ROCZNIKI HUMANISTYCZNE
Tom L, zeszyt 5 – 2002

GRZEGORZ MAZIARCZYK

THE LIMITS OF THE NARRATEE'S INTERPRETIVE COMPETENCE
AN ANALYSIS OF DIRECT ADDRESS TO THE READER IN DAVID MALOUF'S *AN IMAGINARY LIFE* AND JOHN FOWLES'S *THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN*

Direct evocation of the "you" of an unnamed addressee seems to constitute a significant element of a number of contemporary British and Commonwealth novels; it appears in such texts as David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life*, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, John Berger's *G.*, Julian Barnes's *Talking It Over*, Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, Patrick McGrath's *The Grotesque*, Martin Amis's *Money*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. The addressees evoked in these novels share a number of properties. First and foremost, each of them is projected by the narrator of a given text; consequently, he/she is an element of a text structure and should not be confused with the real reader. By the same token, he/she should also be distinguished from the implied reader assumed by the implied author of a given text.[1] His/her position in the text structure is well expressed in the term *narratee* introduced by Gerald Prince to designate the receiver addressed by a narrator and distinct from both real and virtual (implied) readers.[2]

The narratee evoked in the novels mentioned above is the narrator's projection of a *potential* reader or listener of his/her narrative and hence he/she

GRZEGORZ MAZIARCZYK, M.A. – Chair of English Philology at the Institute of English Philology of the Catholic University of Lublin; address for correspondence: Al. Racławickie 14, PL 20-950 Lublin; e-mail: crimson@kul.lublin.pl

[1] Cf. S. CHATMAN, *Story and Discourse*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978, pp. 147-151.

[2] G. PRINCE, *Introduction to the Study of the Narratee*, trans. F. Mariner, in: J. E. TOMPKINS (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, pp. 7-25.

is deprived of a proper name or such features as age or gender, which would concretise him/her on the level of the presented world. Insubstantial as this type of the narratee may appear, he/she does possess some qualities which define him/her in positive terms. The narrator's addresses to the narratee usually have a self-reflexive character and concern the latter's interpretation of the narrative. His/her being an interpreter foregrounded, the narratee's position is analogous to that of the implied reader, whose characteristics – as Emanuel Prower and Wojciech Kalaga demonstrate – can be presented in terms of mutually interdependent competence and strategy.[3] In the case of the narratee *qua* interpreter the first of these terms seems to have a logical priority over the second: the narratee's interpretive performance is a manifestation of his/her interpretive competence, which determines his/her capability to respond in a particular manner. Obviously, the narratee's competence can be reconstructed only on the basis of the narrator's assumptions; it is not a property which is independent of his/her projections.

The aim of the present essay is to analyse the significance of the narratee's competence in two selected novels, David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life* and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, in which the narratee is cast in the role of the potential reader. The narrator of the former explicitly establishes his addressee's position in his first narrative intervention: "I speak to you, *reader*, as one who lives in another century, since this is the letter I will never send."[4] The narrator[5] of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* uses a slightly more indirect method: he imposes on the narratee the role of the reader by means of numerous metafictional self-commentaries on his own writing activity.

The narratees evoked in these two novels seem to occupy two extremes as regards interpretive competence: the narratee addressed in *An Imaginary Life* is attributed a minimal competence, comparable to the knowledge of Prince's theoretical construct of the zero-degree narratee,[6] whereas the narra-

[3] W. KALAGA, E. PROWER, *The Reader as Character*, in: *Discourse and Character*, ed. W. Kalaga, T. Sławek, Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski, 1990, p. 33.

[4] D. MALOUF, *An Imaginary Life. A Novel*, London: Picador 1980, p. 18; italics mine. All the subsequent references to this novel, included parenthetically in the text, are to this edition.

[5] It might seem that the distinction between Fowles and the narrator in the case of this novel is a sign of unnecessary pedantry; however – as James Phelan demonstrates – in his metafictional game with the reader Fowles distances himself at times from the *I* speaking in the text. J. PHELAN, *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 93.

[6] G. PRINCE, *Introduction*, p. 10.

tee of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is ascribed maximal competence, related to Michael Riffatterre's notion of the Superreader.[7] Furthermore, the juxtaposition of these two novels allows a comparative analysis of the significance of the type of the narrator employed by the implied author. *An Imaginary Life* is narrated by a fictional dramatised author, Ovid, evidently distinct from Malouf, the implied author; on the other hand, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is narrated by the unnamed *I* of the narrator who claims to be the author of the whole book, including chapter epigraphs, and who thus seems to be identical with the implied author.

The minimal competence of the narratee evoked in Malouf's *An Imaginary Life* results from a generic convention adopted in this novel: the fictional Ovid of *An Imaginary Life* is writing in the convention known as "the letter for posterity", invented by Ovid, the historical poet.[8] Consequently, he addresses his narrative to future generations, distant in time; so distant that he is not even certain whether they will understand the language of his text: "Is Latin still known to you?" (Malouf, *An Imaginary Life*, 18) Ovid also assumes that his future reader will live in a reality completely different from his:

> I am the poet Ovid – born on the cusp between two houses of the zodiac [...] between two cycles of time, the millennium of the old gods [...] and a new era that will come to its crisis at some far point in the future I can barely conceive of, and where you, reader, sit in a lighted room whose furnishings I do not recognise, or in the late light of a garden whose blooms I do not know, translating this – with what difficulty? – into your own tongue.
>
> (Malouf, *An Imaginary Life*, 19)

Unfamiliar as the reality of his future reader may be, Ovid seems to be quite certain about one thing: his future reader will be – paradoxically – a godlike creature:

> Can one imagine the face of a god? For that surely is what you must be at your great distance from us – the god who has begun to stir in our depths, to gather his being out of us.
>
> (Malouf, *An Imaginary Life*, 18)

---

[7] M. RIFFATERRE, *Describing Poetic Structures: Two Approaches to Baudelaire's "Les Chats"*, in: *Yale French Studies*, 36-37 (1966), pp. 200-242.

[8] L.S. KOLEK, *Re-Structuring the World: David Malouf's "An Imaginary Life"*, in: *The Evidence of Literature. Interrogating Texts in English Studies*, ed. S.-J. Spånberg, H. Kardela, G. Porter, Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Press, 2000, p. 125.

