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## **Two Metaphors for the Experience of Narrative Worlds CHAPTER ONE**

Our lives overflow with experiences of narrative worlds. Even a brief story told in response to "What did you do last night?" can swiftly remove us from our day-to-day reality. At another extreme, we can disappear for hours into the narrative worlds of books and movies. Some narratives are created out of fact, some out of fantasy. Some are intended to communicate serious truths; some communicate pure joy. Some narratives are deeply memorable; some make only a fleeting impression. I am concerned in this book with explicating a common core at the heart of the various experiences of narratives. My goal is to understand the repertory of cognitive processes that give substance to this variety of worlds.

I approach this goal largely through close analyses of phenomena that figure prominently in readers' reports of their experiences. Scholars in a number of traditions have provided observations on the interaction of readers and narratives. I use many of those observations to show how current psychological accounts of narrative understanding must be extended and refined. At the same time, I describe how psychological theories can be used

to capture regularities of experience that have often been overlooked within competing traditions. My overarching aim will be to construct a theory that is equally respectful of the effects authors can achieve and the mechanisms by which they achieve them.

In this chapter, I present two metaphors that are often used to characterize experiences of narratives: readers are often described as *being transported* by a narrative by virtue of *performing* that narrative. My evocation of these metaphors will enable me to refer concretely to otherwise elusive aspects of readers' experiences: conceptual metaphors often function in just this way to structure domains of experience that cannot be accessed through literal language. Lakoff and Johnson (1980; see also Lakoff, 1987) cite an abundance of examples to support their theory that most such metaphorical mappings are nonarbitrary. Examination of the target experiences can make evident the profound appropriateness of the metaphors; analysis of the metaphors, in turn, can reveal important insights into psychological structure. I adhere to this philosophy in introducing the two metaphors of being transported and performance. These two images will serve both as shorthand expressions for what it feels like to experience narrative worlds and as touchstones for generating research questions about those experiences.

### **On Being Transported**

Andrew Parent, the hero of Paul Theroux's novel *My Secret History*, has been through some rough times. At a particularly low point, he picks up his travel journal and begins to read:

I laughed out loud. Then I stopped, hearing the echo of the strange sound. For a moment in my reading I have been transported, and I had forgotten everything—all my worry and depression, the crisis in my marriage, my anger, my

jealousy. I had seen the Indian sitting across the aisle from me in the wooden carriage, and the terraced fields on the steep slopes, and the way the train brushed the long stemmed wild flowers that grew beside the track.

It was half a world away, and because it was so separate from me, and yet so complete, I laughed. It was a truthful glimpse of a different scene. It cheered me up. It was like looking at a brilliant picture and losing myself in it. (p. 402)

In these paragraphs, Parent twice invokes the metaphor of being transported to a narrative world: once explicitly, "I have *been transported*," and once by family resemblance, "*losing myself* [in a brilliant picture]." This metaphor, in fact, goes a long way toward capturing one of the most prominent phenomenological aspects of the experience of narrative worlds. Readers become "lost in a book" (see Nell, 1988); moviegoers are surprised when the lights come back up; television viewers care desperately about the fates of soap opera characters; museum visitors are captivated by the stories encoded in daubs of paint. In each case, a narrative serves to transport an experiencer away from the here and now.

Before I elaborate the metaphor of being transported more fully, I will use this first glimpse as background to sketch out informal definitions of *narratives* and *narrative worlds*. A classic definition of *narrative* comes from the work of Labov (1972), who gathered a large corpus of naturalistic narratives to support his analysis: "We define a narrative as one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred" (pp. 359-60). Against this background, Labov sets as a "minimal narrative" a "sequence of two clauses which are temporally ordered" (p. 360). He goes on to identify six structural components that storytellers may use to move beyond this minimum to create a fully formed narrative. Labov's account of the structure of

narratives has proven to be valuable in the description of the storytelling behavior of both adults (Polanyi, 1989) and children (McCabe and Peterson, 1991).

Labov's definition will enable me to draw a contrast between narratives and the experience of narrative worlds. Consider this exchange from Peter Smith's novel *Make-Believe Ballrooms*:

"Where are you calling from?" I said as I switched off the tape recorder.

