

Crafting a Shared Universe: An Interdisciplinary Poetics of Narrative

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Abstract

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Both narrative theorists and practicing writers are committed to understanding the general mechanisms underlying the inventive and communicative achievements of literary art, yet there is a lack of interdisciplinary conversations between narratology and creative writing. My dissertation *Crafting a Shared Universe* makes a case for bringing together narratology and master writers' craft knowledge by demonstrating a) that instruction in creative writing offers independent testimony and nuanced enrichment to the foundational premises of James Phelan's rhetorical narratology, b) that this synthesis can be further empowered by cognitive humanities—such as cognitive psychology and the psychology of aesthetics—to illuminate what constitutes masterful storytelling and rhetorical communication, c) that unnatural narratology can be integrated into rhetorical, creative, and interdisciplinary practices to invigorate the bonding and reparative potentials of unnatural storytelling, d) and that rhetorical criticism can guide working

writers to further hone their craft by developing a systematic understanding of shared rhetorical interactions.

In putting forward an interdisciplinary practice of rhetorical criticism, I also delve into the art of giving a meaningful shape and balance to slant, rhythmic, or multilayered associations and forward subtextual instabilities to achieve bonding and reparative effects. Specifically, craft can be bonding in that it may deepen readers' empathic resonance with the world of literary imagination. Craft can also be reparative as it may subsume chaotic and blemished realities under an improved, broader vision of hope and interconnection. By the same logic, rhetorical criticism can be bonding and reparative in the sense of examining textual phenomena in relation to what writers and readers can possibly share and moving outward toward a future-oriented, broad-minded vision of what craft can possibly reform. To illustrate bonding, reparative, and unnatural storytelling, I will connect authors' creative endeavors and readers' possible shared engagement in works of fiction including *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* and *Life of Pi* as well as in the screenplay *Anatomy of a Fall*.

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The Resourceful Resonance of Rhetorical Criticism

This dissertation project explores possible ways to bridge the gap—in the sense of lack of communication—between training in creative writing and in narratology. Theoretical studies of narrative have long been dedicated to systematically investigating the logic underlying the composition of fictional narratives, but they rarely refer to master writers’ insights into crafting aesthetically meaningful and rhetorically effective stories. MFA programs are flourishing, and craft books are proliferating, but they rarely cite narratologists. As an exception, Brian Evenson has observed that narrative theories can guide creative writing students to gain holistic pictures of master writers’ craft and rhetoric and then model their own stories on those writers’ communicative achievements (71–72). “Narrative theory allows [creative writing students] to look at well-known stories differently, unveiling the craft that has gone into a story’s construction and how each narrative whole has been constructed from numerous parts and effects,” writes Evenson (76). Given that aspiring writers aim to grasp how individual elements contribute to the overall structure and effects of the narrative, the craft perspective seems to align well with James Phelan’s rhetorical narratology that examines authorial intentionality—the “purposive design of the narrative that governs the entire set of [the writer’s] constructive choices”—“at the level of the whole narrative communication” (*Somebody Telling* 203). To flesh out the shared aspects and complementarity of rhetorical theory and instruction in creative writing, I will put forth what I understand as “bonding and reparative storytelling”—both as an exemplar of masterful rhetorical communication and an interdisciplinary practice of rhetorical criticism. By the former, I refer to how craft may tap into what we can possibly share—such as our shared need for love and connection and shared tendency toward coherent comprehension—to cultivate shared empathy across differences and propel us toward an all-inclusive vision of

life. By the latter, I refer to how holistic, all-inclusive pictures of shared rhetorical interactions may be attainable through systematically investigating textual phenomena in relation to the continuities between writers' rhetorical skills and readers' possible tendencies to engage with life, art, and literature.

Narratology has long been (mis)understood as reproducing textual surfaces, which necessitates our attention to rhetorical narratology's paradigm shift toward shared rhetorical communication. Literary scholar Yoon Sun Lee argues that narratology is dedicated to taxonomizing textual features into categories and replenishing its own toolbox with complementary insights. This investment in taxonomic thought, shared visibility, and complementarity and rapprochement has insulated narratology from revolutionary theoretical replacements, which would subordinate visible textual features to hidden meanings and illuminate an "inaccessible interior space" (986). As Lee puts it, "Perhaps this is another way of saying that narratologists, long before the term was coined, were doing surface reading" (986). While Lee's argument captures one way to understand structural and postclassical narratologies, it falls short in capturing how rhetorical narratology goes beyond the textual surface by subsuming it under a broader picture of complex, multidimensional author-audience communication. Phelan firmly distinguishes between his conception of narrative as rhetoric and the traditional notion of narrative as a textual structure (Clark and Phelan 137). "[Narrative] is less about its materials (narrators, character, events, techniques, and so on)," writes Phelan, "than about how tellers use them to influence their audiences in particular ways" (*Somebody Telling* ix). Under his framework, textual features are rhetorical resources that authors deploy to empower readers' affective, cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic engagement. Phelan's rhetorical conception of narrative represents the revolutionary theoretical replacement that Lee (mis)judges

as wanting in the narratological field, for rhetorical theory overhauls the canonical distinction between story and discourse. This distinction sits comfortably at the core of structural narratology and can be summarized as follows: narrative is a synthesis of story/signified (what is told) and discourse/signifier (how it is told). According to the story-discourse distinction, “characters fall on the story side,” and the continuity between character dialogue (story) and character narration (discourse) is put asunder (*Somebody Telling* 19). Whereas in fact, “scenes of character-character dialogue often function simultaneously as events [story] and as narration [discourse]”; and both character narration and character dialogue are narrative resources used by authors to shape readers’ unfolding experience (19). This instance suggests that viewing narrative as writers’ cultivation of readers’ temporal experience is sometimes more yielding and fruitful than the structuralist view of narrative as a linked sequence of binary operations. Delving into and beyond the textual core, rhetorical theory illuminates an interior space inaccessible to structural narratology, one indicative of theoretical replacement: a feedback loop among authorial agency, textual phenomena (including intertextual relations), and reader response. Not only do authorial designs give rise to readers’ multidimensional (affective, ethical, and aesthetic) responses, but they are also “deeply influenced by the nature of their audiences and their activity in responding to the unfolding communication” (*Somebody Telling* 6).

Furthermore, rhetorical theory gives prominence to the interactions between the implied author and actual rhetorical readers. Rather than seeking to discern actual authors’ conscious intentions, rhetorical theory is concerned with the implied, textualized image of an active authorial agent and the principles and “system of intentionality” governing the author’s overall aesthetic construction and communicative achievement (Phelan and Rabinowitz 32). Rhetorical readers are actual readers who are capable of evaluating their overall, multilayered aesthetic

experiences and joining the implied author's ideal audience—the authorial audience who “shares the knowledge, values, prejudices, fears, and experiences that the author expected in his or her readers, and that ground his or her rhetorical choice” (*Somebody Telling* 7–9). By grounding author-audience communication in possible shared interactions between actual readers and the implied author's craft and rhetoric, Phelan's thesis can be read as reformatory and future-oriented. Although rhetorical theory depends on and interacts with historical knowledge of the implied authors' expectations and the sociocultural contexts of author-audience relations, the primary goal of rhetorical reading is not to return back to the biographical and historical origins of the actual author (*Somebody Telling* 9). Rather, rhetorical readers can evaluate the possible communicative achievements of existing works to put forth future-oriented principles and philosophies undergirding masterful author-audience communication. Rhetorical inquiries into individual narratives, as Phelan explains, in turn enrich rhetorical theory as an enterprise and establish “more general conclusions applicable to other narratives” (*Somebody Telling* xi).

In putting the temporal experience of reading at the center of literary interpretation, rhetorical theory also fosters an orientation toward the overarching goal of shared experience and communication. Phelan contends that readers' possible shared engagement is “responsible to the text as it has been constructed by an author who guides us to experience it in one way rather than another” (*Experiencing Fiction* ix). Jane Austen, for instance, guided readers of *Pride and Prejudice*—readers with potentially different backgrounds and perspectives—to share “the pleasure and satisfaction it offered in the culminating marriage of Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy” (ix). Phelan carefully qualifies his concept of sharing by nodding to the poststructuralist argument that readers respond to the same books in non-identical ways, acknowledging that “shared experiences are far from inevitable” (x). Nevertheless, Phelan

refuses to buy into the poststructuralist assumption that reading experiences are dominated by the ultimate indeterminacy of language, the inevitable influence of interpretive communities, and the shaping force of the ideologies we follow (x). Rhetorical narratology is committed to the idea that “different readers do share (not totally but nontrivially) responses to the same narrative,” and that such shared experiences are “both possible and desirable” (x). Seeking to further illuminate and invigorate the bonding potentials of authors’ craft, my dissertation will unpack Phelan’s idea of communicative connection in relation to the complementarity of creative writing and literary criticism as well as shared empathy across different individuals, groups, and species.

Although craft books on fiction writing and screenwriting do not explicitly refer to narratological terms like the implied author, they refer to specific literary examples to illustrate craft issues and dissect authors’ textualized rhetorical strategies. Instead of seeking to pin down authors’ exact, conscious, or private intentions, craft analyses aim to unpack what constitutes effective, meaningful storytelling and discern strategies that may stimulate the target audiences’ multidimensional participation. In this sense, creative writers’ analyses of craft can be treated as models of rhetorical reading; or such analyses can be read as making possible interactions between craft and critical reading. For instance, fiction writer Maud Casey explores the artful ordering and enrichment of the mysteries in life via case studies including Barbara Comyns’ *The Vet’s Daughter*, Paul Yoon’s *Snow Hunters*, J.M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians*, and James Baldwin’s “Sonny’s Blues.” Not only does Casey unpack the textual nuances and overarching meanings in existing pieces of literature, but she also extends her readings beyond textual criticism by putting forward philosophies undergirding constructing mystery in art. In blending craft and criticism seamlessly into each other, Casey’s rhetorical reading exemplifies Phelan’s paradigmatic two-way traffic between practical inquiries into individual case studies

and theoretical inquiries into rhetorical communication at the level of wholeness. Casey concludes, “Mystery in fiction resides in those carefully articulated questions, and in the unparaphrasable content of a story or a novel, the experienced meaning...Mystery in fiction means taking the reader to that land of *Un*—uncertainty, unfathomability, unknowing” (6). Rather than directly confronting readers with answers to complex questions, effective craft carefully formulates such questions to move readers forward with instabilities and destabilized expectations, inviting them to construct meaning by dwelling on the uncertainty they feel. More importantly, Casey’s discussion of craft exemplifies creative writers’ preoccupation with how language can be used to achieve greater ethical ends. The art of mystery, Casey suggests, also involves writers’ (as well as readers’) effort to move beyond what they know—the historical knowledge of what actually happened—to radically empathize with characters whom they do not resemble and imagine the “things that can happen” (56). By cultivating useful, compelling mystery, creative writers deepen readers’ aesthetic engagement with the unsayable complexities in life and, ultimately, return them to an expanded vision of themselves (52). Unknowing and re-knowing is where mystery and its multilayered answers reside. Casey cites writers Ta-Nehisi Coates and Kaitlyn Greenidge to illustrate how removing the power to name and define liberates mystery’s promise of more. Constructions of racial differences, for instance, have the potential to reproduce racial othering by overemphasizing the significance of perceived physiological characteristics. Therefore, it is up to the artists to stretch the limits of preconceptions by imagining the lives of those defined with “humility and care” (54).