Ovid bases his expectations on his own theory of metamorphosis, according to which all the creatures evolve towards higher forms of existence: "It is as if each creature had the power to dream itself out of one existence into a new one, a step higher on the ladder of things" (Malouf, *An Imaginary Life*, 28-29). Thus, Ovid's image of his future reader is a reflection of his own and his contemporaries' desire for perfection: "And what you are reader is what *we* have wished" (Malouf, *An Imaginary Life*, 64).

The godlike status Ovid attributes to his future reader might seem to lead to a paradox: can gods not know Latin? Obviously, the answer to this question depends on one's understanding of the notion of a god. Ovid assumes that it is possible, if not certain, that the god reading his text will have problems understanding it or will have to translate it into his own language, which suggests that his idea of a god leaves room for some limitations. Since Ovid's concept of evolution consists basically in the realisation of the hidden potential of objects and people, involving a series of changes towards higher, more sophisticated and capable forms, the image of a god seems to have a metaphorical meaning: it denotes the next, higher stage of man's development rather than the absolute, the abilities of which are unrestricted.

It is not only lack of knowledge of Latin that Ovid attributes to the narratee; he also assumes that his/her godlike status itself will constitute a great obstacle to a complete understanding of his letter. The possible problems he foresees are related to the idea of metamorphosis: it is not only mankind that is constantly changing, it is the whole reality which is changed by people in the course of their development. Ovid assumes a radical dissimilarity between the world of Tomis and the world which will have evolved out of it:

> How can I give you any notion – you who know only landscapes that have been shaped for centuries to the idea we all carry in our souls of that ideal scene against which our lives should be played out – of what earth was in its original bleakness, before we brought to it the order of industry, the terraces, fields, orchards, pastures, the irrigated gardens of the world we are making in our own image.
>
> (Malouf, *An Imaginary Life*, 28)

The reality of Tomis which Ovid is describing is the reality of the uncultivated primordial nature, completely unlike the Roman reality of culture he knew before his exile and the potential reader's world whose form will be a result of further evolution in the direction of sophistication and refinement; thus Tomis and the future world constitute two opposite endings of the process of metamorphosis. Ovid is therefore certain that the potential reader will

be unable to fully envision the reality described by him: "You can have no idea how far we have come or how far back I have been to see all this; how rudimentary our life is in its beginning" (Malouf, *An Imaginary Life*, 30).

The features attributed by Ovid to his potential reader can be related to the properties of the zero-degree narratee, a theoretical construct introduced by Prince to designate a common denominator for all the narratees.[9] Its central positive property is the command of the narrator's language; its central negative feature is lack of any prior knowledge of the world described. Living in a reality completely different from Ovid's, the narratee evoked in *An Imaginary Life* does fulfil the negative theoretical requirement; as regards the positive one, he/she appears to be even less competent than the zero-degree narratee: he/she is expected to have difficulties with the very linguistic form of Ovid's letter.

Interpreted in the context of Ovid's misgivings about the narratee's ability to envision the world he is describing, the narratee's act of translation which Ovid imagines in his letter appears to denote something more than turning Latin – in which he is, only theoretically (the book is after all written in English), writing – into some other language. It can also be construed in terms of the process of naturalisation whereby the reader turns the unfamiliar elements of the text into the familiar patterns.[10] Ovid does not appear to be concerned about his potential reader's literary competence, understood as the knowledge of genres and conventions of literature. He simply calls his text a letter and tacitly assumes that it will be read as a realistic personal account of his exile at Tomis. The realism of his story has a psychological character: he emphasises that what he is describing is what he has really experienced, even though he has not always been able to distinguish between reality and hallucination. His writerly self-consciousness is thus not of a postmodernist type: he does not flaunt his control over the fictional world, which he creates *ex nihilo*. What bothers him is whether the reader will be able to understand his experiences and imagine the world he is describing, for in order to do that he/she will need to relate the reality depicted by Ovid to the reality he/she is living in.

The image of the reader as a translator is connected with Ovid's own experience of an exile depicted in the first part of the novel. Thrown into a completely alien environment, Ovid attempts to comprehend it within the

[9] G. PRINCE, *Introduction*, pp. 9-11.

[10] Cf. J. CULLER, *Structuralist Poetics*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975, pp. 131-161.

system of codes derived from the Roman reality; he himself compares this process to reading: "the landscape itself when night shadows flow over it, is a vast page whose tongue I am unable to decipher, whose message to me I am unable to interpret" (Malouf, *An Imaginary Life*, 17). With their emphasis on the futility of his attempts, these words indicate an epistemological crisis he undergoes: the familiar codes are not adequate to the new environment and he is forced to re-adjust his interpretation of the world to the new circumstances.[11] Ovid realises that the potential reader's knowledge of the world, based on his/her experience, may, by analogy, prove inadequate for the comprehension of his/her text. Since he cannot imagine the narratee's world and relate to it the reality he is describing, there is nothing he can do but tell his story, hoping that the reader will ultimately be able to relate it to his/her experience, just as he ultimately managed to acquire and synthesise new codes in the process which enabled him to comprehend the world in which he found himself and develop a new method of approaching reality.[12]

In the course of his metamorphosis Ovid discovers a completely new form of communication based on imagination and realises that the ability to describe the reality in words is not necessary for its comprehension. Whereas in Rome he used his poetic gift to conjecture entertaining fantastic visions in his poems, in Tomis he realises that imagination can be used as means of direct communion with Nature, which renders language redundant. As Kolek observes, this new skill bears strong resemblance to John Keats's concept of Negative Capability, that is an ability to identify oneself with, or even temporarily become, the object of one's perception.[13]

Ovid's evolution from a heavy reliance on familiar forms and patterns and the ability to talk about the world towards a rejection of the language as such in favour of direct communication and unification with the universe can be correlated with the gradual disappearance of passages evoking the presence of the narratee. In the first part of the novel Ovid appears to be a very self-conscious narrator: he is well aware that he is describing his life in Tomis in a letter directed to future generations and emphasises the textuality of his text by referring to the circumstances in which it is created: "I write this by candlelight. It is dark as night in this windowless room" (Malouf, *An Imaginary Life*, 19). Once he becomes aware that the way to approach the world

[11] A. NETTLEBECK, *Imagining the Imaginary in "An Imaginary Life"*, in: *Southern Review*, 26(1993), p. 29; L.S. KOLEK, *Re-Structuring the World*, p. 116.