"Texas. Yippee. Bore me, I mean. Bore me. Just kiddin'. Aagh, I've just taken some poison 'cause I can't stand to be here. Oh, no, I'm commitin' suicide. Just kiddin', Bob, Texas is fine—" (p. 115)

Although no part of the reply, which is uttered by the character Mary-Ann, would match the structure even of Labov's minimal narrative, it nonetheless provides the potential for a visit to a narrative world. Even had Mary-Ann's reply been limited simply to "Texas," she would have given readers the opportunity to be mentally transported to Texas. If we define the experience of narrative worlds with respect to an endpoint (the operation of whatever set of mental processes transports the reader) rather than with respect to a starting point (a text with some formal features), we can see that no a priori limits can be put on the types of language structures that might prompt the construction of narrative worlds. If Mary-Ann's rich evocation of Texas transports readers to Texas, then it matters little that the utterance "Texas" looks nothing like a formal narrative.

Note that I am ignoring issues of aesthetics in this broad (and hazy) definition of narrative worlds. Bruner (1986), for example, asserts that "narrative deals with the vicissitudes of human intentions" (p. 16) largely to create a context in which he can examine what makes a narrative effective or ineffective. He goes on to describe some of the methods by which good stories draw their readers in. For one method, Bruner implies that texts which

require readers to fill in gaps—by forcing " 'meaning performance' upon the reader" (p. 27)—will, on the whole, be better stories (that is, higher-quality visits to narrative worlds). Bruner might be correct in the connections he hypothesizes between content features of narratives and aesthetic experiences. Even so, some core set of processes is likely to allow readers to experience narrative worlds even when the stories themselves are poorly crafted. In fact, as I argue in later chapters, one of the most profound aspects of the experience of narrative worlds is how very hard it is *not* to show some features of being transported, whatever the quality of the narrative. "Texas" may not constitute an elegant entry into a narrative world nor sustain a lengthy visit, but it has as much right to invoke the processes that constitute "being transported" as the best passages of the literary canon.

Not all readers, of course, would take up the invitation to visit Texas. Once we identify a narrative world as the product of some set of processes, we must acknowledge that the experiences of narrative worlds will be optional: a text cannot force a reader to experience a narrative world. Even something that optimally qualifies as a narrative with respect to Labov or Bruner's templates will on some occasions fail to bring about the type of participation that ensures the creation of a narrative world.

A similar claim is captured in the distinction that has been drawn between *propositional* representations of texts versus *situation models* (van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983) or *mental models* (Johnson-Laird, 1983). Early research on comprehension demonstrated that readers begin the analysis of a text by extracting basic units of meaning, or propositions (see Kintsch, 1974, 1978; Ratcliff and McKoon, 1978). We might imagine, for instance, that Hal (who Mary-Ann mistakenly believes is someone else, named Bob) might initially represent the reply to his question as "The caller is from Texas," or *from (caller, Texas)*. As Hal

takes in more information, he might begin to pull out larger units of meaning, or *macropropositions* (see Kintsch and van Dijk, 1978; van Dijk, 1977, 1980). He might begin to gather together information about life in Texas or the people who live there.

For readers to carry out complex reasoning with respect to a text, however, they typically must construct more elaborate models, situation models, which integrate information from the text with broader real-world knowledge (Johnson-Laird, 1983; van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983). (I use the term *situation model* because, as Garnham [1987] suggests, the term *mental model* is used ambiguously in the psychological literature.) Readers do not inevitably create such situation models: sometimes the text is too complex (Perrig and Kintsch, 1985) or insufficiently determinate (Mani and Johnson-Laird, 1982) to allow readers to construct coherent representations of the full situation. On the other hand, if readers need to perform certain types of judgments with respect to the text, situation models are essential. In Perrig and Kintsch's experiments, readers were required to read texts describing the spatial layout of a fictitious town. Only when the readers were able to construct a situation model could they easily verify true but previously unrepresented statements about aspects of that spatial layout.

Empirical aspects of the dichotomy between propositional representations and situation models thus map onto the distinction I wish to draw between narratives and the experience of narrative worlds. Although readers might inevitably extract basic units of meaning from a narrative, the narrative itself cannot require that a situation model be constructed (though features of the narrative can rule out this type of representation). Although I believe that *narrative world and situation model* circumscribe similar theoretical claims, I will use the expression *narrative world* because, by calling to mind the metaphor of being trans

ported, it better suggests the complexity of the experience of narratives. As we shall see, *narrative world* belongs to a broader theoretical agenda that examines the diverse consequences of constructing situation models.