In a similar vein, creative writer Anne Lamott urges working writers to bring their moral vision to life. She argues: “You need to put yourself at their [stories’] center, you and what you believe to be true or right. The core, ethical concepts in which you most passionately believe are

the language in which you are writing” (103). The writer’s obligation, as Lamott understands it, is to capture the unforgivingly complex reality via a committed moral lens. Great writing taps into the moral compass we can choose to travel by, revealing in an ethical light that in the midst of chaos, violence, and vices, a good part of ourselves has not been damaged or corrupted (106). As Lamott puts it, “When a more or less ordinary character, someone who is both kind and self-serving, somehow finds that place within where he or she is still capable of courage and goodness, we get to see something true that we long for. This is what helps us connect with your characters and with your book” (106). A writer has to cultivate a deep, passionate caring about life’s mysteries, about growth and reformation, and about the reparative truths that help us navigate and improve the perplexing world.

Creative writers’ exploration of the greater affordances of storytelling is also shared by rhetorical narratology, which builds connections between aesthetic and ethical values. Under Phelan’s framework, readers’ aesthetic and ethical judgments significantly interact with each other (*Experiencing Fiction* 14). Rhetorical theory is founded upon the premise that elegant craftsmanship is crucial to a narrative’s achievement of greater ethical ends; and one criterion for defining a highly crafted narrative is to engage readers in “complex ethical judgments that are integrally related to the narrative’s working out of its formal problems” (146). While rhetorical theory is grounded in interpretations of primary texts, its stakes are by no means limited to the textual worlds. In examining readers’ experience of the temporal unfolding of narrative, rhetorical theory seeks to unpack the “relation of the textual world to the extratextual world” and capture how storytelling enables “our finding ourselves in the world and needing to cope with our condition” (Clark and Phelan 139, 147). It is thus reasonable to contend that craft and narratology share the potential for starting with the textual core and concluding with real-world

ethical relevance. Integrating craft insights into rhetorical criticism can allow us to see how fiction writers offer independent testimony to rhetorical narratology's foundational premise on the richness and wholeness of multileveled communication. As my first chapter will demonstrate, writers' holistic perspective unveils the art of slowing down and intensifying readers' visceral, cognitive, and ethical engagement while moving them forward toward the unraveling of the half-visible and half-sayable.

Since rhetorical narratology conceives of narrative as an event, it puts particular emphasis on the way narrative form is "experienced through the temporal process of reading and responding to narrative" (*Experiencing Fiction* 3). As my second chapter will illustrate, Phelan's account of narrative progression synthesizes the flow of textual dynamics from beginning through middle to ending and the order in which readers process and respond to authors' rhetorical designs. He understands narrative beginning as "that which generates the progression of the narrative by introducing unstable relationships between characters (instabilities) or between implied author and authorial audience or narrator and authorial audience (tensions)" (*Experiencing Fiction* 16). The instabilities and tensions become complicated in narrative middles, pushing readers toward the future and advancing their evolving ethical, aesthetic, and interpretive judgments; such unstable relationships can be resolved during narrative endings, which guide readers toward holistic pictures of narrative wholes. Central to the rhetorical framework of narrative progression is the interconnectedness of different authorial choices, which interact with one another to give a meaningful shape to the narrative whole as well as shape rhetorical readers' overall temporal experience (Phelan and Rabinowitz 58).

In a similar way that rhetorical theory foregrounds the dynamic forward progression of narrative, creative writer Jane Alison puts forward the idea that there is a sense of energy,

movement, and transformation in how an elegantly-built story develops into an overarching pattern and pulls readers forward to viscerally experience that pattern. She advises aspiring writers to find fundamental patterns in the natural world—such as a wave, a spiral, and branching and cellular patterns—to give order and meaning to stories as well as create the “inner sensation of traveling toward something” in readers’ minds and bodies (20, 22). After readers move through the carefully-woven passages, they also see how they’ve traveled via a remote, comprehensive, or “aerial point of view,” acquiring objective and holistic insights (4, 8).

Alison’s craft knowledge substantiates rhetorical narratology’s core principle that the rhetorical view of narrative as multidimensional communication subsumes insights into its textual patterns, and that the narrative form is experienced through the unfolding interconnectedness of craft elements and that of readers’ corresponding cognitive and affective responses.

If rhetorical narratology already goes beyond the traditional view of narrative as a visible structure, fiction writers’ craft knowledge can further reinforce its tendency toward an “inaccessible interior space” that has not been illuminated by structural narratology (Lee 986). At the same time that craft and rhetorical narratology both strive for in-depth comprehension of the whole narrative communication, they work toward this goal in different ways. Rhetorical narratology carries forward the structuralist traditions of enumeration, classification, and principle formulation, unpacking the multidimensionality and complexity of rhetorical communication through taxonomizing its various components into small-to-large categories. Consider, for example, the taxonomy of character narration. It starts with broader categories such as reliability and unreliability in terms of reporting, interpreting, and evaluating and then progressively branches off into smaller categories—such as six subtypes of bonding unreliability—to throw light on nuanced differences.

Instead of seeking to account for the totality of knowledge, fiction writers bring to light the half-orderliness within the cosmic architecture of the story. Robert Boswell identifies common failed stories as those written by writers who approach their raw materials too categorically, holding a crystal-clear vision of the motivations of their characters and the development of their stories “before any words reach the page” (21). As Boswell puts it, “these novels ignore the unexplainable, the quirky, the unconscious—the human slippage that makes people large and contradictory and fascinating” (22–23). To embrace the possible contradictions, surprises, and nuanced meanings that speak to the anarchic aspect of the imagination and the elusive complexity of human experience, writers need to practice remaining in a half-visible, half-known world (23–24). In a similar vein, Casey suggests that the secret lives of fictional characters—far from estranging readers—in fact take them deep into the mystery of the fluid, dynamic self and that of our humanity (33–50). Peter Turchi’s craft essay “The Writer as Cartographer” furthers the idea that writing involves venturing into uncharted territory extending beyond what the writer has seen and experienced. The subtle machinery of literary art functions in the same way as maps. They do not help make sense of our world via objective, accurate presentation. Rather, they grapple with “profound questions of our existence” and spark our creative thinking by ordering, organizing contradictory elements while setting them into complex interplay. “It is the artful balance of detail and blankness, suggestion and opportunity, that fires the imagination,” writes Turchi (173).

While narratology aims for scientific rigor and places narrative elements into neat categories, craft keeps returning to the land of half-logic, half-symmetry, and half-accessibility. Fiction writer Charles Baxter’s framework of half-rhyming action, for example, illustrates how craft resides in the beautiful and elusive “half-ness.” He advises aspiring writers to cultivate an

eerie sense of repetition and assonance by having readers experience an action and a slant, varied repetition of it simultaneously. As Baxter puts it, “We see an image that we half remember. We hear a voice that we think we have heard before. We watch as someone performs an action that someone else did very much that way years ago” (*Burning Down* 113). This time reversal taps into and shows forth the anarchic and elusive nature of our memory: “Rhyming action exists in that curious area of writing between conscious intent and unconscious or semiconscious impulse...Memory does not have to attach itself to its replica in our present moments. It can be oblique, sidling, scary and luminous in its distant relatedness to us” (125). Baxter suggests that writers allow memory and progression to bring together irrational associations, letting them serve as off-center, deflective lenses for one another and generate fresh, mutually reinforcing meanings. My second chapter will illustrate in more depth how Baxter’s backward rhyming movement offers nuanced enrichment to Phelan’s rhetorical theory.

In a similar vein, Ursula K. Le Guin’s craft book *The Wave in the Mind* delves into the art of giving a meaningful balance and shape to the story’s forward insights and backward rhythmic correspondences across the temporal frame. She defines a well-crafted story as one that establishes inner coherence by imagining an integrated mesh of self-referential allusions, semi-repetitions, and variations. Such forward-looking and backward-looking references work together to achieve a balance between “continuous and developing invention” and the “complexity and integrity proper to a living creature or a work of art” (94). Craft, therefore, may enrich the narratological vision by illuminating the rhetoric of directing half-visible, half-symmetrical complexities toward an overarching narrative strategy, which transports readers into an expansive realm wherein the artful ordering of the mysteries in life transcends the limits of time.

At the same time that craft may offer nuanced enrichment to rhetorical narratology, critical reading and interpretation also yields potential for further improving working writers' rhetoric. Echoing Evenson's observation that narratology may empower creative writing students in the sense of deepening their comprehension of narrative wholes, Judith Grossman insists that understanding master writers' communicative achievements is essential to the sharpening and refinement of craft skills. She advises writers to view their creative projects as collaborative acts. As Grossman beautifully explicates this point, "writing is a solitary practice that has a sociable destiny...we're (however subliminally) opening another kind of door—toward an implied presence, the distant yet oddly intimate stranger...an internally buried audience is always and already there" (236). Grossman's craft perspective on the social character of fiction writing further corroborates Phelan's idea that writers bring to mind and compose strategically for ideal readers or authorial audience. After all, practicing writers are also ideal readers of the masterful pieces that they admire. If apprentice writers merge their reading and storytelling skills to cultivate a resonance between their own creative projects and those of "their best allies and teachers in the art," they will discover the joy of furthering their craftsmanship for the sake of communicating with their imagined audience—their most thoughtful, attentive literary friends (Grossman 243). Creative writing and critical reading can foster each other's growth via empathic, imaginative interactions.