[12] An exhaustive analysis of Ovid's metamorphosis can be found in L.S. Kolek (*ibid.*).

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 123-124.

is to imagine oneself into it, to experience rather than to describe it, he ceases to refer to the future reader. The mode of narration seems to change from an epistolary form, with its references to the reader and the act of writing, to the psychonarration and the emphasis on the immediate impressions. It is as if Ovid immersed himself in his experiences so deeply that he is no longer aware that he is communicating them to the narratee by means of the language. Furthermore, in the final part of the novel Malouf makes Ovid pronounce the following metafictional query: "In whose trance am I making this journey?" (Malouf, *An Imaginary Life*, 144) These words can be construed as Malouf's signal to the implied reader reminding the latter that Ovid is just a fictional creation; speaking in more metaphorical terms, they suggest Ovid's dissolution into the text actually produced by Malouf, Ovid "speaking through" Malouf being another example of Negative Capability in action.[14]

The novel ends with Ovid's presentation of his own death, which is the ultimate indication of the departure from a realistically interpretable epistolary form and of the artificial character of his letter for posterity.[15] Just as Ovid's "letter" cannot be interpreted in realistic terms – as the letter "actually" written[16] – neither can the narratee be construed as the figure of the reader who could "actually" read it. The evocation of the narratee in *An Imaginary Life* is thus disclosed as a typically literary device, a signal of the generic convention, not an element of verisimilitude.

The problem which needs to be discussed at this point is whether it is Ovid, the self-conscious dramatised author, or Malouf, the implied author, who is responsible for the generic choice made. Ovid himself seems to have his reasons related to his situation in the presented world for addressing his text, at least initially, to posterity. The fact that his letter is directed to future generations might seem to be a result of his forced exile; however, he is apparently able to communicate with Rome. Having decided never to return there, he adds: "[...] I will go on writing to my wife and attorney. I shall even go on addressing Augustus, begging him to forgive my crimes and recall me" (Malouf, *An Imaginary Life*, 94). Thus, the addressing of the letter

[14] *Ibid*., p. 125.

[15] *Ibid*., p. 125, n. 8.

[16] The only way in which the narrator can describe his/her own death and retain the realistic status of an author of the text the reader is reading is the use of the future forms. This is the technique employed by Saleem Sinai, the narrator of *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie: he ends his novel with the description of what will happen to him after the act of writing is finished.

to posterity is not a matter of external circumstances but of Ovid's conscious decision. It is partly a sign of mere vanity combined with the defiance of the emperor's orders: his books being banned, he wants to survive for future generations in his letter. It can also be interpreted as a sign of Ovid's rejection of the Roman interpretive community,[17] whose reading strategies he knows all too well. Pretentious and shallow, just as he was before his exile, they would not understand his new experience in the wilderness of Tomis. Thus, Ovid prefers an unknown, hopefully unprejudiced, reader who may understand him to the familiar reader, who will definitely not understand him.

By having Ovid address his text to the future readers Malouf, on the one hand, plays a kind of a practical joke on him and makes the fictional Ovid write in the literary convention invented by the historical Ovid.[18] On the other hand, in Ovid's plight Malouf emphasises the basic element of the situation of a writer who does not expect to be understood by his contemporaries: he/she can only count on the future generations. He also demonstrates that in such a situation, when the writer's knowledge about his/her potential readers is minimal, he/she can only speculate about their response to the text. As Patrick Buckridge demonstrates, lack of any exact knowledge about his future reader on Ovid's part can be related to one of the recurrent elements of Malouf's fictional grammar, namely the motif of "a gap, silence, a blankness."[19] Obviously, in the case of *An Imaginary Life* the problem concerns Ovid, the dramatised author; Malouf, the implied author, has some knowledge of the horizon of expectations of the contemporary reading public and utilises this knowledge in his text.

According to John Stephens, there is a huge discrepancy between the audience projected by Ovid and the audience Malouf is directing his novel to. For one thing, Ovid expects that his potential reader will be forced to translate his letter from Latin into some other language, while the reader implied in the text is the reader who knows English, the language in which the novel is actually written. For another, Ovid assumes that his future readers will have evolved into gods. In Stephens's view, this element of Ovid's conjectures generates a double irony: "the reader knows that this hasn't hap-

---

[17] Cf. S. FISH, *Introduction, or How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love Interpretation*, in: *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980, p. 14.

[18] L.S. KOLEK, *Re-Structuring the World*, p. 125.

[19] P. BUCKRIDGE, *Colonial Strategies in the Writing of David Malouf*, in: *Kunapipi*, 8(1986), p. 49.

pened (whatever meaning can be assigned to gods); the narrator himself reveals a large gap between his idealised reader and his inevitable ignorance of what the reader may be."[20]

These discrepancies signal, argues the critic, the need for the separation between "the-reader-of-the-text and the reader-in-the-text (narratee)."[21] Stephens does not define the former: even though he evokes the names of Chatman and other narratologists, he seems to mean simply any real reader of the text. However, the tension between these two figures is inscribed in the text itself; thus, his "reader-of-the-text" is not any real reader, but rather the implied reader of *An Imaginary Life*. In Stephens's view the fictiveness of the narratee is Malouf's signal of the unreliability of Ovid as a narrator, resulting from the inherent limitations of the first person narration and the unstable nature of the language as such. While the narratee is expected to take Ovid at his word, the implied reader – by perceiving the narratee reading – is to realise that the events are presented from Ovid's inevitably limited point of view.

If we assume that Malouf does not share Ovid's convictions as to the godlike status of his readers, then Ovid's projection is indeed an example of unreliability as understood by Seymour Chatman, that is as a phenomenon involving the implied author communicating with the implied reader behind the narrator's back.[22] However, it is questionable whether the distinction between the narratee and the (implied) reader is necessary for the interpretation of the novel's ending, as Stephens claims. He argues that the tension between the narratee's and the (implied) reader's perceptions of Ovid reinforces the effect of the open ending, which results from the ambiguity with which Ovid's final experience is presented: "the abandonment of the narrator to the Child's world may be a culmination of growth, a unification of past and present, as he claims, or it may be only self-deception and illusion."[23] The ambiguity of the ending is caused, in Stephens's view, by Ovid's fluctuation between two points of view: the perceptual one, which denotes an actual act of seeing, and the conceptual one, which refers to the process of ordering and interpreting the perceptual data. In the final part of the novel the perceptual point of view fails: Ovid is unable to see what is "really"

[20] J. STEPHENS, *"Beyond the Limits of our [sic] Speech...": David Malouf's "An Imaginary Life"*, in: *Commonwealth Novel in English*, 3 (1990), p. 164.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 163.