By refocusing attention from narratives to the experience of narrative worlds, I am not trying to undercut the force of structural analyses like Labov's (1972). He was pursuing the quite different goal of explicating how experience is transformed into narrative structures. My aim, by contrast, is to make evident exactly how pervasive the experience of narrative worlds can be. It is a rare conversation among adults that does not depart from the here and now. All such instances allow a journey to a narrative world to begin. Clearly, we enjoy many activities that are explicitly designed to prompt experiences of narrative worlds: novels, newspapers, movies, television programs, history books, representational artworks, and so on. In each case, I suggest, we should be able to find some common core of processes that are the implementation of being transported. For the sake of convenience, I will continue to refer to *narratives*, but I will be using the term quite promiscuously. In particular, I intend *narrative* and *narrative world* to be neutral with respect to the issue of fictionality. Although many of the theoretical statements I cite were framed specifically around the experience of fiction, I suggest that they yield insights that apply to the experience of all narratives.

Note that I almost always refer to the experiencers of narrative worlds as readers. I hope that much of what I say would remain true regardless of how the experiencer is prompted to construct a narrative world (for example, as a listener, as a viewer, and so on). Even so, most of my examples are from the printed page; I am therefore most comfortable using *reader* to stand for the range of possible experiencing roles.

Characters in novels, as well as people in real life, often testify to being transported when they have been astonished by the depth of an experience. Such is the case with Andrew Parent who was surprised by how reading his travel journal had allowed him to forget all his "worry and depression, the crisis in [his] marriage, [his] anger, [his] jealousy." Such is also the case with the hero of E. L. Doctorow's novel *Billy Bathgate*. Billy has become the protégé of the mobster Dutch Schultz. In a scene revisited throughout the book, Billy watches over another mobster, Bo Weinberg, who will soon be pitched into the ocean, his feet encased in a tub of cement. In the final moments before he is drowned, Weinberg tells Billy about one of the murders he has committed, and how he got rid of the "hot piece" by slipping it into the pocket of a gentleman waiting to catch a train in Grand Central Station: "Can't you see it, hello dear I'm home my God Alfred what's this in your pocket eek a gun!"

And he is laughing now, tears of laughter in his eyes, one precious instant in the paradise of recollection, and even as I'm laughing with him I think how fast the mind can move us, the way the story is a span of light across space. I know he certainly got me off that boat that was heaving me up and down one foot at a time through an atmosphere rich in oil, I was there in Grand Central with my hand delivering the piece into Alfred's coat pocket. (p. 159)

In this instance, although the here and now is especially compelling (particularly for Bo Weinberg), the narrative serves momentarily to transport both Billy and Bo to some imagined world in which they both can have a good laugh. Only minutes later, Billy is helping to kill the man who has so amused him.

What is additionally compelling is the challenge the passage provides for readers: those who are also transported by Bo's story are actually several cognitive layers deep (see Bruce, 1981;

Clark, 1987). In this part of the novel, Billy is telling the story of the immediate circumstances surrounding Bo's execution. Within that context he recounts the story Bo told him. All of this, of course, takes place in the context of a novel. In metaphorical terms, each reader (given a certain level of skill from Doctorow) will have been transported initially to the world of the novel. From that world, the reader is transported again to some new location by Billy's story. And within that story, we are transported by Bo's story. The observation that readers can be multiply transported strongly suggests why theorists often select texts as a locus for illuminating complex cognitive processes. *Billy Bathgate* as an experience *feels* unremarkable: that is the challenge to an adequate theory of being transported.

These first two anecdotal evocations of being transported come from works of fiction. I suggest that Theroux and Doctorow have lodged this image in the thoughts of their characters because it accurately captures the authors' own experiences (that is, I suggest that we can trust the phenomenological reports of most characters in realistic fiction as accurately reflecting the types of mental experience real people have). Nonetheless, I offer some additional evidence from a nonfictional source, one that concerns responses to paintings rather than to written or oral stories. Schama (1989) quotes a report from the *Journal de Paris* on responses to Jacques-Louis David's *The Oath of the Horatii*, painted in 1785:

One must absolutely see [this painting] to understand how it merits so much admiration.... In the end if I am to judge from the feeling of others as well as my own, one feels in seeing this painting a sentiment that exalts the soul and which, to use an expression of J. J. Rousseau, has something poignant about it that attracts one; all the attributes are so well observed that one believes oneself transported to the earliest days of the Roman Republic. (p. 174)

Schama quotes an additional testimony to the power of paintings to immerse eighteenth-century Frenchmen, if not others, in narrative worlds. Here Charles Mathon de La Cour is commenting on Jean-Baptiste Greuze's painting *Girl Weeping over Her Dead Canary* (1765):