As an established critical and interpretive method, narratology operates within a rigorous taxonomic framework. Lee situates narratology in the broader "classical epistemic structure of natural history," tracing narratology's beliefs about enumeration and classification all the way back to Foucault's "classifying systems of thought" (983). Such knowledge structures compartmentalize characteristics and entities into named, visible boxes to juxtapose their

nuanced features, interrelations, and epistemological implications (984). Rhetorical narratology also embodies this “faith in the power of the eye to see, of language to name and describe, and in our ability to place diverse phenomena within a single field for representation and comparison” (984). In illustrating theoretical concepts, categories, and principles, Phelan is careful to move from nuanced textual examination to generalizations about the narratological enterprise toward a picture of shared, unified, and articulated knowledge. For instance, Phelan contextualizes rhetorical theory in relation to the dominant suspicion of intentionality in contemporary literary studies. He starts with a renewed definition of intention—“the force that takes potentially ambiguous matter and shapes it into one thing rather than another”—and proceeds with a careful distinction between intention and meaning (*Somebody Telling* 202). While intention suggests creative writers’ effort to regenerate the resources of language and communicate with target readers, meaning implies critics’ examination of how and how well intentions can be executed. Phelan then adds an additional layer to the idea of intentionality, arguing that rhetorical readers make meanings out of writers’ public, textualized intentions—their craft constructions—at a holistic level (203). In doing so, Phelan cultivates a shared space within which a diversity of communicative resources and strategies can be labeled, arranged, and evaluated.

Moreover, Phelan’s rigorous critical approach yields the promise of further advancing creative writers’ rhetorical reading. At the same time that Casey makes a solid argument on how to create inviting mystery through formulating compelling questions, she does not clearly explain the distinction between the two varieties of mystery: the evocation of suspense versus the complexities of human existence. While the former is a rhetorical strategy used by artists to cue the audiences to “shifts that prefigure revelation,” the latter refers to the ways that “the human fact is submerged in and subordinated to a world of circumstance” and historical forces (17,

104). This underemphasized distinction is in fact integral to her overarching argument on the question-seeking quality of literary experience. She writes: “If mystery, the genre, is about finding the answers, then mystery, that elusive yet essential element of fiction, is about finding the questions” (6). As her rhetorical readings of literary examples reveal, however, the two varieties of mystery are not mutually exclusive, and they apply to diverse textual phenomena in nuanced ways. For instance, in her case study “Sonny’s Blues,” (the implied) Baldwin cultivates mystery (in the form of answerable, resolvable suspense) to guide readers toward a climactic epiphany about African Americans’ shared journey toward freedom in the perplexing course of history (101–14). Had Casey more clearly defined and evaluated the different versions, uses, and implications of mystery and situated them within a broader gridded space of rhetorical resources, she would have fleshed out their communicative affordances with greater theoretical precision.

To further invigorate the potential of literary criticism to guide working writers’ craft and their rigorous, systematic understanding of shared rhetorical interactions, I stake my thesis on bonding and reparative storytelling through an interdisciplinary framework. **Chapter one “The Craft and Rhetoric of Moderate Defamiliarization: Empathic Sharing through Literary Storytelling”** puts forth what I term “bonding storytelling”(or, in the context of this chapter, “moderate defamiliarization”). Bonding storytelling encompasses masterful craft that defamiliarizes and deepens readers’ multidimensional, empathic immersion in narrative worlds. Both literary scholars and practicing writers have noted but not systematically unpacked how and why defamiliarizing techniques deepen readers’ embodied, emotional, and empathic resonance with writers’ creative and intellectual imagination. This first chapter argues that writers’ intricate integration of multilayered meanings, varied repetitions, and half-sayable, half-visible subtextual complexities may defamiliarize—slow down and invigorate—readerly engagement by tapping

into their inclination to resolve uncertainty and complexity and work toward holistic, coherent comprehension. Such rhetorical communications constitute what I understand as “moderate defamiliarization,” both as an overarching experience and as a mechanism that brings readers closer to authors’ literary ideas and cultivates readers’ shared, empathic connections with fictional characters.

To present my framework of moderate defamiliarization, I will synthesize the continuities between authors’ rhetorical insights and readers’ possible tendencies to engage with art or literature by integrating rhetorical narratology, fiction writers’ craft knowledge, and the psychology of aesthetics. I will then complement my theoretical principles with a rhetorical reading of *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* to flesh out how the craft of defamiliarization may foster empathy across differences and species. By inviting shared rhetorical interactions and addressing the shared aspects of human psychology and experience, craft can subvert the binary and hierarchical thinking inimical to our shared need for love and connection. My aspiration, then, is to chart an interdisciplinary path for further exploration of defamiliarization or other mechanisms undergirding the bonding force of literary art.

Chapter two “On Ecological and Reparative Storytelling: The Rhetoric of Two-Way Narrative Movements” unpacks what I understand as “ecological and reparative storytelling”—the art of subsuming blemished, gruesome realities under a broad-minded vision of hope and interconnection and of guiding readers to experience the internally resonant, metaphorically represented mesh of coexistences. Recent developments in eco-narratology have directed attention to interdisciplinary examination of the cognitive and affective affordances of storytelling and ecological thinking. Seeking to contribute to ongoing eco-narratological conversations, I explore how forward narrative progressions and implicit backward narrative

movements work together to convey Timothy Morton's ecological thought—the fundamental interconnectedness of all beings and forms of thinking. The rhetoric of two-way narrative movements will be investigated through an interdisciplinary framework synthesizing rhetorical narratology, fiction writers' craft knowledge, and cognitive science. With this framework, I argue that ecological and reparative storytelling operates on both ontological and epistemological levels. On an ontological level, Mary Shelley and Yann Martel beautifully imagine the fundamental coexistence among human beings and their environment and non-human selves as well as the coexistence between literary and scientific forms of thinking. Shelley and Martel's approach to ontological existences is inclusive, reformatory, and future-oriented. On an epistemological level, Shelley and Martel's masterful storytelling taps into rhetorical readers' shared cognitive tendency to construct forward and backward coherence, inviting them to attain holistic pictures of narrative wholes as well as all-inclusive visions of life. This chapter concludes that writers' and readers' shared faith in literary imagination can bond different individuals, groups, and species across binary and hierarchical differences.

Chapter three “Reviving Mimesis: Unnatural Storytelling and its Reparative Fire”

unpacks what I understand as “unnatural storytelling” with a reparative touch. While unnatural narratology is committed to examining how highly inventive narratives transcend life-like reproduction of the world, screenwriters' reflection on craft disrupts the lines between mimesis and anti-mimesis, throwing light on the resourceful originality infused within stories' mimetic, emotional resonance with extratextual reality. To bridge the gap between narratological and craft perspectives on imaginative and masterful narration, I integrate them to form a complementary whole, illuminating how storytellers can revive the fire of hope and reinvigorate our empathic comprehension of the world. Through a close reading of the screenplay *Anatomy of a Fall*, I

illustrate that unnatural and reparative storytelling remolds the paranoid materials in our anarchic and elusive reality into a visionary truth—that what we share is more important than how we divide. This essay revisits the concept of unnaturalness within cross-disciplinary conversations among social psychology, screenwriting, and literary criticism, concluding with the potential of unnatural narratology to serve as guidance for creative writing.

Although I have put forth a few specialized terminologies including moderate defamiliarization and bonding, ecological, reparative, and unnatural forms of storytelling, I do acknowledge that there are productive overlaps among these concepts. As my third chapter will demonstrate, there are also crucial overlaps between the seemingly antithetical concepts of mimesis and unnaturalness. After all, such technical terms are less important than what they are meant to outline: the aesthetic philosophies undergirding masterful rhetorical communication.

Extraordinary craft, as my dissertation will demonstrate, recreates the extratextual reality, reordering its chaos and blemishes while retaining its beauty and complexity. By the same logic, rhetorical criticism does not simply decipher historical writers' messages or reduce texts to single, fixed, and authoritative origins. It rereads, restructures, and reproduces the text's overarching pattern and its nuanced multitudes, extracting its essential qualities and then moving outward toward a shareable vision of effective communication. In integrating systematic examination of textual phenomena into a visionary framework of what writers and readers can share, I explore the possibility that rhetorical criticism can empower writers to acquire practical wisdom and invigorate the bonding and reparative potentials of literary craft.

One core value of narratology, among others, is the willingness to share—the idea that “what’s more fundamental to criticism than agreeing on a single method is agreeing on an object constituted and held in a common world” (Lee 987). Although craft and rhetorical perspectives

do not always overlap, their differences can be brought into an interplay of complementarity that constantly expands critics and writers' literary visions—the distant yet intimate imaginary worlds in which we find ourselves navigating the forbidding yet alluring mysteries in life.

The Craft and Rhetoric of Moderate Defamiliarization: Empathic Sharing through Literary Storytelling

This chapter puts forth the overarching concept of bonding storytelling as an exemplar of masterful writing. By bonding storytelling, I refer to both the creative art of moderately defamiliarizing readers' multidimensional experience and an interdisciplinary practice of rhetorical criticism. At the same time that creative writing may deepen and defamiliarize readers' shared engagement with art and literature to empower, expand empathic understanding across differences, rhetorical criticism illuminates how masterful craft directs half-visible mysteries and multitudes toward internal resonance, moving readers forward with destabilized expectations and refreshed, enlarged meanings. Even in rhetorical reading where sharing, comprehension, and communication are of paramount importance, the perplexing differences, uncertainties, contradictions, and injustices that ensnare our elusive realities do not simply rupture or vanish. Rhetorical readers, however, are capable of navigating and working through the complexities in life by connecting with writers' expanded, future-oriented vision of love across realistic, systemic constraints and binary, hierarchical differences. As this chapter will demonstrate, rhetorical criticism can offer holistic vision and forward thinking. It acknowledges how dark and blemished realities impose constraints on the capacity of different individuals, groups, and species to bond with one another, but it expands outward toward to visualize how storytelling and imagination can cultivate mutual understanding and shared experience. Interdisciplinary insights from craft analysis and the psychology of aesthetics can further build on rhetorical narratology's premise that different readers may connect through overlapping literary and aesthetic experiences. As in my case study *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* by Karen Joy Fowler, the unreliable narrator visualizes how the differences between her and her

chimpanzee sister can be shaped into a complementarity of shared affinity. The narrator concludes: “what mattered in the end was not what Fern could do or what I could do, but the sum of it—Fern and me together. And me and Fern together, we could do almost anything” (108). In offering a systematic and multifaceted exploration of bonding storytelling, this chapter also suggests that rhetorical criticism may guide creative storytellers to further hone the craft and rhetoric of their work-in-progress and, ultimately, further invigorate the bonding potentials of literary craft.