[22] S. CHATMAN, *Story and Discourse*, p. 233.

[23] J. STEPHENS, *"Beyond the Limits of our [sic] Speech..."*, p. 168.

happening, as his rhetorical questions indicate, and he is forced to rely on the conceptual point of view, that is, to invent the events according to the pattern of an expected illumination.

Stephens' demonstration of the ambiguity of the ending is very convincing, though he does not point out that Ovid is describing his own death,[24] in view of which fact a lack of precise perception might be justified. However, it is rather unclear why he relates the differentiation between two points of view to the distinction between the narratee and the reader:

> The narratee to whom all is addressed is limited to the point of view of the narrator, since she/he is not able to see anything else. Whereas the reader is in a position to see the narrator seeing, and that makes the important difference. For as the narrator sees perceptually, he also interprets.[25]

Stephens seems to assume that the narratee's point of view is limited to the perceptual one, whereas the reader can apparently recognise both of them; *ergo*, the narratee believes that what Ovid describes is what "really" happens, while the reader realises that this might be just his illusion. However, there are no signals in *An Imaginary Life* that the narratee, whose position is established as being analogous to that of the reader, cannot see that Ovid might be deluding himself. Thus, though Stephens derives his model of literary communication from the theories of Chatman and other narratologists, his understanding of the notion of the narratee is actually closer to Peter J. Rabinowitz's concept of the ideal narrative audience, denoting the audience which believes not only that the events described by the narrator happened in reality but also that they happened exactly in the manner described by the narrator, irrespective of how unreliable he/she might appear to the reader.[26]

The readers projected by Ovid and Malouf do indeed differ and this discrepancy does signal Malouf's irony underlying Ovid's image of future gods; however, the difference between these two addressees of the text seems to be related to the amount of the knowledge they are assumed to possess, not their credulity. Furthermore, the relationship between the "you" addressed by Ovid

---

[24] That the novel ends with Ovid's death is taken for granted by most interpreters of the novel; cf., e.g. L.S. KOLEK, *Re-Structuring the World*, p. 125, n. 8; P. BISHOP, *David Malouf and the Language of Exile*, in: *Australian Literary Studies*, 10 (1982), p. 426; A.G. MCDONALD, *Beyond Language: David Malouf's "An Imaginary Life"*, in: *Ariel*, 19 (1988), p. 46.

[25] J. STEPHENS, *"Beyond the Limits of our [sic] Speech..."*, p. 166.

[26] P. J. RABINOWITZ, *Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences*, in: *Critical Inquiry*, 4 (1977), p. 134.

and the reader projected by Malouf does not preclude the latter's identification, albeit temporal, with the former. Since there are no signals to the contrary in the text, I assume that Malouf is directing his novel to his contemporaries, not writing another letter for posterity. If it is so, then Ovid, the narrator, and the implied reader projected by Malouf are separated by a time gap of some two thousand years. Thus, Ovid's words emphasising that he is directing his letter to future generations invite the implied reader to identify with the "you" of the narratee. Likewise, Ovid is right in his assumption about the general course of changes in the world: the implied reader lives in the world much different from the primitive reality of Tomis. Finally, the manner in which the narratee is evoked in *An Imaginary Life* allows the implied reader's identification with the "you" addressed by Ovid: the latter speaks in a tentative manner and his conjectures take mainly the form of questions.

And yet Ovid's direct communication with the implied reader assumed by Malouf is disclosed as an illusion, an artificial literary device. Malouf makes Ovid pronounce words which remind the implied reader that Ovid is projecting a certain receiver, his projections being determined by his own situation within the fictional world, as his assumption that his text will be translated from Latin by a godlike reader demonstrates.

Furthermore, Malouf expects his reader to utilise an extratextual knowledge about the historical Ovid in his/her interpretation of the text, though again we can observe here a certain degree of tension between Ovid's speculations and Malouf's assumptions. It might seem that the fictional Ovid presumes that the narratee's knowledge about him will come only from his letter; in fact, however, he assumes that the narratee might know his poems:

> Have you heard my name? Ovid? Am I still known? Has some line of my writing escaped the banning of my books from all the libraries and their public burning, my expulsion from the Latin tongue?
>
> (Malouf, *An Imaginary Life*, 19)

Obviously, Ovid cannot know the answers to these questions; he can only speculate about what the reader projected by him might know. It is the implied reader projected by Malouf who is expected to recognise Ovid's name and to know what happened to the historical Ovid and his writings. Ovid's anachronistic dream of the horsemen searching for his grave is another example of the motif whose significance can be recognised only if one knows that the unknown location of Ovid's grave remains a subject of much speculation.

As can be seen, the implied reader's knowledge is assumed to be more extensive than the knowledge tentatively attributed by Ovid to the narratee.

In *An Imaginary Life* the narrator, directing his letter to posterity, assumes a minimal competence on the part of the narratee, living in the reality completely different from his. The self-conscious narrator of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, in contrast, assumes that he and his readers belong to the same interpretive community and share the knowledge of the Victorian fiction, necessary for a complete comprehension of his artistic project. The attribution of the high degree of competence to the narratee evoked in this text results from the peculiar character of Fowles's novel, namely its being a twentieth-century postmodern metafictional parody of the nineteenth-century Victorian novel.

The narrator's assumption that he and the narratee belong to the same community is signalled by means of the frequent appearance of the combination of the evocative *you* and the inclusive *we*. This correlation can, for instance, be observed in the following description of Mrs Poulteney's addiction:

> [...] she was an opium-addict – but before *you* think I am wildly sacrificing plausibility to sensation, let me quickly add that she did not know it. What *we* call opium she called laudanum. A shrewd, if blasphemous doctor of the time called it Our-Lordanum, since many a nineteenth-century lady [...] sipped it a good deal more frequently than Communion wine. It was, in short, a very near equivalent of *our* own age's sedative pills.[27]

Apart from emphasising the similarity between the narrator and the narratee, the phrase "our age" suggests that the "we" does not refer only to the narrator and the narratee; rather, it emphasises that both of them are just representatives of a larger interpretive community, whose perspective on the Victorians is shaped by the twentieth-century experience. In his interpretation of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* Jerome Bump calls the narrator a protoreader of Victorian fiction and tradition, thus emphasising the fact that the narrator himself represents the modern manner of approaching (reading) the Victorians.[28]

---

[27] J. FOWLES, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, London: Panther, 1971, p. 82; italics mine. All the subsequent references to this novel, included parenthetically in the text, are to this edition.