"Connoisseurs, women, fops, pedants, wits, the ignorant and the foolish," he [de La Cour] claimed, were "all of one mind about this painting," for in it "one sees nature, one shares the grief of the girl and one wishes above all to console her. Several times I have passed whole hours in attentive contemplation so that I became drunk with a sweet and tender sadness." (p. 151)

What both quotations reveal is how powerfully we can be transported to narrative worlds even under unfavorable circumstances. Studying these static paintings in a (presumably) crowded gallery, these two viewers were nonetheless transported to the world of the early Romans or to a world in which it would be possible to console the grieving girl. In addition to characterizing experiences of narrative worlds, the metaphor of being transported also serves as a schema with respect to which theoretical questions can be framed and developed. In particular, we can sketch the features of the source domain of being transported to see what types of research have been undertaken in the past and what types may be called for in the future. Roughly speaking, here are the elements of a literal experience of being transported:

- i. Someone ("the traveler") is transported
2. by some means of transportation
3. as a result of performing certain actions.
4. The traveler goes some distance from his or her world of origin

5. which makes some aspects of the world of origin inaccessible.
6. The traveler returns to the world of origin, somewhat changed by the journey.

*Someone ("the traveler") is transported.* One of the hoariest bits of advice with respect to travel is "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." In essence, we are admonished to refit ourselves for local customs. Certainly if we plan to travel in good faith, we must be sure we are willing to behave as Romans do for the duration of the trip.

Literary theorists have suggested that narratives also call on us to adapt willingly to local conditions. Gibson (1980) wrote, "The fact is that every time we open the pages of another piece of writing, we are embarked on a new adventure in which we become a new person.... We assume, for the sake of the experience, that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us to assume, and, if we cannot assume them, we throw the book away" (p. 1). Prince (1980) similarly argued that the real reader should not be confused with the "narratee" (see also Bruce, 1981). To illustrate the distinction, Prince quotes from *Le Père Goriot*, in which the narrator tells the "reader": "That's what you will do, you who hold this book with a white hand, you who settle back into a well-padded armchair saying to yourself: perhaps this is going to be amusing" (p. 9). "It is obvious," Prince asserts, that few, if any, readers will resemble the armchair-bound character with a white hand evoked by the narrator: "The reader of fiction... should not be mistaken for the narratee. The one is real, the other fictive" (p. 9).

This suggests that the traveler assumes certain new characteristics (as called for by the narrative) as a consequence of undertaking the journey. This idea is virtually unexplored in cognitive psychology, which has emphasized the way the reader constructs the narrative world rather than the way the narrative

world reconstructs the reader. The issue looms large, however, when we take up (in chapter 6) questions of how experiences of narratives affect real-world attitudes and beliefs. In this context, we can wonder whether narratives, by causing us to collapse the distinction between reader and narratee, might change our views of what sort of people we are. Gibson (1980) offered an instructive example: "Recognition of a violent disparity between ourself as mock reader [the term Gibson uses to mark the contrast with the "real" reader] and ourself as real person acting in a real world is the process by which we keep our money in our pockets. 'Does your toupee collect moths?' asks the toupee manufacturer, and we answer, 'Certainly not! My hair's my own. You're not talking to *me*, old boy; I'm wise to you.' Of course, we are not always so wise" (p. 2). Gibson's admonition that "we are not always so wise" is a compelling invitation for psychological research.

*Travelers avail themselves of some means of transportation.* The means of travel, in this case, are novels, anecdotes, movies, and so on. This is Emily Dickinson's explicit image when she begins, "There is no Frigate like a Book." I suggested earlier that little is formally required to bring about experiences of narrative worlds: the means are quite diverse and sometimes mundane. Great artistry might facilitate the journey, but the only a priori requirement for a means of transportation is that it serve as an invitation to the traveler to abandon the here and now. (In terms of our metaphor, I'm claiming that a pickup truck isn't as elegant as a Cadillac, but it will still get us to Texas.)

*Travelers perform certain actions.* Nested within the overarching metaphor of being transported is the second image—that readers perform narratives. In the next section, I describe the performance metaphor in some detail. Let me note briefly here that a major flaw in relying on being transported to organize my discussion

is that the phrase projects an aura of passivity. I have used it even so because it accurately encodes readers' descriptions of their experiences. The disparity between the passivity of the metaphor and the active complexity of the processes that make the experience of narratives possible suggests that an adequate theory in this domain must concern itself with the illusion of effortlessness.