The artistic salience of defamiliarization shines through its rhetorical affordances. Viktor Shklovsky has famously credited literary and artistic techniques with the capacity to defamiliarize—intensify and slow down—readers’ perception of the familiar and the ordinary. As a result of this intensity and “slowness of perception,” readers are empowered to experience and appreciate the artful dynamics of the literary object “in its continuity” and “in its entirety” (12, 22). Whereas Shklovsky attributes defamiliarization’s rhetorical function to recipients’ refreshed awareness of the internal workings of art, fiction writer Charles Baxter notes that defamiliarized perceptions of a literary work liberate its meanings from automatic symbols, infusing the extratextual reality with fresh insights and a sense of sudden correctness.¹ Baxter advises aspiring writers to use defamiliarization in moderation—making small events interesting and characters contradictory—such that it invigorates readers’ “re-cognitions” or their renewed understanding of the extratextual reality (*Burning Down* 38). Although Shklovsky attempts to disentangle experiencing from knowing, extratextual reality from artful dynamics, the literary experience defamiliarization invokes is multidimensional and multifaceted, and the visceral, affective, and cognitive responses that defamiliarization elicits are often intertwined.² To knit together relevant critical, empirical, and craft insights, defamiliarizing elements—such as

striking stylistic features characterizing literary language and unreliable narration featuring strangeness and subjectivity—can paradoxically empower readers’ emotional and interpretive engagement with literary exploration of the deep patterns of life and generate their embodied empathy with fictional characters, including the seemingly alien and different unreliable narrators.³

At the same time that the rhetorical and aesthetic salience of defamiliarization has fascinated practicing writers and literary scholars alike, the specific principles underlying its empathic and empowering effects have remained largely underspecified. For instance, David Miall has taken pains to pinpoint the dehabituating power of foregrounded stylistic features and readers’ sensuous, embodied experience of empathizing with fictional characters as two primary components of literary reading; and he draws on extensive empirical and neuropsychological research to unpack defamiliarization and empathy respectively (*Literary Reading* 21; “Enacting” 291).⁴ As he argues, “to understand literary reading and the role of empathy in particular, an enactive account involving the body is required—enactive, given that the human mirror neuron system appears to simulate in our motor systems and feelings the events, objects, actions, and emotions that we encounter while we read” (“Enacting” 291). “Through literary reading,” Miall also maintains, “we dehabituate [experience defamiliarization], that is, we are enabled to contemplate alternative models for being in the world” (*Literary Reading* 17). Yet Miall treats empathy and defamiliarization more or less as two discrete elements of literary reading; and he does not explain how and why defamiliarizing craft techniques deepen empathy with fictional characters. Steering clear of the agency of authorial construction, Miall views literariness as “a result of interaction between text and reader” rather than as the communication between creative writing and rhetorical reading (*Literary Reading* 144).

This chapter reworks Shklovsky's concepts of slowness and continuity to explore the craft and rhetoric of moderate defamiliarization. While Baxter presents the notion of moderate defamiliarization as an alternative to the modernist "aesthetics of shock and surprise," empty avant-gardism, or programmatically unconventional writing, my understanding of moderation concerns not so much the scope of innovation in technique or subject as the craft of directing subtextual uncertainties and nuanced variations and repetitions toward internal logic and continuity (27–31). Such narrative complexities cultivate time and space for readers to viscerally experience, empathically inhabit, and intellectually understand the represented ideas, events, and characters from multiple angles, bringing readers into the deeper layers of narrative that interconnect to probe shared empathy and experiences. More specifically, I propose four interrelated principles governing the workings of moderate defamiliarization. First, authors' flexible yet thoughtful, controlled arrangement of half-visible, half-sayable subtextual complexities cultivates a sense of mystery, slowness, and internal resonance, which may invite readers to resolve complexity and uncertainty, work toward holistic and coherent comprehension, and thus slide into empathic imagination and sharing of others' situations.⁵ Second, the internal resonance of a story also emanates from the varied repetitions or multidimensional variations on an overarching theme; such repetitions or variations intensify readers' empathic immersion in narrative worlds with recurring yet shapeshifting, destabilizing yet mutually reinforcing meanings. Third, writers can recover the sensations and thought-provoking potential of the common, familiar ideas (such as love and power) through interweaving them in such a way that they serve as deflective, defamiliarizing lenses for one another. Fourth, as readers evaluate their overall aesthetic experiences in their continuity, they may gain insights into the overarching logic or philosophy behind a narrative whole and obtain a

holistic picture of how narrative complexities are brought into tension with one another to both enrich and navigate the mysteries in life. At the same time, such narrative complexities are seamlessly blended together to cultivate internal continuity, guiding readers toward an enlarged, renewed awareness of how storytelling and the imagination expand elusive realities into a world of shared, empathic possibilities.

The craft and rhetoric of moderate defamiliarization will be investigated through an interdisciplinary framework synthesizing ideas from three bodies of literature: James Phelan's rhetorical narratology, contemporary fiction writers' analysis of craft, and the psychology of aesthetics. Phelan's poetics gives prominence to the interactions between the implied author—the textualized image of an active authorial agent—and actual rhetorical readers who seek to join the implied author's ideal audience and are capable of evaluating their overall, multilayered aesthetic experiences.⁶ The multidimensionality of rhetorical communication is due in part to the fact that its cognitive, affective, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions are bound up with one another.⁷ Although fiction writers' craft analysis has not been examined under the light of rhetorical narratology, they embody rhetorical readers who evaluate the aesthetic achievements of literary works and elucidate the ways that narrative strategies are used to move and enlighten readers.⁸ Such craft analyses share rhetorical narratology's investigation of implied intentionality—the logic and affordances of authorial construction—as opposed to conscious authorial intentions. At the same time that creative writers explore how artistic techniques may appeal to readers' emotion, cognition, and visceral engagement, psychologists draw insights from experimental psychology, neuroscience, and the philosophy of aesthetics to inquire into the principles underlying the creation and reception of art.⁹ The psychology of aesthetics seeks to understand how art or literature “provides a link between creator and recipient who may or may

not share common social realities” and how art or literature taps into the shared aspects of human cognition and emotion (Cupchik 77). In this sense, the psychology of aesthetics not only shares rhetorical narratology’s commitment to explaining multidimensional rhetorical exchanges but also shares its assumption that different readers may connect through overlapping aesthetic experiences, and that rigorous theoretical investigation can illuminate the patterns and principles underlying such commonalities.¹⁰

To put forward my framework of moderate defamiliarization, I will combine theoretical inquiry with practical criticism. Not only will I draw together narratological, craft, and psychological perspectives to formulate principles underlying the bonding, empowering effects of defamiliarization, but I will also perform a rhetorical reading of *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* to flesh out how the author integrates half-reliable narration with subtextual and multilayered meanings to connect readers across differences. By engaging with readers’ shared capacity for empathy, shared tendencies to resolve uncertainty and construct coherence, and shared experience of family love as intertwined with physical sensations and intimacy, this novel may foster their shared connections with the nonhuman character and the seemingly strange unreliable narrator. Since rhetorical reading concerns implied authorial reading or possible shared readings facilitated by authorial construction, I will substantiate textual analysis with contextual information about the author Karen Joy Fowler to illustrate how this case study both realizes and enriches my preliminary principles.¹¹ Nonetheless, in joining authors’ aesthetic principles and readers’ aesthetic preferences and possible tendencies to engage with art in a seamless continuum, I seek to extend the relevance and applicability of moderate defamiliarization beyond Fowler’s novel. This chapter could potentially hold significance for both rhetorical readers and creative storytellers, for it delves into how writers can deploy

aesthetic means to achieve ethically meaningful ends: connecting readers with potentially different backgrounds and perspectives and breaking open the binary, hierarchical, and intergroup barriers that hinder our shared need to bond with others.

Literary Experience and Moderate Defamiliarization

Defamiliarization can be viewed as a salient feature of aesthetic experience, during which artistic techniques slow down readers' perception to invigorate their holistic, refreshed understanding of both the extratextual reality expressed through literature and its internal artful dynamics. For Shklovsky, art helps counter habitual, automatic perception and thinking, by which people move through life in an untouched and unconscious way. He writes: "By this 'algebraic' [automatic and habitual] method of thought we apprehend objects only as shapes with imprecise extensions; we do not see them in their entirety but rather recognize them by their main characteristics... Either objects are assigned one proper feature—or else they function as though by formula and do not even appear in cognition" (11–12). In this sense, Shklovsky's defamiliarization is concerned less with specific techniques than with the experience invoked by artistic craft. While the usual meanings, preconceived notions, and automatic symbols applied to understand our habitual experiences obscure their sensations, art or defamiliarization works exactly to retrieve and bring them forth, allowing us to experience life's underlying beauty and depth in its entirety (Shklovsky 11–12). By increasing the difficulty of form and stretching the duration of perception, artistic works render their objects unfamiliar, perceivable and comprehensible "in its continuity" (22). Shklovsky's defamiliarization has been misinterpreted by M. M. Bakhtin and P. N. Medvedev as the loss and negation of original meanings. They claim that defamiliarization is "far from emphasizing the enrichment of the word with new and positive constructive meaning," and that its mechanism is "constantly contrasted to meaning, thought,

artistic truth, social content” (60–61). This surface reading, however, has not done justice to Shklovsky’s original point—that defamiliarization enriches and expands our multidimensional experience of life, returning us back to its complexity with enlarged awareness. For all Shklovsky’s effort to disengage intellectual comprehension of extratextual reality from aesthetic appreciation and perception, his emphasis on readers’ reinvigorated cognition and holistic view of artistic objects unwittingly contradicts or counteracts his statement that “the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself,” and that “*Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object* (12). Stefan Iversen also observes that Shklovsky’s defamiliarizing art is not autonomous from the world; in recovering the sensations of the stone, defamiliarization works to “reunite the audience with the (now more stony) stone” (459). We may thus conclude that the bonding effects of defamiliarization arise out of its capacity to empower readers’ perceptual and cognitive engagement with art or literature as well as the complexities of extratextual realities.