[28] J. BUMP, *The Narrator as Protoreader in "The French Lieutenant's Woman"*, in: *The Victorian Newsletter*, 74 (1988), pp. 16-18.

The proximity between the narrator and the narratee is reinforced by the former's emphasis on the temporal distance separating the realm of narration from the presented world. Throughout the novel the narrator emphasises that he is a twentieth-century author (obviously, in the sense of a dramatised, not implied author) describing for a twentieth-century reader the world of the past. The opening paragraph explicitly situates the events described in the year 1867; the references to Henry Moore and the Cobb as it looks "today" (Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, 7-8) a few lines later signal the narrator's twentieth-century perspective. As James Phelan observes, there are no indications in the text that we should distinguish between the "today" of the time of narration and the time of publication (1969) and thus we can assume that Fowles situates the act of narration in the late 1960s.[29]

The narrator's reliance on the narratee's twentieth-century competence can be observed in a number of motifs. On the most basic level it provides a basis for the narrator's references to modern art or inventions, such as an atomic bomb or television. It also surfaces in the narrator's little jokes based on the assumption of the narratee's knowledge of history, which enables him/her, for instance, to recognise the figure whose importance could not have possibly been noticed by Charles, the protagonist, from his Victorian perspective:

> Needless to say, Charles knew nothing of the bearded Jew quietly working, as it so happened, that very afternoon in the British Museum library; and whose work in those sombre walls was to bear such bright red fruit. Had you described that fruit, or the subsequent effects of its later indiscriminate consumption, Charles would almost certainly not have believed you – and even though, in only six months from the March of 1867, the first volume of *Kapital* was to appear in Hamburg.
>
> (Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, 16)

The competence attributed to the narratee does not comprise only the knowledge of modern inventions and key historical figures and events. It also includes a very important literary, or rather textual, component. The narrator assumes that the narratee has a certain image of the Victorians, an image based on his/her knowledge of textual representations of this epoch, including both historical studies and literary texts. The novel abounds in stock figures and motifs of Victorian fiction; however, as Malcolm Bradbury emphasises,

[29] J. PHELAN, *Reading People, Reading Plots*, p. 85.

it is not merely a text full of intertextual allusions to particular Victorian authors and themes: "the Victorian novel Fowles reconstructs and pastiches is not that of a single Victorian novelist – Dickens, Trollope, Wilkie Collins, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, though all these contribute elements – but the Victorian novel as an archetype, the sum of the writings of and indeed about the idea of Victorianism."[30] This open reliance on the Victorian models specifies the narratee's competence: he/she is not expected to know some universal rules of fiction making; he/she is to know conventions of the Victorian fiction. The narratee projected in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* can therefore be related to Riffatterre's notion of the Superreader, which denotes the sum total of existing responses to a given text.[31] In the case of Fowles's novel the narratee is the embodiment of the existing readings not of a single text, but of the whole Victorian fiction.

The direct address to the narratee-potential-reader is obviously one of numerous typically Victorian devices which Fowles consciously parodies in his novel;[32] however, it is not a mere imitation of the Victorian direct address. Rather, in a typically postmodern manner, Fowles simultaneously reconstructs and subverts its Victorian character. On the one hand, being typical of novels by Thackeray or Trollope, the direct address to the reader endows *The French Lieutenant's Woman* with the characteristics of a Victorian novel and thus makes it seem to be one. On the other hand, the narrator's remarks directed to the narratee usually remind him/her that he/she is not actually reading a Victorian novel, but a postmodern self-conscious text about Victorians.

Furthermore, in his direct addresses to the narratee the narrator simultaneously requires of the narratee the ability to recognise the fictional models he is alluding to and discloses their inadequacy. Describing Charles' servant Sam, for instance, he assumes that the narratee will automatically associate him with the Dickensian predecessor: "Of course to us any Cockney servant evokes immediately the immortal Weller" (Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, 41). In this direct address the intertextual referent is explicitly evoked, with the words "of course" and "immediately" signalling that its identity is so obvious that the narratee would not really need the narrator's help. Ostentatious as it is, the narrator's commentary has a rather self-ironic cha-

[30] M. BRADBURY, *The Modern British Novel*, London: Penguin, 1994, p. 357.

[31] M. RIFFATERRE, *Describing Poetic Structure*.

[32] Cf. L. HUTCHEON, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, London and New York: Routledge, 1988, p. 45.

racter: it shows that twentieth-century readers, including the narrator himself ("us"), tend to pigeonhole Victorians according to the patterns, or rather stereotypes, derived from Victorian fiction. The fact that not every Victorian servant, fictional or real, must be a copy of Sam Weller is emphasised on the very next page of the novel: "But the difference between Sam Weller and Sam Farrow (that is, between 1836 and 1867) was this: the first was happy with his role, the second suffered it" (Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, 42).

Thus, in his comments directed to the narratee, the narrator self-consciously reminds him/her that his/her image of the Victorians is based on the textual representations of the epoch, not a direct contact with their world. His aim is obviously not to create a "true," unmediated image of the Victorians, this being an impossible task, but rather to impose on the narratee the awareness of the textual character of the twentieth-century perspective on Victorians. Thus the novel is as much about Victorians as about the modern image of them. One could notice here parallels with Edward Said's discussion of Orientalism as a textual representation of the East,[33] the only difference between Victorianism and Orientalism would be the fact that the twentieth-century image of the Victorians comprises their self-representation whereas Orientalism includes only the Western representation of the East.