*The traveler goes some distance from his or her world of origin.* There are two senses in which we can interpret the distance a reader is transported as a consequence of experiencing a narrative world. The first captures the intuition that the world of "Star Trek" is somehow more distant in both time and place than the world of "All in the Family." The second captures the intuition that, nonetheless, we are equally prohibited from intervening in either world.

One of the frequently discussed properties of narrative worlds is that many of the truths intended to prevail within them are not explicitly stipulated by their creators (see, for example, Crittenden, 1982; Eaton, 1976; Lewis, 1978; Margolin, 1987). Thus, we would be reasonably willing to take it for granted that the majority of characters mentioned in narratives have livers, although the liver is rarely mentioned in ordinary narratives. Differences among narrative worlds on the first sense of distance partially represent our intuitions about the extent to which assertions true in the real world would remain true in the narrative world. Ryan (1980) articulated a *principle of minimal departure*, which states that "we reconstrue the world of a fiction ... as being the closest possible to the reality we know. This means that we will project upon the world of the statement everything we know about the real world, and that we will make only those adjustments which we cannot avoid" (p. 406; see also Walton on the "reality principle" [1990]). (Note that "minimal departure" implicitly alludes to the metaphor of being trans

ported.) The greater the departure from the real world—the more adjustments that must be made—the greater the perception of distance. This sense of distance presupposes, of course, that readers participate in the construction of narrative worlds, an assumption I embrace in the analysis of performance.

Whatever the degree of overlap in propositional content, however, we are strictly prohibited from affecting the course of action in narrative worlds. This is the conclusion Walton (1978a) reached in his essay entitled "How Remote Are Fictional Worlds from the Real World?" There is no sense in which, by leaping to our feet and calling out, "Don't believe Iago!" we can save Desdemona from her fate. We know as soon as we redistance ourselves from the narrative world that Desdemona's fate is sealed and, in any case, that the woman about to be smothered is only an actress who will rise again to take a curtain call. Walton recognizes that, although we solidly maintain our real-world belief that fictional worlds are inaccessible, our behavior when experiencing a narrative world often gives the appearance of uncertainty. We are willing, for example, to argue about Iago's motives as if they exist in the real world. Walton suggests, even so, that "except in the rarest of circumstances, readers and spectators are not deluded. Tom Sawyer and Willy Loman are neither real nor believed to be. Instead, appreciators are fictional. Rather than somehow promoting fictions to the level of reality, we, as appreciators, descend to the level of fiction" (p. 21). I consider Walton's range of issues at greater length in later chapters. My major modification will be to remove "fictional" from his formulation. Walton's arguments in favor of being transported, I argue, apply equally to both fictional and nonfictional narratives.

*Some aspects of the world of origin become inaccessible.* When we leave our place of origin behind for a real-world trip, it is incontrovertible that certain elements of that place of origin

become inaccessible: trivially, we must briefly do without our most comfortable armchairs or most reliable weather forecasters. In chapter 5, I take up the somewhat less trivial claim that the experience of narrative worlds also makes certain aspects of the real world inaccessible. Here, I offer an anecdote to sketch out what I mean by such a claim.

Edgar, the young hero of E. L. Doctorow's novel *World's Fair*, reports on many wonders, including one performed by his uncle:

Uncle Willy sometimes did tricks for us, and I remember one trick in particular that was my favorite and that he did very well. He'd stand in the doorway to my room and make it appear that a hand belonging to someone else just hidden from view was grabbing him by the throat and trying to drag him away. He would choke and gasp and his eyes would bulge and he'd try to tear at the claw-like hand; his head would disappear and reappear again in the struggle, and sometimes it was so realistic that I'd scream and rush to the door and beg him to stop, jumping up and swinging on the arm of the malign killer hand, which, of course, was his own. It didn't matter that I knew how the trick was done, it was terrifying just the same. (p. 57)

What is most remarkable about Edgar's description is his awareness that he should not be frightened—he "knew how the trick was done"—but he was frightened anyway. Edgar's experience, which I suggest in chapter 5 should be accepted as representative of nonfictional experiences (see Gerrig, 1989a, 1989b), demonstrates a clear dissociation between what he knows or believes in the real world (how the trick was done) and what he knows or believes in the narrative world (that his uncle was in danger). The cognitive psychological puzzle is how this dissociation is accomplished: Why is it that the real-world knowledge, which ought to be readily accessible in the repeated situation, fails to

undermine the thrill of the trick? Edgar's experience provides evidence that immersion in narratives brings about partial isolation from the facts of the real world. In chapter 5, I return to this and related phenomena and describe experimental evidence that will make this claim less mystical.

