some humor, even if to a very small degree. This is particularly true for middle-grade and young-adult novels, although even most serious adult novels include instances of humor. In addition to situational humor, a writer might use a sharp-witted or otherwise funny heterodiegetic narrator rather than flat, omniscient, emotionless narrator. Consider the opening lines from Douglas Adams' novel *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*:

Far out in the uncharted backwaters of the unfashionable end of the western spiral arm of the Galaxy lies a small unregarded yellow sun.



Orbiting this at a distance of roughly ninety-two million miles is an utterly insignificant little blue-green planet whose ape-descended life forms are so amazingly primitive that they still think digital watches are a pretty neat idea.

This planet has—or rather had—a problem, which was this: most of the people on it were unhappy for pretty much [sic] of the time. Many solutions were suggested for this problem, but most of these were largely concerned with the movements of small green pieces of paper, which is odd because on the whole it wasn't the small green pieces of paper that were unhappy.

And so the problem remained; lots of the people were mean, and most of them were miserable, even the ones with digital watches. (3)

In the opening paragraphs, the narrator exhibits some dimension of personality and character absent in most third-person narrators. Instead of providing an emotionless, impersonal narration, Adams' narrator offers descriptors and commentary that are both witty and humorous.<sup>25</sup> While not fully round, neither is this narrator two-dimensional. “We get the beginning of the curve towards the round” (Forster 67). Continuing with Forster's discussion of flat versus round (albeit his discussion pertains to characters rather than narrators), the narrator of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* can surprise us—not just in terms of plot and characterization, for every narrator can surprise in those regards—but in terms of their voice, tone, and emotion (Forster 78). As with any good comedian, Adams' narrator performs their role with a degree of uncertainty and unpredictability. Indeed, good humor depends on unpredictability and surprise.

If a narrator can be humorous, then wouldn't two narrators be even more humorous? Recall the comedy duos referenced earlier. Many of the most famous and memorable comedic acts are duos rather than solo performances. Not only does a team of comedians introduce

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<sup>25</sup> For a good, concise explanation of the difference between wit and humor, see Harmon 583-84.

multiple personalities, but a team also increases unpredictability and the appearance of spontaneity. Everything *Hitchhiker*'s narrator can do, team narrators can do even more. However, team narration also offers an additional method for injecting humor into a story. Consider the following example from my own writing (unpublished):

ZIGGY: Robert had made the varsity baseball team, but not as a starter. He spent most of his time sitting on the bench. But whenever the team had a big lead or fell too far behind, he would come in for the last two or three innings. And that had occurred quite a bit the last few weeks. Baseball was one of Cliff View's weaker sports.

FINN: I'm pretty good at baseball, you know.

ZIGGY: I'm sure you are.

FINN: No, I mean it. I even made the district all-star team last season.

ZIGGY: What ... as a cheerleader?

FINN: Ha-ha-ha.

ZIGGY: Robert trotted out to his position in center field.

"I think he might get to bat next inning," said Emma.

In this excerpt, Ziggy operates as the main narrator, while Finn serves as the side narrator. Notice the narrators have names, creating expectations for significant amounts of side dialogue and possible side plot apart from the plot of the novel. Their unusual names further set expectations for humorous interactions between them. Their names also help identify and reinforce the genre—in this case, young adult. At various parts of the novel, Ziggy and Finn function much like one of the comedy duos referenced earlier. Their names, Ziggy and Finn, sound like a comedy duo, similar to Cheech and Chong or Laurel and Hardy. The side narrator, Finn, is a flat, comedic narrator who often interrupts to relate some incident that he thinks is related to the

novel. Ziggy typically ridicules Finn, and they occasionally banter back and forth before Ziggy continues with the narration.

The use of team narrators to add an element of humor to a novel might be particularly useful and appropriate for middle-grade and young-adult novels, similar to the use of dual narrators in *The Muppet Christmas Carol*. Young readers often list comedy as one of their favorite subgenres (Wendelin 34; Worthy 18, 20). Although individual tastes in humor vary greatly, age does play a role, not so much in the overall appreciation for humor, but rather the appreciation for the type of humor (Wendelin 36). Older children (sixth grade and above) tend to prefer verbal humor, which is the primary type of humor team narration could add to a story.<sup>26</sup>

#### *Narrators as Characters*

Typically, a first-person point-of-view narrator is a character in the novel, and most often, that is the only point of view wherein the narrator also serves as one of the characters (Forster 78; Stern 181). The exception would be embedded narratives of various forms, where a character of one scene becomes a narrator of a later scene. In such instances, however, the narrator does not serve simultaneously as both narrator and character unless the story is told from the first-person point of view. That is not the case, however, with team narration. Team narrators narrate from a third-person perspective yet can serve as both narrators and characters.

I already mentioned that in team narration, the narrators can be given names to assist the reader in distinguishing them from each other. Also, team narrators often converse among themselves, either to discuss the story at hand or, occasionally, to step away from the story and discuss something outside the main narrative. In contrast to a “story within a story,” team narration allows for a related concept of a “story without a story,” or perhaps more descriptively,

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<sup>26</sup> Verbal humor is defined as “The type of humor based upon the manipulation [sic] of language through word play, puns, jokes, sarcasm, wit, name-calling, and the like.” (Wendelin 35).

a “story outside a story.” The narrators can provide a narrative unrelated to the plot of the novel. The narrators can, in a sense, become characters in their own story. For example, consider the following section of narration from my own writing (unpublished):

Narrator A: A full-length mirror near the bathroom door was the only other piece of furniture in the bedroom. It was made with an iron framework decorated with small colored tiles that formed a border around its perimeter. The iron framing had curves and corners and crevices that looked like they had been collecting dust for several years. Scenic paintings of some of Utah’s national parks hung on the walls—Zion National Park, Arches National Park, Bryce Canyon National Park, and Cedar Breaks National Monument.