The narrator assumes that the narratee's twentieth-century perspective may even be an impediment to a better understanding of the presented world. In his self-conscious comments he reminds the narratee that he/she should not evaluate the characters and their actions according to the standards of his/her age. Thus, in his description of Charles' equipment for his walks, he does point out its being ridiculously fastidious; however, he also adds the following commentary on the presumed reaction of the narratee:

> Well, we laugh. But perhaps there is something admirable in this dissociation between what is most comfortable and what is most recommended. We meet here, once again, this bone of contention between the two centuries: is duty to drive us, or not? If we take this obsession with dressing the part, with being prepared for every eventuality, as mere stupidity, blindness to the empirical, we make, I believe, a grave – or rather a frivolous – mistake about our ancestors; because it was men not unlike Charles, and as over-dressed and over-equipped as he was that day, who laid the foundations of all our modern science. Their folly in that direction was no more than a symptom of their seriousness in a much more important one. [...] [T]hey knew, in short, that they had things to discover, and that

[33] Cf. E. SAID, *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

> the discovery was of the utmost importance to the future of man. We think (unless we live in a research laboratory) that we have nothing to discover, and that the only things of the utmost importance to us concern the present of man. So much the better for us? Perhaps. But we are not the ones who will finally judge.
>
> (Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, 45-46)

The narrator of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* distances himself from the stereotypical image of Victorians, widespread in his times, and attempts to present them in a less biased manner. As Bump puts it, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* "helps the twentieth-century reader overthrow his own complacency and prejudices about the Victorians and come to appreciate and even admire some of the profound ways in which they differ as well as resemble ourselves."[34]

Less biased does not mean less fictional; in the famous thirteenth chapter the self-conscious narrator of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* breaks the mimetic spell and reminds the narratee that he/she is reading a modern parody of a Victorian novel, not a historical account of "real" events:

> This story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind. If I have pretended until now to know my characters' minds and innermost thoughts, it is because I am writing in (just as I have assumed some of the vocabulary and the 'voice' of) a convention universally accepted at the time of my story: that the novelist stands next to God. He may not know all, yet he tries to pretend that he does. But I live in the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes. If this is a novel, it cannot be a novel in the modern sense of the word.
>
> (Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, 85)

The narrator's metafictional intervention involves not only the disclosure of the fictionality of the presented world; more importantly, it is also an exposition of his artistic theory. He expects that the narratee, his twentieth century perspective and possible familiarity with more experimental forms notwithstanding, assumes the author's control over his/her creation: "Perhaps you suppose that a novelist has only to pull the right strings and his puppets will behave in a lifelike manner; and produce on request a thorough analysis of their motives and intentions" (Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, 85). The narrator of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* explicitly renounces this simple idea of the authorial control, most visibly embodied in the notion of

[34] J. BUMP, *The Narrator as Protoreader*, p. 16.

an omniscient narrator. This gesture is not mere rejection of an outmoded, Victorian, point of view in favour of a more modern one. It is rather a reflection of his existentialist notion of God as "the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist" (Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, 86) and an organic idea of the fictional world, which develops partly outside the author's control. Lack of omniscience is thus the manifestation of the autonomy of characters: the progression of the narrative is determined by their qualities and not the author's initial plans or conventional patterns. This is the explanation the narrator gives for his inability to present Sarah's innermost feelings: "I know in the context of my book's reality that Sarah would never have brushed away her tears and delivered a chapter of revelation" (Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, 85).

It might seem that by means of these confessions addressed to the "you" of the narratee Fowles wants to ensure that his text will be interpreted properly, that is as a quasi-reality in which both characters and chance (symbolised by the coin) can influence the development of the story over which he exerts but a partial control. However, self-conscious and self-disclosing as the narrator of the novel is, his metafictional comments cannot be interpreted as direct guidelines for its interpretation. As Phelan demonstrates in his very insightful analysis of the novel, the "I" speaking in it cannot be identified with Fowles. Even though throughout the larger part of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* the distinction between the author and the narrator is blurred, in a number of motifs the fictionality of the speaking "I" is disclosed.

The distance separating the author from the narrator of the novel is – paradoxically – underlined in the thirteenth chapter, which only seemingly can be interpreted as Fowles's self-conscious presentation of the process of writing. Phelan observes that an apparently spontaneous confession of an inability to enter Sarah's mind and rejection of total control over characters cannot but be interpreted as elements which have been consciously included in the text by the author.[35] In other words, Fowles's design for the novel includes the narrator's confession that he had to reject his earlier plans. Likewise, the narrator's insistence that Charles suggested his own action is another metafictional element planned by Fowles, the implied author. Thus, the narrator's metafictional comments appear to be the reverse of what the author himself wants to convey: "the narrator's claim about the autonomy of the

[35] J. PHELAN, *Reading People, Reading Plots*, p. 93.

characters functions as the signal from the author that these characters are constructs."[36]

Phelan relates the distance between the author and the narrator to the distance between authorial and narrative audiences.[37] He emphasises that the former type of audience is well aware of the fictionality of the presented world and the constructedness of the text, whereas the latter reads everything realistically and takes the narrator at his word. Their respective approaches to reading condition the manner in which each of them interprets the self-conscious renunciation of control presented in the thirteenth chapter:

> [...] the authorial audience views this 'confession' by the narrator as a move in the author's construction of the whole [...] Reading without the first principle that everything is constructed, the narrative audience takes the narrator at his word and therefore reads on in the expectation that the narrative will continue to develop in this unplanned, organic way. The authorial audience, meanwhile, will seek to uncover what synthetic [planned by the author] purposes the signs of the allegedly unplanned development are actually serving.[38]

Thus, in Phelan's view, the narrative structure of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* comprises two levels of communication: the narrator addressing the narrative audience and the author addressing – behind the narrator's back – the authorial audience, with the latter one endowing the novel with its modern characteristics. After the thirteenth chapter the narrative audience simply "continues to read as if it is in the company of a reliable nineteenth-century narrator,"[39] whereas the authorial one realises the metafictional intent of the novel and combines an emotional involvement with the awareness of the constructedness of the presented world. Phelan's final conclusion is that by balancing the realistic and metafictional elements Fowles develops in his audiences, authorial and real, the awareness of the three dimensions of fictional characters: mimetic, that is their being human-like; synthetic, that is their being semiotic constructs, and thematic, that is their being embodiments of larger themes of a given text.[40]

The narrator and the author of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* are not indeed altogether identical; however, it seems questionable whether this di-

---

[36] *Ibid*., p. 94.
[37] Cf. P.J. RABINOWITZ, *Truth in Fiction*, p. 134.
[38] J. PHELAN, *Reading People, Reading Plots*, p. 93.
[39] *Ibid*., p. 93.
[40] *Ibid*., p. 104.

stinction can be related to a differentiation between narrative and authorial audiences. Following Rabinowitz, Phelan assumes that the former audience (1) takes the narrator at his word – it believes, for example, that he grants freedom to his characters – and (2) is unaware of the constructedness, or what Phelan calls the synthetic component, of the characters.[41] However, he seems to overlook the fact that in the case of self-conscious narration the application of this definition leads to an aporia. At the very beginning of the thirteenth chapter, the narrator of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* announces that the story he is telling is just a product of his imagination. If the narrative audience by definition believes the narrator, then it must accept his words and stop treating the characters as real, thus ceasing to be the audience satisfying the second requirement of the unawareness of the synthetic component of the character. The example of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* suggests that the narrative audience, as defined by Rabinowitz (and employed by Phelan), is not a concept which can denote a recipient addressed by the narrator. It rather refers to a certain type of reading, one which is based on the willing suspension of disbelief and which can be observed in the act of reading realist fiction. Phelan himself presents the activity of the authorial audience as an oscillation between mimetic and metafictional readings; paradoxically then, it moves between being a narrative audience and itself.