*The traveler returns to the world of origin, somewhat changed by the journey.* For the majority of narratives, we would be surprised if some mental structures were not changed as a function of their experience. At a minimum, we would expect to have created memory representations to encode the actual propositional information in the narrative. Such minimal types of changes, however, need not have much effect on whatever it was the reader knew or believed before visiting the narrative world.

In chapter 6 I discuss the ways information from narratives can have a more profound effect on preexisting knowledge and beliefs. This issue is controversial largely with respect to fiction, where theorists have been troubled by uncertainty about what people *ought* to do about information or attitudes tendered in fictional worlds. Authors openly invent the details of fictional worlds: in many analyses, it is simply nonsensical to be influenced by information that has no real-world verifiability. If we *know*, for example, that we cannot meet Sherlock Holmes walking down a street in London, we should not be influenced by his opinions, as if someone might really hold them.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that we are not nearly so pristine in our use of fictional information. Consider a phenomenon reported on July 28, 1975, by both *Newsweek* and *Time* magazines, which *Newsweek* labeled "Jawsmania": "Its symptoms are saucered eyes, blanched faces and a certain tingly anxiety about going near the water" (p. 16). Fear of shark attacks inspired by the movie *Jaws* kept vacationers out of the water despite the most responsible efforts of the popular press to correct mistaken notions: "Shark attacks are statistically far more remote a death

threat than, say, bee stings or lightning bolts; the great danger in going to the beach, says John Prescott of Boston's New England Aquarium, is the drive there and back" (p. 17). The (non-)swimmers were not persuaded by such demonstrations of the fictional worldliness of their beliefs.

The burden of chapter 6 will be to make sense of viewers' seemingly nonsensical reactions to *Jaws* by situating them in a richer context. I examine reactions to fictional information as a special case of general reactions to narrative information. Along the way, I reject simple "toggle" theories of fiction which have suggested that readers perform some mental act called "the willing suspension of disbelief" that eviscerates the effects of fiction. Whatever the effects of narrative worlds may be, they will arise because of strategic actions that experiencers do and do not perform with respect to those worlds.

## **Performance**

In many respects, the task of the reader is much like the task of the actor. Consider this excerpt from Constantin Stanislavski's classic volume, *An Actor Prepares*:

We need a broad point of view to act the plays of our times and of many peoples. We are asked to interpret the life of human souls from all over the world. An actor creates not only the life of his times but that of the past and future as well. That is why he needs to observe, to conjecture, to experience, to be carried away with emotion. (p. 181)

Readers are called upon to exercise exactly this same range of skills. They must use their own experiences of the world to bridge gaps in texts. They must bring both facts and emotions to bear on the construction of the world of the text. And, just like actors performing roles, they must give substance to the psychological lives of characters.

Most cognitive psychological research on the experience of narrative worlds has clustered, at least implicitly, around the metaphor of reading as a type of performance. Researchers have directed their efforts toward detailing the mechanisms by which readers actively contribute to the experience of narrative worlds. One important focus of research, initiated by Bartlett in 1932, has demonstrated that readers' memories for texts represent a merging of textual information with elements of preexisting knowledge. In his original research, Bartlett asked English readers to recall a story called "The War of the Ghosts," which he had adapted from a translation of a North American folktale. Bartlett found that his readers' reproductions of the story were often greatly altered through a process he called *rationalization*, the sources of which were both cultural and idiosyncratic. Some alterations reflected the readers' general tendencies to bring details of the story into line with English norms. Thus, at a lexical level, "boat" might replace "canoe" and "went fishing" might replace "hunt[ed] seals." At a plot level, Bartlett's readers often changed the story to eliminate evocations of supernatural forces. Within these general trends, however, there was great individual variation, which interested Bartlett as well: "The fact of rationalisation was illustrated in practically every reproduction or series of reproductions, but, as would be expected, the way in which it was effected varied greatly from case to case. For the particular form adopted is due directly to the functioning of individual special interests... or to some fact of personal experience, or to some peculiarity of individual attitude which determines the salience or potency of the details in the whole material dealt with" (p. 71). Bartlett thus concludes that individual performances— influenced by the general tendency toward rationalization—dictated the final forms of the reproductions. In chapter 2, I use the research that has followed Bartlett's lead to work toward an analysis of performance as an activity that is shaped by both shared and idiosyncratic cognitive structures.