With a perceptive eye, Baxter qualifies Shklovsky’s concept and presents an alternative to the modernist principles of making it new and avant-garde, programmatically anti-conventional writing. Instead of adhering to the “principle of novelty or absolute innovation in technique or subject,” novelists can employ moderately strange narrative elements, such as contradictory and undecidable characters, to renew readers’ grasp of habitual realities and help them combat the numbing effects of familiarity (*Burning Down* 29). As Baxter puts it, “The moderately strange in the middle of the ordinary is the lens for focusing the ordinary...Defamiliarization is finally more about the way in which we recognize ourselves in an action and simultaneously see someone we don’t recognize...You see a glimpse of someone reflected in that mirror, and a moment passes before you recognize that that person is yourself. Literature exists in moments like that” (38–39). For Baxter, moderate defamiliarization is a core

element of literary and aesthetic experience in the sense that literature allows for richer and more expansive exploration of common, familiar ideas via defamiliarizing, deflective points of view. He advises creative writers to explore complex concepts such as “bored ecstasy,” “pessimistic hope,” “furious tenderness,” and lovable psychopaths (36). While boredom, ecstasy, pessimism, hope, fury, and tenderness may appear unoriginal when portrayed individually or separately, they generate fresh meanings when working in continuity with or serving as off-center, deflective lenses for one another. Such meticulous authorial designs slow down and inspire moments of “recognition” and “re-cognitions” in which literature comes alive (38).

Scholars have also analyzed what constitutes literariness or aesthetic values from philosophical and psychological perspectives. Phenomenology scholar David Carr regards literary fiction as a skillfully crafted art, with “organization and coherence,” “structure and continuity,” “wholeness and complexity,” and “ambiguity” that “engages the intellect” as its lineaments (447–51). He articulates that literary fiction slows down the reading process to deepen readers’ comprehension: “Literary fiction...[provides] moments when the narrator and reader can reflect...Such deepening is a characteristic of reading for complexity” (451). In a similar vein, a philosophical tradition or line of thought holds that artistic virtues lie in the crafty techniques employed by the artists to achieve cognitive-affective outcomes, such as cultivating the audience’s empathic imagination of characters and enhancing their grasp of the human situation (Kieran 294, 296). Miall’s understanding of literary reading likewise highlights readers’ affective, empathic, and cognitive engagement. Through the lens of psychology and empirical aesthetics, Miall shines a light on the literariness of empathy—readers’ sensuous, embodied experience of feeling and thinking with fictional characters—and defamiliarization—the ways that unusual or striking descriptions and stylistic features slow down reading and invigorate

critical reflection. To knit together Baxter and Shklovsky's insights into defamiliarization, art, and literature as well as philosophical and psychological perspectives into literary and aesthetic experience, craft that combines complexity with coherence may give rise to slowness and continuity (in the sense of enlarged, holistic awareness) and deepen readers' empathic and multidimensional engagement with writers' exploration of life.

In addition to Baxter, fiction writers Robert Boswell, Maud Casey, Stacey D' Erasmio, and Christopher Castellani have also analyzed what constitutes literariness or aesthetically meaningful and rhetorically effective storytelling. Their craft insights exemplify rhetorical reading in that they analyze primary texts to examine how the half-sayable emotions, half-known subtexts, uncertainties and contradictions, and complex and multilayered meanings are shaped to *slow down* readers' experience of fiction. Boswell insists that the key to writing literary, artistic fiction is to move readers beyond the plot and surface story. "If the writer's goal is literary fiction...fiction that aspires to be art," writes Boswell, the writer should suggest a "dimension to the fictional reality that escapes [easy] comprehension" (5). He draws a negative correlation between readers' sense of familiarity and their level of critical thinking, arguing that a proper balance between what is displayed and what is secreted would make the audience "fully absorbed in the creative work" (8). In a similar vein, Casey regards mystery or a sense of half-visibility as the "elusive yet essential element of fiction" and of aesthetic experience (8). She maintains that a "literary aesthetic" "favors gesture over explanation," "the willingness to reside in, and to make room for, mystery" is "at the heart of making art" (48, 137). As Baxter, Casey, Castellani, and D' Erasmio have all pointed out, the half-known mystery in characters and narrators grows out of their multitudes, contradictions, complex psychology, and overcharged

sets of emotions and desires that cannot be easily articulated (Baxter 3, 16; Casey 51, 67; Castellani 9, 12; D' Erasmio 118).

At the same time that Castellani highlights narrators' "sensibility and...motley set of biases and agendas at the moment of telling" that at once fuel and slow down narratives, he also puts forth an aesthetic of coherence and continuity (9). For Castellani, a narrative strategy encompasses all of the elements and nuances that the author employs: point of view, "type of narrator," "the degree of retrospection," the narrator's diction, and "the presence or absence of footnotes" (17–18). These different choices are tied together to form an organizing, overarching narrative strategy—"a unique philosophy behind the construction of a work of fiction" (17). This philosophy or strategy's "greatest virtues are consistency and internal resonance; its archenemy is the arbitrary" (18). To illustrate this point, Castellani unpacks the narrative strategies in works of fiction as different as E. M. Forster's *Howards End*, Zoë Heller's *Notes on a Scandal*, and Lorrie Moore's *Self-Help*. In attending to and making positive aesthetic judgments about the internal logic of authorial designs, Castellani embodies the position of a rhetorical reader who examines works of fiction in their continuity and proposes rhetorical and aesthetic principles with generalizability.

Slowness and continuity, a sense of nuanced multitudes and half-visibility combined with internal coherence and resonance, are powerful and dynamic forces that shape a moderately defamiliarizing experience. Casey suggests that writers may slow down and mystify readers' experience by using the literal level of a narrative to guide readers toward the half-visible subterranean complexities. In her rhetorical reading of James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues," Casey analyzes how (the implied) Baldwin frames mystery and grants readers glimpses into the metaphorical darkness—the narrator and his brother Sonny's deep, fraught interiority, which

bears the crushing weight of intergenerational racism, by first immersing them in the visceral darkness—the unsettling and suggestive darkness beyond the windows (104–5, 110–11). In cueing readers to piece together the puzzles of looking out and looking in, Baldwin “[provides] the reader a view at once panoramic and exquisitely intimate” (114). The intimate, reflective first-person narration may bring readers with potentially different backgrounds into the narrator’s mental trajectory to fathom and connect with Sonny’s inner life of fury and passion, a life that contains the dark reality shared by generations of Southern migrants and the Harlem community. The pivotal moments of darkness ultimately lead readers to share the narrator’s climatic epiphany: in order to move upward into the light, they have to embrace—rather than escape—their shared memory of struggle, trauma, and loss, for it is exactly what ties them together and ignites their creative fires and freedom of expression (Baldwin 120–22). Echoing Casey’s rhetorical reading, literary critic Marc Dudley argues that “Baldwin was that most democratic of artists, giving voice to all people, and his means to getting there was as varied and inclusive as the social umbrella he held” (82). Dudley identifies the racial pain in “Sonny’s Blues”—the travails of darkness—as “of an empathetic kind” (87). By pivoting back and forth, the first-person narration explores shared salvation to racial alienation and ultimately concludes with a “shared truth,” that a “universal story” conveyed through music can reestablish empathic connection among people living under collateral racial oppression (87–93).

As it happens, Casey’s craft insights are rendered more suggestive by perspectives from the psychology of aesthetics. Psychologists Moritz Lehne and Stefan Koelsch regard artists and storytellers as applied psychologists who use tension-resolution patterns—the evocation and resolution of uncertainty associated with feelings of anticipation, expectation, and suspense—to “take advantage of general principles of human cognition” (“Tension” 286). Such tension-

resolution patterns tap into our brain's tendency to minimize surprise or prediction errors and our "basic psychological need for uncertainty reduction and understanding" (290, 298). In the case of literature, writers may put readers in a psychological state of uncertainty and anticipation that triggers sensible, future-oriented interpretations of fictional characters and narrative plots (288). Likewise, for Miall, literary narratives are complex and indeterminate; they defamiliarize readers "existing structures of knowledge" and impel readers to formulate new frameworks or structures to account for literary texts' complexities, nuances, and uncertainties (*Literary Reading* 47, 49). Feelings such as anticipation and suspense play an important role in the cognitive-affective process of resolving uncertainty or working toward an integrated understanding (54, 78–79). As Miall puts it, "Feelings, like suspense, appear to be anticipatory, projecting possible future states of our being...Given the indeterminacy of the reader's experience of a literary story such as the Woolf, the reader must develop some representation of the outcome of a narrative to keep the comprehension process on line...In this sense, feeling offers a pre structuring of the meaning of the text as a whole" (54, 78–79). It is notable that this cognitive-affective process of navigating and working through complexity may be embodied. Lehne and Koelsch suggest that aesthetic experiences of suspense and tension involve physiological responses like "increased heart rate associated with sympathetic arousal" ("Toward" 3, 6). Also, in a study investigating "the dynamic development of narrative suspense in excerpts of literary classics," participants including "both experts and lay recipients" were presented with "two sections of canonical German novels"; one text is suspenseful, and the other one neutral, less suspenseful (Katrin and others 211, 217). Changes in "the size of pupil diameter" were adopted as physiological measures of suspense (215). The results show significant positive correlations between participants' suspense ratings and their pupil diameters, which suggest that the aesthetic

experience of suspense has a reliable physiological indicator (228). These psychological and empirical findings align well with Casey's observation, that mystery is a visceral experience beginning in the body.