It therefore transpires that the communicative structure of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* can be better described if the notion of the narratee, understood as the audience whose manner of reading is determined by the narrator's assumptions and not a priori theoretical presuppositions, is employed. In Fowles's novel the qualities that the narrator attributes to this potential reader comprise, first and foremost, his/her knowledge of Victorian fiction and Victorianism, not a propensity for a crudely mimetic reading. As a matter of fact, the narrator assumes that his metafictional disclosure at the beginning of the thirteenth chapter may even reinforce the narratee's awareness of the fact that his novel is just a fictional reconstruction of the past. Hence he argues that the exposure of the fictionality of the characters paradoxically enhances their verisimilitude. In a passage which prefigures the theories of the narrative identity developed in the 80s and 90s,[42] he reminds

[41] *Ibid*., p. 91.

[42] Cf., e.g., P. RICOEUR, *Time and Narrative*, trans. K. Blamey, D. Pellaur, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984-1988; A. GIDDENS, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991. The interpretation of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* itself in terms of the narratives the characters of the novel

the narratee that people's lives have always consisted of stories in which fiction and reality are mingled:

> But this is preposterous? A character is either 'real' or 'imaginary'? If you think that, *hypocrite lecteur*, I can only smile. You do not even think of your own past as quite real; you dress it up, you gild it or blacken it, censor it, tinker with it ... fictionalise it, in a word, and put it away on a shelf – your book, your romanced autobiography. We are all in flight from the real reality. That is a basic definition of *Homo sapiens*.
>
> (Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, 87)

The theme of the interplay between fiction and reality is further developed in motifs which abolish the borderline between the realm of the story and that of the narration. The narrator of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* claims, for instance, that "Mary's [the character's] great-great-granddaughter, who is twenty-two years old this month [he] write[s] in, much resembles her ancestor; and her face is known over the entire world, for she is one of the most celebrated young English film actresses" (Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, 69). Such passages can be naturalised within the realistic framework: they suggest a continuity between the "now" of narration and the "then" of the story. However, the appearance of the narrator in the train compartment in which Charles is travelling, that is within the fictional world, is an instance of true metalepsis[43]: the narrator in one arbitrary gesture abolishes the time gap between 1867 and 1969, thus emphasising the constructedness of both the level of narration and the level of the story.

The narrator's intrusion into the presented world is an ultimate signal that the "I" speaking in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is a fictional persona constructed by the implied author of the text. It emphasises that the act of narration presented in the text cannot be naturalised in terms of verisimilitude: the "real" author cannot claim that he met the character created by him. This does not mean, however, that the narrator cannot be regarded as a spokesperson for the implied author and express his or her ideas. In the criticism of the novel the narrator's commentaries on Victorians and Victorianism are

---

produce, transform and subvert can be found in K. TARBOX, *"The French Lieutenant's Woman" and the Evolution of Narrative*, in: *Twentieth Century Literature*, 42 (1996), pp. 88-102.

[43] The term *metalepsis* was introduced by Gerald Genette to designate a transgression of narrative levels. Cf. G. GENETTE, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*, trans. J.E. Lewin, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980, p. 236.

regarded as manifestations of Fowles's approach to these issues[44]. The effect Fowles creates is again a postmodern tension and ambiguity: he simultaneously directly comments on his own text and precludes an easy identification of the narrator with the author of the text.

By the same token, the narrator's image of the narratee he is addressing reveals the implied author's assumptions as to the implied reader of his text, the latter's cultural background being especially important. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* seems to be addressed to a reader possessing deep knowledge of the British history and culture, necessary for the understanding of the narrator's allusions. Thus, it might seem that the novel will be incomprehensible for readers unfamiliar with these issues. And yet again Fowles can have his cake and eat it: the realistic aspect of the text, its storyline, develops in the way which enables an emotional involvement of the reader, uninterested in the (meta)historical aspects of the novel. Furthermore, the relationship between the Victorians and the modern image of them is just an illustration of a more general issue, namely a relationship between history and fiction.

The two novels discussed above illustrate two possible extremes of the competence attributed by the narrator to the narratee: the narrator of Malouf's novel explicitly doubts whether the reader he is addressing will be able to comprehend his text, Fowles-the-dramatised-author, on his part, establishes a sense of community between himself and his narratee. Obviously, in between these two limits some other novels can be situated. John Berger's *G.*, for instance, does not include any similar signals which would allow one to locate its narratee in any of the two extremes; the narratee of this text seems to occupy a middle position as regards the competence attributed to him/her by the narrator.

The degree of the interpretive competence attributed to the narratee is related to the type of the dramatised author's artistic project and the convention adopted by him/her or the implied author. The form of the letter for posterity, employed in *An Imaginary Life*, involves the evocation of a minimally competent degree-zero narratee, virtually unknown to the narrator. On the other hand, the postmodern reworking and questioning of Victorianism conducted by an ostentatiously self-conscious dramatised author of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* requires the presence of an addressee familiar with the tradition he is referring to.

---

[44] Cf., e.g., A.S. BYATT, *People in Paper Houses: Attitudes to 'Realism' and 'Experiment' in English Postwar Fiction*, in: *The Contemporary English Novel*, ed. M. Bradbury, D. Palmer, Stradford-upon-Avon Studies 18, London: Edward Arnold, 1979, p. 28.