Note that there are other types of individual differences that can be subsumed under the performance metaphor but are not the particular focus of this book. If we think of readers as actors, Bartlett's catalog of individual differences can be likened to the various interpretations equally skilled actors might give to the same role. The types of individual variation I will largely ignore are akin to the distinction between the Othello of Sir Laurence Olivier and that of a high school student. In parallel to the differentiation of good actors and poor actors, we can identify more and less skilled readers (and, thus, presumably people who are more or less skilled in interpreting stories in on-going conversation or in following the details of a movie, and so on). These differences are, in fact, nontrivial because less-skilled readers find it harder to become thoroughly immersed in narrative (Nell, 1988). In any event, I go forward with the assumption that, within certain broad limits, all readers are capable of performing the cognitive activities that enable them to be transported to narrative worlds.

Bartlett drew one other conclusion that is important for putting the performance metaphor in a proper perspective. Although he illustrates a variety of rationalizations, he maintains that "rather rarely this rationalisation was the effect of conscious effort. More often it was effected apparently unwittingly, the subject transforming his original without suspecting what he was doing" (p. 68). Just as I was concerned that being transported projects an undue aura of passivity, the performance metaphor appears to presuppose too active an involvement of conscious attention. Although some aspects of performance make explicit claims on attentional resources, a great number of "performance" acts are sufficiently routinized to take place outside of awareness.

Within cognitive psychology, the performance metaphor can be used to bring coherence to a variety of research programs.

Within literary criticism, the performance metaphor has more regularly emerged as a vivid corrective: theorists have invoked "performance" as a way of forcefully reinserting readers into the process of deriving meaning from texts. Wimsatt and Beardsley (1954) made what stood for several years as a strong case in favor of excluding the reader when they identified "The Affective Fallacy": "The Affective Fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its results.... It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism" (p. 21). Over the past few decades, however, literary critics have increasingly rejected the pejorative equating of "psychological effects" with "impressionism and relativism." Their research has been directed toward demonstrating the regularities of performance (see Benton, 1982; Kermode, 1983; Maclean, 1988; Suleiman, 1980; Tompkins, 1980a; as well as the essays in Suleiman and Crosman, 1980; and Tompkins, 1980b). In this section, I have elected to describe the work of three critics, Wolfgang Iser, Norman Holland, and Stanley Fish, all of whom have adduced types of evidence that remain largely unknown in cognitive psychology.

Iser has consistently characterized reading as having "the quality of performance" (1978, p. 61). Two types of observations support his conclusion. The first is wholly in character with Bartlett's program of research—Iser is concerned with the way readers must fill the gaps authors leave in their texts. In a quotation from *Tristram Shandy*, Iser (1980) credits Laurence Sterne with the observation that it is often the author's intention to leave such gaps: "No author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself. For my own part, I am eternally paying him compliments of this kind, and

do all that lies in my power to keep his imagination as busy as my own" (p. 51 in Iser; p. 79 in Sterne). Even so, Iser demonstrates (1989) that different works require different amounts of gap-filling performance. He discusses a phenomenon that amounts to a thought-experimental proof of the dissociation of text and reader in the experience of a narrative:

A second reading of a piece of literature often produces a different impression from the first. The reasons for this may lie in the reader's own change of circumstances, but all the same, the text must be such as to permit this variation. ... The increased information that now overshadows the text provides possibilities of combination that were obscured in the first reading. Familiar occurrences now tend to appear in a new light and seem to be at times corrected, at times enriched. But for all that, nothing is formulated in the text itself; rather, the reader himself produces these innovative readings. (p. 10; see also 1980, p. 56)

In Bartlett's original experiment, he had his readers recall "The War of the Ghosts" with various time delays to see how the act of re-recalling changed their productions. Iser's analysis suggests that we should also observe readers reexperiencing texts to see how prior representations of the text come to wield their own influence on the course of comprehension.

The second type of evidence Iser presents parallels my evocation of Stanislavski. Iser observes, "In order to produce the determinate form of an unreal character, the actor must allow his own reality to fade out.... The reader finds himself in much the same situation. To imagine what has been stimulated by aesthetic semblance entails placing our thoughts and feelings at the disposal of an unreality, bestowing on it a semblance of reality in proportion to a reducing of our own reality. For the duration of the performance we are both ourselves and someone else"

(1989, p. 244). (Similarly, Poulet [1980] characterizes reading as "the strange invasion of my person by the thoughts of another, I am a self who is granted the experience of thinking thoughts foreign to him" [p. 44].) Once again, cognitive psychologists can wonder what mental activities enable readers to "reduce [their] own reality" and achieve the duality of inhabiting the real and narrative worlds as a real and narrative character. I discuss aspects of this problem in chapters 4 and 5.