Additional perspectives into the psychology of reading have illuminated readers' tendency toward integrated and coherent understandings of literary texts. Psychologist Gregory Schraw considers works of literary merit as "narratives that are richly symbolic and include both an interpretable surface meaning and one or more coherent subtexts (i.e., implicit thematic interpretations that run parallel to the explicit surface-level meaning of the text)" (436). Having conducted a study on why literary texts appeal to readers, Schraw found that readers' situational interests—interests evoked by "reader goals or properties of the text"—are related to the text's coherent organization and flow as well as readers' holistic interpretations that integrate different parts of the story's contents or combine sophisticated textual analysis with extratextual materials (437, 441, 442, 448). Moreover, literary scholar Dirk Vanderbeke employs neuropsychological research to indicate readers' aesthetic preference for coherence and their inclination to construct continuity among disjunctive information. He contends that "fluency and smoothness are important aspects in aesthetic perception and favor the evaluation of an object as beautiful or pleasant," and that "gap filling is itself a smooth mental activity already fully working in children when they first approach literary or semi-literary publications" (Vanderbeke 184–85). Similarly, Gestalt psychology, a theoretical tradition underlying the psychology of aesthetics, suggests that individuals perceive artistic objects as complex, multilayered, and coherent wholes that integrate subject matters and stylistic features with the audience's sensory, embodied aesthetic experience, which is deeply connected to their lived world and personal life meanings (Cupchik 66, 71). To shape viewers' coherent comprehension, artists can interweave tension with harmony,

juxtaposing different colors, textures, structural layers, and areas of composition (66). At the same time that psychological insights point to the tie between aesthetic perception and coherence or continuity, Castellani's craft knowledge draws attention to the internal resonance found within the composition of fictional works. Similarly, Casey, Baxter, Boswell, and D' Erasmio's shared emphasis on the mystifying slowness and half-visibility of literature aligns well with psychological explanations of the empowering uncertainty and complexity in the arts. It may thus be reasonable to propose that writers' rhetorical principles and readers' aesthetic engagements can exist on a seamless continuum.

By establishing continuity between craft and psychology, I propose my first principle of moderate defamiliarization. That is, authors can cultivate half-known mystery to invite readers to resolve uncertainty, work toward a holistic understanding, and thus slide into empathic imagination of fictional characters and narrative plots. My first principle presents slowness and continuity not only as the creation and resolution of uncertainty but also as empathic, imaginative gap-filling prompted by literary and artistic craft, which resides in the beautiful and elusive half-ness, veiled from immediate accessibility and tinged with the promise of more.

My second principle concerns the varied, multidimensional repetitions that may slow down and enrich readers' empathic immersion in narrative worlds. Such destabilizing, metamorphic yet logically integrated complexities transport readers into an alternate universe that originates in the characters' visions but expands beyond their boundaries. On narratological grounds, "coherent narrative seems to involve a healthy amount of repetition and near repetition (repetition with alteration)" (Toolan). Similarly, Boswell performs a craft and rhetorical reading of Alice Elliot Dark's "In the Gloaming" to illustrate how Dark repeats, in various ways, the overarching idea of hope and joy amidst seeming dimness and desperation. The story revolves

around the son's dying during the twilight hours, but *Dark* destabilizes readerly expectations by using the gloaming as a metaphor for revitalization as opposed to deterioration. "The gloaming is the time when Laird [the son] is magically restored," writes Boswell, "and it restores his mother [Janet], as well" (116). By the idea of restoring, Boswell refers to Laird's effort to maintain his diminishing energy and Janet's happiness in having Laird exclusively to herself (116–17). The twilight hours, the delicate and intimate moments of exclusion, also immerse readers in Laird and Janet's mutual desire to get to understand each other again after the intervening years and revive their shared moments of intimacy in his childhood (*Dark* 9–16, 24). In addition to imbuing the dying scenes with a touch of tenderness, *Dark* further defamiliarizes, enriches readers' experience of hope and love by having Laird's death occur in the daylight and having his father Martin appear in the gloaming, whose effort to connect with his son may push readers beyond Janet's illusion of Martin's withdrawal from the family and "[exceed] the reader's expectations, creating in the process a rush of emotional power" (Boswell 117). This story ends in Martin's question that, despite years of alienation, evokes memories of how he used to rely on her to get to understand their children: "Please, Janet, tell me—what else did my boy like?" (*Dark* 37). By creating multidimensional repetitions of the beautiful contrast between death and daylight, between ongoing decline and unending promise, *Dark* propels readers toward a holistic picture of Janet, Laird, and Martin's shared effort to create ties that transcend the limits of time, and she transports readers into an alternate universe, an expansive vision wherein hope and human connection are still possible in the face of unrelenting circumstances.

Boswell and Casey's interest in forging the relationship between the complexity and continuity of authorial design and the intensity of readerly engagement is also shared by D'Erasmio. She offers a rhetorical reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to illustrate how writers can

cultivate time and space for readers to feel and fully apprehend the weight of “connectedness”—the “most primal, most powerful human emotion” by bringing them to the “*brink of almost not being able to say*” (112, 118). In D’ Erasmio’s case study, Sethe commits the unspeakable murder of her daughter because she cannot bear to let Beloved endure a life plagued by systemic injustices and severed human ties. Sethe’s effort to free her daughter in turn stifles her own freedom to express and experience love; but only when she is able to love Beloved without reservation can she be freed from the haunting feelings of terror, grief, and guilt (114, 116, 118). The unsayable, unbearable atrocity of slavery serves as a defamiliarizing mirror that reflects motherly love—a wounded, strained but essential aspect of humanity—with insight and illumination. “*Beloved* teaches us that it may be the case that, paradoxically, we feel the weight of that word [love] more directly by experiencing the weight of the forces ranged against it,” writes D’ Erasmio, “that we measure its power in the power of its cost” (119). Motherly love and the brunt of slavery are relatively well-known concepts, but Morrison brings them into tension with each other to add mutually reinforcing meanings. As literary scholars Maureen Fadem and Sara Kaplan have also pointed out, Sethe’s enslaved motherhood or “dispossessed maternity” speaks powerfully to “the intimate violence of chattel slavery,” revealing that “in the life of a slave, one must also unfold and bear love as conscious, intentional, radical act, as choice and a necessarily tragic one” (Kaplan 82, 88; Fadem 48). Morrison depicts how the particularity of racial experience metamorphoses into the freedom to love and “be human without the legal ‘right’ to be,” affording shared humanity to a heartfelt, truthful vision of freedom (Fadem 48). The art of crafting intimacy through distance brings out my third principle of moderate defamiliarization: writers can defamiliarize or breathe new life into well-known concepts

through interweaving them in such a way that they serve as deflective or magnifying lenses for one another.

In light of D' Erasmo's rhetorical reading of Morrison, Boswell's rhetorical reading of Dark, and Casey's rhetorical reading of Baldwin, I put forth my fourth principle; that is, as rhetorical readers evaluate their overall aesthetic experiences, they may gain holistic insights into how literary craft combines slowness with continuity and brings together narrative complexities. Although D' Erasmo, Boswell, and Casey do not explicitly refer to the terminologies of rhetorical narratology, their craft analyses are grounded in close examination of authors' literary techniques and textualized, implied ideas. Instead of returning to authors' historical, biographical, and authoritative origins or deciphering their exact, conscious, and private intentions, they evaluate how writers direct different narrative elements toward internal logic and continuity to intensify rhetorical effects. In a similar vein, the goal of rhetorical narratology is not to "determine the conscious intention of the actual author...but rather to discern the system of intentionality that explains why the text has this particular shape rather than some other one" (Phelan and Rabinowitz 32). By "system of intentionality," rhetorical narratologists refer to the logic and principles behind the overall construction and workings of narratives as well as writers' communicative achievements. As a rhetorical reader, I set out to systematically investigate the mechanism and principles governing clusters of constructive, communicative choices that invite readers into the depths of what we can possibly share: the healing, reparative power of abiding love and connection, the lights of rebirth and revitalization amidst encroaching darkness, and so forth.

Half-Sayability and Empathic Imagination in *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*

To offer a detailed illustration of the craft and rhetoric of moderate defamiliarization and the broader concept of bonding storytelling, I will apply my interdisciplinary framework to analyze how (the implied) Fowler empowers her (rhetorical) readers to bond with the unreliable narrator Rosemary Cooke and her chimpanzee sister Fern. Fowler's intricate integration of half-sayable subtextual mystery, half-accessible multitudes, reliable and unreliable narrations, and multidimensional variations on the theme of love may slow down and deepen readers' collective experience of the multiple shapes and layers of an overarching idea—that storytelling and imagination can expand shared empathy across individuals, groups, and species.

Scholarly interpretations of the novel have tended to focus on how the novel's complex narrative designs—the uncertain, unreliable, and nonlinear first-person narration, as an important example—serve to highlight the indeterminacy of knowledge and human-animal boundaries, the cognitive differences between Rosemary and her chimpanzee sister Fern, and our limited understanding of the nonhuman character's interiority. Literary scholar Erin James puts forward the argument that Fowler refuses to anthropomorphize Fern and instead uses Rosemary as a human bridge character to inspire actual readers' concern and compassion for non-human beings. The particular challenge posed by the novel's narrative complexities, as James argues, is readers' assigned quest for caring for a nonhuman character whose unknowable interior world resists their empathic efforts. In a similar vein, Emily York argues that the novel's multivocal narrative voice Rosemary/Fern works to challenge human exceptionalism, which can be viewed as a manifestation of anthropomorphism. These sophisticated interpretations and my rhetorical reading share a similar ambition of delving beyond the internal workings of the novel; we analyze textual intricacies in order to investigate its possible real-world implications and greater ethical relevance. My rhetorical reading, however, may further enrich the ongoing scholarly

conversation by illuminating how Fowler's craft lifts readers above the crude, objective facts concerning anthropomorphism and transports them into a more expansive realm of imagination and connection. It is precisely through Rosemary's effort to visualize a life shared with Fern that Fowler forges the connection between the world of writerly imagination and that of readers' empathic and multidimensional participation. *Love—the capacity to extract a sense of affinity from elusive realities and limited understandings—brings together the narrative fragments and complexities and empowers us to see what we can possibly share beyond limits and boundaries.* If literary criticism aspires to delve beyond the text and probe greater ethical significance, we may first need to delve *into* the complex and coherent textual core and then move outward toward the possible real-world achievements of craft construction and rhetorical communication. In joining insights from craft and rhetorical narratology to evaluate the effectiveness of literary writing, I also gesture toward the possibility that literary criticism may guide writers to further hone the craft and rhetoric of their creative works.