Narrator B: I’ve been to some of those places. We made a long road trip out there several years ago with the family. Rented an RV and everything.

Narrator A: That’s nice.

Narrator B: No, it really was a great trip. Our children still talk about it.

Narrator A: Fascinating, B. Erin tossed the six decorative pillows from the bed onto the floor and pulled the covers back on her side of the mattress.

If enough of this type of side narration occurs, collectively, the narrators can tell their own story—the narrators’ story. In later dialogues, we might learn more about a narrator’s background, family, interests, etc. It is not really a true subplot of the novel since it has nothing to do with the novel’s characters or plot, hence the term “story outside a story.” Through the narrators’ side conversations with each other, their “characters” and personalities are revealed, and they become first-person narrators and characters of their own stories. Similar to a “story outside a story,” the narrators become, in a sense, “characters outside the characters”—characters

not of the novel being narrated but characters in their own stories. They can end up serving as both narrators and characters, albeit of two different, distinct stories. Indeed, some of the beta readers of my own attempts to employ team narration in novels listed the side narrator as one of their favorite characters.

## Conclusion

I have proposed a new multiple-person narrative form for the novel, which I have termed “team narration.” Many novels feature two or more narrators who occupy different perspectives. Team narrators, in contrast, share the same perspective and participate together in each scene as third-person narrators. While the team is a “they,” “they” narrate as “I’s.” They are individuals and maintain their individuality throughout the narrative.

Although much of the scholarly work on perspective has historically focused on first-person and third-person narratives, multiple-narrator forms are not at all rare in novels. Indeed, they are quite common (Nelles, “Embedding” 134; Hogan 15; Richardson, “I etcetera” 313). However, they tend to be limited to three forms: parallel narration, embedded narration, and group narration. Yet, outside literature, other multiple-narrator forms not only exist but are common and, in some cases, the norm. In broadcasting, we have the concept of the “broadcast team” for news, sports, and event broadcasting. In sports broadcasting, for example, the team form of narration has become the norm. Within the field of linguistics, scholars use the terms co-construction and co-narration to describe conversations where two (or more) people narrate a story. Finally, in film, we find examples (albeit very few) of a team of narrators. So, why isn’t this narrative form found in fiction?

The use of team narration would certainly entail some challenges, including distinguishing between the individual narrators, the jarring nature of the form, the relationship between characters and narrators, and the purpose of the form. Of these four challenges, the ability of readers to distinguish which narrator is narrating a particular section might be the most significant challenge. However, writers can borrow from script formatting (both screenplay and drama) to provide readers the tools and means to easily distinguish between multiple narrators

even when they are participating on the same page. Related to format, some readers might find the use of team narrators awkward and jarring, as it is a new and different narrative form.

Anything new can seem uncomfortable at first. However, many of the most popular narratives of all time are considered awkward and jarring by new readers. We still read the Bible and Shakespeare, for example. Similarly, readers' impulse to relate a novel's characters to character-like narrators is a function of unfamiliarity with the new narrative form. The last challenge for writers is to have a purpose for using team narration. Writers could be tempted to use team narrators just to be different—to “make it new.”<sup>27</sup> However, as every good writer knows, every decision a writer makes should have a purpose—some end in its employment.

Among those ends are the affordances of team narration. Team narration would offer writers some additional tools for achieving their desired effects:

- The use of team narrators of necessity affects pacing. While writers have several tools already at their disposal to slow or accelerate the pace of a novel, team narration adds another method for slowing the pace or pausing.
- Team narration also offers writers another method to provide additional information, e.g., clarifying potential confusing or misleading actions or dialogue. When one narrator leads the narration, the second narrator can serve much like a Greek chorus, offering commentary or moral interpretation. The second narrator can also represent the reader, asking questions or pointing out inconsistencies in either plot or characterization.
- Team narration, by its nature, begs to add humor to the narration. Team narrators can easily act similarly to a comedy duo. The lead narrator might typically be the “straight man,” serious and reflective. In sharp contrast, the second narrator might

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<sup>27</sup> Of course, Ezra Pound's Modernist charge to “make it new” referred to innovation with a purpose.

play the role of the sometimes goofy and uniformed sidekick. Team narration offers an entirely new palette from which to shade and color humor to a story.

- Team narration offers writers the opportunity to add a story—a story outside a story—to their novel. Team narrators are individuals that can temporarily depart from narrating the story at hand and share their own stories. Team narrators can become characters—not characters inside the novel, but characters outside the novel—characters in their own storyworld.

Team narration would offer both challenges and affordances to writers—which is what most writers want, is it not? Writers, as well as readers, yearn for something that is both old and familiar yet new. “Make it new” has become for writers, publishers, and readers, make it “old but new”—novels that both build and expand on past successful formulas and forms. So, why not team narration?



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