Norman Holland specifically champions the "metaphorical family LITERARY PROCESS AS PERFORMANCE" (1988, p. 159). He argues that the "traditional metaphors" that have been used to describe the experience of literature, such as "LITERATURE IS FORCE, LITERATURE IS CONTROLLER, LITERATURE IS PERSON" (p. II7), "image people as passively being hit or poured into. I would trade them for language that expresses the craftsmanship, skill, dexterity, mastery, artistry—or clumsiness—that we bring to reading and (more obviously) writing. We even bring a craftsmanship to moviegoing and television watching" (p. 159). Holland supports this conclusion by demonstrating great differences *among* individuals in interpreting the same works of literature but great consistency *within* each individual in his or her interpretation of various works. Holland builds his most elaborate case with respect to the mental life of Robert Frost. By examining Frost's poetry, his critical responses to others' writings, and his general analyses of societal concerns, Holland extracts what he terms Frost's *identity theme*: "I was able to read Robert Frost as managing his fears of the unlimited and unmanageable by manipulating limited, knowable, symbols" (p. 170). By projecting this identity, Frost has performed as both a writer and a reader. To Holland, then, what constitutes performance is the process whereby individual readers experience narratives in consonance with their own identity themes. What must emerge from cognitive psychology, as I discuss in chapter 2, is a characterization

of the mental representations that allow such identity themes to emerge in the ongoing experience of narratives.

Stanley Fish offers as a general credo, "Interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing. Interpreters do not decode poems; they make them" (1980, p. 327). In his analyses of literary works, Fish frequently provides moment-by-moment accounts of the cognitive activities readers must perform, in language familiar to cognitive psychologists. What is unfamiliar, however, is his suggestion that part of the meaning recovered from the experience of the text is conditioned on metacognitive awareness of exactly those moment-by-moment processes. Consider his analysis of four lines from Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

Satan, now first inflam'd with rage came down, The Tempter ere th'  
Accuser of man-kind, To wreck on innocent frail man his loss Of that  
first Battle, and his flight to Hell. (IV, 9-12)

Fish suggests that readers incorrectly believe at first that "his" in line II refers to "innocent frail man" and thus imagine that the passage refers to the loss of Eden. As readers progress through line 12, however, they must perform a reanalysis to understand that Milton is referring to Satan's loss of heaven:

It is that loss of which Adam and Eve are innocent, and the issue of the Fall is not being raised at all. But of course it has been raised, if only in the reader's mind.... The understanding that the reader must give up is one that is particularly attractive to him because it asserts the innocence of his first parents, which is, by extension, his innocence too. By first encouraging that understanding and then correcting it, Milton... makes the reader aware of his tendency, inherited from those same parents, to reach for interpretations that are, in the basic theological sense, self-serving. (p. 4)

Fish offers a number of similar examples suggesting that the means by which both poetry and prose passages prompt the ultimate recovery of meaning partially constitutes that ultimate meaning. With respect to the metaphor of performance, the claim is that readers' observations of their own performances contribute to the experience of narratives.

Together, these three critics expand our notion of the types of acts readers might perform in the experience of narratives. Much of literary criticism, of course, has been concerned with the activities of readers who have acquired expertise in specialized interpretive strategies. In this book I am concerned almost exclusively with the reading done by those who are relatively innocent of such matters. (As Bruner comments, "It requires the most expensive education to shake a reader's faith in the incarnateness of meaning in a novel or poem" [1986, p. 155].) We can nonetheless use the insights of literary theory to explore the full potential of even ordinary visits to narrative worlds.

### **The Plan of the Book**

Although I use the metaphor of being transported as a device for organizing the topics in this book, the metaphor itself does not constitute a theory of the experience of narratives. Rather, it brings into focus a number of issues that warrant theoretical treatment.

In chapters 2 and 3, I review and reframe psychological research to provide a broader account of issues of performance. Chapter 2 is concerned with inferences, and chapter 3 with noninferential responses to narratives.

In chapter 4, I consider the way language is experienced in narratives, contending that the controversy surrounding narrative versus ordinary language has been founded on too narrow a conception of the repertory of everyday language activities.

In chapter 5, I discuss some of the consequences of the on going experience of narratives for access to aspects of the real world left behind.

And in chapter 6, I treat the effects of narrative experiences on thought and behavior in the real world, with particular attention to the special problems occasioned by visits to fictional worlds.