Under the rhetorical framework, unreliable narration is “a mode of indirect communication”—the “implied author communicates with his or her audience by means of the voices of another speaker [narrator]” (*Somebody Telling* 99). Underreporting is one subtype of unreliability and occurs “along the axis of information about characters and events,” due to “discrepancies between “the implied author’s and the narrator’s reports” (99–100). As in my case study, Rosemary’s underreporting resides in her withholding of pieces of information essential to the story that Fowler has in mind. Rosemary’s unreliability can also be considered in relation to readerly experience: Fowler interweaves two types of underreporting with revelations about Rosemary’s past to constantly destabilize readers’ expectations. In one respect, Rosemary is unable to narrate a painful piece of childhood memory because she cannot afford to remember a

wrong she has committed. While the repression of her traumatic past is due to her unspeakable, unbearable guilt, Rosemary also consciously and deliberately withholds the fact about Fern's species. These temporary impediments to knowledge paradoxically cultivate a world-making sense of intimacy emanating from readers' empathic imagination.

Rosemary's story opens with abstract, incomplete information about the disappearance of her brother and sister: "My parents persisted in pretending we were a close-knit family...In light of my two missing siblings, this was an astonishing triumph of wishful thinking" (17). A few pages later, she reports, "Missing family members. Gone was gone" (21). Rosemary's narration simultaneously invites and impedes readers' effort to gain a clear picture of her story.¹² At the same time that the stylistic choices "astonishing," "wishful," "gone," and "pretending" imply the tremendous emotional toll caused by the unexplained disappearance of Fern, Rosemary delays the revelation about Fern's identity as a chimpanzee and shares only glimpses of her memory of Fern. Consider this passage: "Though I was only five when she disappeared from my life, I do remember her. I remember her sharply—her smell and touch, scattered images of her face, her ears, her chin, her eyes. Her arms, her feet, her fingers. But I don't remember her fully" (55). While Rosemary's fragmented recollection of Fern cues readers to integrate different sensory modalities—their senses of smell, sight, and touch, it leaves out specific and concrete details about what, exactly, Fern smells like, looks like, and feels like to the touch. Interdisciplinary scholar Laura Otis holds that creative literary language prompts readers to "recall and recombine their own past sensory experiences so that they can feel what the characters are feeling" (3). Here Rosemary's literary language is inflected with a lack of immediate accessibility, which may tap into readers' possible inclinations to resolve uncertainty, fill in ambiguities, and construct coherence between the subject matter's "physical sensory structure" and their own "personal life

meanings” (Cupchik 66).¹³ Given the incomplete yet important sensory information, readers may be prompted to assume that the human narrator’s sister is also human and retrieve their own embodied sensory knowledge to imagine, perceive, and approximate the siblings’ intimate relationship. While individual experiences with family members and the specific instances of feeling their touches and looking at them affectionately vary among different readers, they may still share the understanding that family love involves bodily interactions that deliver a sense of intimacy, warmth, and security. In recalling and re-experiencing what it feels like to physically interact with their loved ones, readers can share Rosemary’s (disjointed) memory through their own recollected sensations.

One quarter of the way through the novel, Rosemary discloses the truth about Fern’s species. Being aware that not many people have similar experiences of growing up with chimp siblings, Rosemary makes the decision to withhold Fern’s “essential simian-ness”: “I wanted you to see how it really was. I tell you Fern is a chimp and, already, you aren’t thinking of her as my sister” (77). By positioning Fern as a family member before revealing her identity as an animal, Rosemary empowers readers to imagine that her life and Fern’s are intimately, profoundly intertwined.

During interviews, Fowler commented on the logic behind Rosemary’s unreliability, which serves to empower readers to visualize how humans and animals exist on a continuum and what different groups can possibly share. “I have lived through a number of iterations of people trying to figure out where the divide is,” said Fowler, “What’s more interesting to me is the way we do actually fit in with the other animals” (“Karen”). Fowler also explained that she made the choice to withhold Fern’s identity because she wanted to “begin from an assumption of similarity” as opposed to the position of avoiding anthropomorphism (“An Interview”). As she

said, “The very care we take not to anthropomorphize is not a neutral position, but has implications for results, as Fern has to prove herself every step of the way in a sort of rigged game. I wanted to do the opposite—to begin from an assumption of similarity. As Lowell says, it felt more Darwinian to me to do so. And less rude” (“An Interview”). At the same time that the implied Fowler prompts readers to compare their own embodied sensory experience with the intimate bond between Rosemary and Fern before revealing Fern’s identity, the flesh-and-blood Fowler used underreporting to help readers think forwardly and beyond the binary distinctions among different groups. Such binary, hierarchical thought is a potential barrier to our ability to imagine what we can possibly share and empathize with the needs of other people and other species. Consider Fowler’s analysis of her ethics of empathy: “As the title of my book suggests, I have come to think of one of the primary roles of literature and art being the extension of our sense of who is like us and therefore the extension of our empathy...I would like to go even further and have our empathy extend beyond our species. I would like a world in which we recognize that we are all completely beside ourselves” (“Interview”). Fowler’s craft perspective, together with the title of this novel, shines a light on the ethical dimension of literary and aesthetic experience, which involves our enhanced capacity to think beyond ourselves.

The narrator’s conscious underreporting works in tandem with the subsequent reliable description of her tactile experience towards internal logic and continuity. Shortly after Rosemary reveals the news about Fern’s species, she narrates: “My very earliest memory, more tactile than visual, is of lying against Fern. I feel her fur on my cheek...A few drops of water still cling to the sparse white hair of her chin. I see this, looking up from the shoulder I am leaning against” (80). Once again, Fowler appeals through the senses; this time, however, she supplies concrete sensory information, which may further assist readers with viscerally experiencing and

intellectually understanding the intimate bond humans and animals can share. According to Miall's framework of empathy, "abstract events that are modeled on a sensory mode are also represented bodily;" and "character descriptions are adopted by the reader as though they described the self, with consequent bodily feelings" ("Enacting" 291). If Miall's theory holds true, the specific sensory details—"lying against Fern," "fur on my cheek," and "leaning against [her shoulder]"—may enable readers to imagine Rosemary's tactile experience and physically feel the sensations of warmth and relief as well as the texture of soft and fluffy furs (80). Miall also predicts that "bodily feelings may then resonate with the reader's episodic memories and other meaning structures from the reader's own experience and understanding" (291). In this sense, readers' sensory perceptions may then resonate with their own tactile, embodied memories with their loved ones, such as feeling their touches and leaning against their shoulders, which further evokes a sense of comfort, connection, and affection. In view of the connection between physical sensations and "other meaning structures" arising from readers' unique comprehension of the world, Fowler's sensory description may also engage them on a cognitive level, prompting them to draw on prior knowledge to grasp the capacity of love to transcend differences (291).

On psychological grounds, readers "experience the imagery of sense when [they] have the subjective experience of sensation without having corresponding sensory input" (Starr 72). As they experience perceptual imagery through reading and imagination, "areas of the brain involved in actual perception are active, and function in similar patterns" (75). Imagery is by nature multisensory, with motion at its very heart (81). Indeed, Miall goes so far as to state that "descriptions of bodily movements are felt immediately in the reader's own body" ("Enacting" 291). Fowler invites readers into the fictional characters' bodies by invoking the multisensory imagery of touch and motion. Consider this passage: "[Fern] used to grip me so tightly that the

only way I could put her down was to pry her loose, one digit at a time...But that's how it works in the wild—the baby chimp clings to its mother for the whole of the first two years...Still, that was the week she took hold of my heart. She was so little and so alone in the world. So frightened and sad. And so much like a baby. So much like you, only with a lot of suffering added" (286–87). The phrases "grip me so tightly," "pry her loose," and "clings to its mother" blend representations of movements with tactile sensations arising from physical contact (286). In prompting readers to viscerally enact the characters' physical interactions in their own bodies, multisensory imagery also brings them into intimate contact with the emotional connection shared between Fern and Rosemary. This delineation of humans' and chimpanzees' shared need for companionship as well as the parallel between a baby chimp's reliance on its mother and Fern's strong attachment to Rosemary breaks open interspecies boundaries and allows the characters' tactile and emotional experiences to take life in readers' empathic imagination.

The novel culminates in the heart-wrenching, heart-warming reunification of the siblings: "I pressed my palm...against the bulletproof glass...Her body had become unfamiliar to me. And yet, at the very same time, I recognized everything about her" (308). The contradiction between Rosemary's lack of familiarity with Fern's physical appearance and her strong sense of recognition defamiliarizes—slows down and temporarily impedes—reading and interpretation. This slowness and half-accessibility may tap into readers' inclination to construct coherence and smoothness among complex information, guiding them to integrate different parts of the novel to attain a holistic picture. Although the bulletproof glass renders it impossible for Rosemary and Fern to make any physical contact, the way that Rosemary presses her palm against the glass and her intense longing for Fern's touch powerfully echoes her previous statement that their memory is "more tactile than visual" (80). Fern's body looks unfamiliar because Rosemary has not seen

her for years; but Rosemary still recognizes everything about Fern because she has retrieved her sensuous and emotional memory with Fern, which may also evoke readers' visceral knowledge of the previous narrative parts.

As much as the seemingly disparate narrative elements generate slowness and complexity, they also work beautifully in synergy with one another toward internal logic and resonance. In addition to employing the rhetorical strategy of conscious underreporting, Fowler also cultivates mystery around the ellipses in Rosemary's inner world. Repeatedly Rosemary narrates that she is "inching into dangerous territory" when being asked about her family, that the go-to-story she shares with people "replaces the moment it was meant to capture," and that "history and memory seem like a mist, as if what really happened matters less than what should have happened" (28, 37, 40). According to Baxter and Casey's craft insights, writers can employ luminous, gratuitous details to create exquisite surface tensions suggesting overloaded subtextual matters (*Subtext* 3; *Mystery* 37, 41). Rosemary repeats, again and again: "I can only assume that our parents explained to me about Fern's disappearance, possibly many times, and I've repressed it...Maybe later, after Fern left, I saw how I should have felt and revised my memory accordingly" (67, 78). The overabundance of details and repetitions amplifies Rosemary's unspeakable pain over broken familial bonds as well as the mystery around her subconscious need to escape a memory that is difficult to bear and talk about.