The narratee's competence plays an important role in the reconstruction of the implied reader. The examples of the texts analysed above suggest that whether it can also be ascribed to the latter depends on the relationship between the narrator and the implied author. In *An Imaginary Life* the implied author and the narrator (dramatised author) are obviously two distinct figures; consequently, the narratee with his/her godlike status and a rudimentary knowledge of the language in which his text is written, assumed by Ovid, cannot be identified with the implied reader projected by Malouf. On the other hand, in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* the distinction between author and narrator is undermined, which suggests that the properties attributed to the "you" evoked in this novel can also be attributed to the implied reader projected by Fowles.

Regardless of the competence attributed to him/her, the narratee's presence in the communicative structure of the text reminds the implied reader that he/she is reading a text which projects a certain fictional world rather than offers a direct access to reality. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman* the dramatised author openly addresses to him/her his metafictional comments on the problems involved in the craft of fiction and linguistic representation. Whereas he lays bare the device in an ostentatious, self-conscious manner, Malouf reminds the implied reader of the fictionality of the presented world by disclosing the artificiality of Ovid's letter to the "you" of the future readers, the title of his novel being obviously another signal of the imaginary nature of the text.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. *Primary texts*

MALOUF, D.: An Imaginary Life. A Novel (1978), London: Picador, 1980.
FOWLES, J.: The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969), London: Panther, 1971.

2. *Secondary texts*

BISHOP, P.: David Malouf and the Language of Exile, in: *Australian Literary Studies*, 10 (1982), pp. 419-428.
BRADBURY, M.: The Modern British Novel. London: Penguin 1994.
BUCKRIDGE, P.: Colonial Strategies in the Writing of David Malouf, in: *Kunapipi*, 8 (1986), pp. 48-58.
BUMP, J.: The Narrator as Protoreader in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, in: *The Victorian Newsletter*, 74 (1988), pp. 16-18.

BYATT, A.S.: People in Paper Houses: Attitudes to 'Realism' and 'Experiment' in English Postwar Fiction, in: The Contemporary English Novel, ed. M. Bradbury, D. Palmer, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 18, London: Edward Arnold, 1979, pp. 19-42.

CHATMAN, S.: Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978.

CULLER, J.: Structuralist Poetics, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975.

FISH, S.: Introduction, or How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love Interpretation, in: Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1980, pp. 1-20.

GENETTE, G.: Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method, trans. J.E. Lewin, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980.

GIDDENS, A.: Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.

HUTCHEON, L.: A Poetics of Postmodernism, London and New York: Routledge, 1988.

KALAGA, W., PROWER, E.: The Reader as Character, in: Discourse and Character, ed. W. Kalaga, T. Sławek. Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski, 1990, pp. 31-39.

KOLEK, L.S.: Re-Structuring the World: David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life*, in: The Evidence of Literature. Interrogating Texts in English Studies, ed. S.-J. Spånberg, H. Kardela, G. Porter, Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Press, 2000, pp. 113-128.

MCDONALD, A.G.: Beyond Language: David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life*, in: *Ariel*, 19 (1988), pp. 45-54.

NETTLEBECK, A.: Imagining the Imaginary in *An Imaginary Life*, in: *Southern Review*, 26 (1993), pp. 28-38.

PHELAN, J.: Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

PRINCE, G.: Introduction to the Study of the Narratee, trans. F. Mariner, in: J. E. Tompkins (ed.), Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, pp. 7-25.

RABINOWITZ, P.J.: Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences, in: *Critical Inquiry*, 4 (1977), pp. 121-141.

RICOEUR, P.: Time and Narrative, vol. 1-3, trans. K. Blamey, D. Pellaur, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984-1988.

RIFFATERRE, M.: Describing Poetic Structures: Two Approaches to Baudelaire's "Les Chats", in: *Yale French Studies*, 36-37 (1966), pp. 200-42.

SAID, E.: Orientalism, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

STEPHENS, J.: "Beyond the Limits of our [sic] Speech...": David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life*, in: *Commonwealth Novel in English*, 3 (1990), pp. 160-168.

TARBOX, K.: *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and the Evolution of Narrative, in: *Twentieth Century Literature*, 42 (1996), pp. 88-102.

GRANICE KOMPETENCJI INTERPRETACYJNEJ ODBIORCY NARRACJI
ANALIZA ZWROTÓW DO CZYTELNIKA W *AN IMAGINARY LIFE* DAVIDA MALOUFA I *KOCHANICY FRANCUZA* JOHNA FOWLESA

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Podstawowym składnikiem tożsamości odbiorcy narracji jest kompetencja interpretacyjna zakładana przez narratora. Dwie współczesne powieści anglojęzyczne analizowane w powyższym artykule reprezentują dwa skrajne przypadki kompetencji przypisywanej odbiorcy narracji: jej minimalny oraz maksymalny zakres.

An Imaginary Life jest przykładem tekstu, w którym występuje odbiorca o minimalnej kompetencji interpretacyjnej. Sytuacja komunikacyjna wynikająca z przyjętej konwencji (listu do potomności) powoduje, iż narrator, rzymski poeta Owidiusz, zakłada, że odbiorca jego tekstu, żyjący w rzeczywistości zupełnie innej od rzeczywistości przezeń opisywanej i posługujący się innym niż łacina językiem, z trudem zrozumie jego list. Przykład tej powieści pokazuje, że odbiorca narracji jest fikcyjnym elementem tekstu, składnikiem określonej konwencji, różnym od czytelnika zakładanego przez autora.

Kochanica Francuza jest z kolei przykładem tekstu, w którym narrator przypisuje odbiorcy narracji maksymalną kompetencję. Również w tym przypadku wynika to z przyjętej konwencji literackiej. Powieść Fowlesa jest specyficznym przykładem powieści historycznej, w której narrator nieustannie podkreśla swą dwudziestowieczną perspektywę. W komentarzach adresowanych do czytelnika zakłada on, że odbiorca jego tekstu należy do tej samej co on wspólnoty kulturowej i jest w stanie zauważyć liczne nawiązania do literatury wiktoriańskiej. Celem narratora jest uświadomienie dwudziestowiecznemu czytelnikowi, że jego obraz wiktorian oparty jest na stereotypach zaczerpniętych z literatury oraz przekonaniu o wyższości współczesnej kultury.

Słowa kluczowe: odbiorca narracji, kompetencja interpretacyjna, narracja, zwrot do czytelnika, David Malouf, John Fowles, *Kochanica Francuza*, *An Imaginary Life*.

Key words: narratee, interpretive competence, narration, reader address, David Malouf, John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, *An Imaginary Life*.