For all Rosemary's struggle to contain her intense emotions, she has to narrate the missing part of the story herself for some unknown, mysterious reason; and it pains her to do so. She reports, "Not mentioning Fern was first a decision, and later a habit, hard and painful even now to break...I can't abide someone else bringing her up. I have to ease into it. I have to choose my moment" (55). Just a few pages later, Rosemary adds, "I was our mother's favorite child.

Lowell was our father's. I loved our father as much as our mother, but I loved Lowell best of all. Fern loved our mother best. Lowell loved Fern more than he loved me. When I lay out these facts, they seem essentially benign" (59). These excessive details about Rosemary's family relations and her emphasis on the essential harmlessness of these facts are, paradoxically, an index of her hidden jealousy towards Fern for Lowell's love. Indeed, the glimpses into her deep emotions reveal a sister's yearning for her brother's affection. Rosemary tells us that it hurts to watch a brother pamper his sister, that Lowell was patient while teaching her to play poker, and that he defended her from an abusive classmate and comforted her by buying her an ice cream cone (22, 45–46). The narrator's multitudes and contradictions, together with the unsayable and uncontainable, may compel readers to piece together textual clues to resolve complexity and slide into the intimate space for imagination and connection. For D' Erasmo, this speculative, world-making act of imagining "the most private core" of a fictional character's life is "an intimacy in art that may not be possible in real life"—the "deepest and most powerful intimacy" (20, 25). In brief, the empathic gap-filling achieved through Rosemary's half-sayability illustrates my first principle of moderate defamiliarization: authors can cultivate half-known mystery and a lack of immediate accessibility to deepen holistic understanding of and empathic immersion in narrative worlds.

As Rosemary struggles to bring the repressed piece of memory to the surface, her unreliable underreporting gradually shades into reliable narration. Despite her jealousy towards Fern, she cannot help but take pains to imagine how Fern must have felt when being expelled from the family. Rosemary says, "I'm sobbing and sobbing, because...I've let myself imagine the day Fern was taken away...Now I searched through my weariness, into every breath, every muscle, every heartbeat, and found a reassuring, bone-deep certainty. I loved Fern. I had always

loved Fern. I always would” (166, 224). Rosemary’s previously repressed love resurfaces because it is experienced as feelings that “arise in our bodies” (223). Not only does this visceral love fill in the blanks of Rosemary’s disconnected tactile, embodied memories of Fern, but it also renders Rosemary’s subsequent reliable narration, which is driven by her need to face her dark side, all the more moving and meaningful.

Later Rosemary reveals that it is actually her love for Lowell—a jealous, possessive love—that results in the expulsion of Fern from her family; it is her lifelong, unbearable guilt over a mistake she committed as a child—a failure of empathy—that has silenced her. At the age of five, Rosemary took a kitten and passed it to Fern, albeit reluctantly; Fern then killed it with her fingers. Rosemary told Lowell what had happened, but Lowell chose to believe that Rosemary made up the story to put Fern in trouble (251). Acting on her jealousy, Rosemary not only confided in her mother about Fern’s murder but also lied to her mother that she is scared of Fern, a lie that got Fern removed from the family (270). Although the five-year-old Rosemary made their parents take her side and make up for the love she felt is owed to her by Lowell, she might not have realized that humans have absolute power over animals, a power so dangerous that exercising it once can result in Fern’s lifelong misery and imprisonment. Rosemary’s reliable narration thus sheds retrospective light on her previous underreporting. In order to acknowledge her repressed love for Fern, Rosemary has to work through and overcome the pain of guilt; and she comes to peace with her past via remembering and narrating the unsayable.

Another unsayable truth about the Fern-Rosemary relationship is that it is, at its very root, a power relationship. Despite that Rosemary has always considered Fern as an endearing sibling who takes hold of others’ hearts and triggers jealousy, their father treats Fern as an object of a psychological study that implicitly endorses human superiority. Whereas the stated purpose of

this study is to compare and contrast the developing linguistic abilities of a human child and a baby chimpanzee, the unacknowledged, ulterior purpose is to explore if Rosemary can learn to use language to exert influence over Fern (100). The study ends in failure because it focuses on the linguistic skills Fern lacks as opposed to her physical strength and agility or the “mountain of things she can do that [Rosemary] can’t” (82). Together the human effort to establish hierarchical divisions between “us” and “them” and the lack of empathy with those in lower power positions can sever meaningful bonds or prevent their development. As a property of Indiana university, Fern is easily “sold to South Dakota on the condition that they take her at once,” which finalizes her lifelong separation from her family members (213). Fowler intensifies and refreshes our experience of love, a concept so well-known that we may have become habituated to it, through presenting us with the forces ranged against its possibilities.

Although Rosemary will never be able to physically touch Fern again, she feels Fern’s presence through drawing inspiration and inner strength from memory and imagination. In one extraordinary passage, Rosemary narrates: “I stood by the tracks, all by myself, in a sudden shower of images. My life, only with Fern instead of without her. Fern in kindergarten, making a paper turkey from the silhouette of her hand. Fern in the high school gym watching Lowell play basketball and hooting when he scored. Fern in the freshman dorm, complaining to the other girls about our crazy crazy parents” (224). In visualizing what a life of growing up with Fern would have been like, Rosemary realizes that she has always been, imaginatively and wistfully, sharing the ordinary and cherished moments with Fern. Love, together with the desire to bridge gaps between different individuals and realities, can renew the possibilities of language and fuel creative imagination and storytelling. As Rosemary tells us, “finally I came to understand that all of my verbosity had been valuable only in the context of my sister. When she left the scene, no

one cared anymore about my creative grammars, my compound lexemes, my nimble, gymnastic conjugations” (108). It is never clear to what extent Fern is able to understand human language, and they primarily communicate via non-verbal forms such as gestures, postures, and signs. Yet Fern’s presence endows Rosemary’s effort to creatively express herself, translate for Fern, and revitalize language—the mechanism through which people connect across differences—with meanings and significance.

Love, as Rosemary grows to understand, is like a mirror that allows her to see the best in herself and in Fern. When the novel opens, Rosemary was “meandering through [her] fifth year at the University of California, Davis, and still maybe only a junior or maybe a senior [and] wouldn’t be graduating anytime soon” (6). In narrating her love for Fern, however, Rosemary decides to take responsibility for her career. She tells us, “I had a sister to take care of. It was time to get serious” (275). Rosemary’s storytelling concludes in this reverberating line: “My sister, Fern. In the whole wide world, my only red poker chip. As if I were looking in a mirror” (308). This line echoes the way Fern used to give Rosemary a red poker chip, which means “same” in that psychological study. It is difficult to fathom Fern’s exact understanding of the red poker chip, but Rosemary takes it as a sign of empathy and affinity: “When you feel bad, I feel bad... We’re the same, you and I” (203). Once again, Fowler speaks to the capacity of love and imagination to help us see more clearly, among all the differences, what we can share with one another. As Rosemary pieces together the bits and pieces of memory, she sees the golden raisins Fern used to share with her, the birthday cake with icing roses they both loved, and the name “luv” that a graduate student used to call her and Fern both (73, 80, 98). Rosemary also comes to see that love is more important than hierarchical distinctions: “what mattered in the end was not what Fern could do or what I could do, but the sum of it—Fern and me together. And me and

Fern together, we could do almost anything” (108). Furthermore, the novel explains that humans and chimpanzees share a natural inclination towards empathy, and Rosemary explains how empathy operates on both emotional and cognitive levels: “When we see someone hurt, our brains respond to some extent as if we’d been hurt ourselves. This response is not located merely in the amygdala, where emotional memories are stored, but also in those regions of the cortex responsible for analyzing the behavior of others. We access our own experiences with pain and extend them to the current sufferer” (170). With perspicacity and tenderness, Fowler taps into the essential aspects of human psychology and brain functioning to take different readers on Rosemary’s journey to grow up and become a better sister. By interconnecting multidimensional variations on the theme of love in the light of power imbalance and imaginative storytelling, Fowler’s craft illustrates my second and third principles of moderate defamiliarization. That is, writers can interweave varied repetitions, multilayered meanings, and deflative points of view to invigorate the visceral sensations and thought-provoking potential of the shared, fundamental aspects of our lives—such as the beauty, frailties, and various manifestations of love.

My first three principles of moderate defamiliarization ultimately lead to the fourth principle. As rhetorical readers evaluate the overall quality of their aesthetic experience, they may gain holistic insights into how Fowler blends nuanced complexities to bring readers closer to her overarching idea—that we are all completely beside ourselves because storytelling empowers us to imagine beyond ourselves and established hierarchies. By tapping into our shared emotional and cognitive capacities for empathy, Fowler’s craft works to help us overcome our inherent “preference for our own kind” and rivalry with outgroups—our natural inclination towards denying common humanity (We 151–52). Suzanne Keen argues that we should especially prize narrative techniques involved in extending “readers’ sense of shared humanity

beyond the predictable limitations” and fostering empathy “regarding the emotional states of others marked out as different by their age, race, gender, weight, disabilities, and so forth” (“Narrative Empathy” 69–70). As a mechanism through which writers combine slowness with continuity to invite shared rhetorical interactions and deepen readers’ empathic immersion and comprehension, moderate defamiliarization is worthy of attention for its potential to empower shared rhetorical interactions and connections across differences.

Conclusion

In putting forth an interdisciplinary practice of rhetorical criticism, I seek to throw light on rhetorical narratology and creative writers’ shared quest for exploring what constitutes aesthetically meaningful and rhetorically effective storytelling, which also intersects with psychological inquiries into the principles underlying our multilayered interactions with artistic creations as well as the connections between artistic creativity and art appreciation (Vartanian 29). As I hope to have shown, interdisciplinary insights such as craft analyses and psychological perspectives may enrich rhetorical theory by illuminating the continuities or shared aspects between writerly craft and readerly engagement.

By the same logic, it appears reasonable for working writers to combine craft with narratology and use them as guides. By putting forward an interdisciplinary perspective, I also hope to illuminate the possibilities writers can explore: the preliminary terminology, structures, and principles for inviting readers to meet all the way across differences in the imaginative space. In listening attentively to how writers fill their craft with the breath of life, rhetorical readers can show forth, in a structured and systematic way, how that life contains so many stories of our lives. It is undeniable that life can be blemished with ungraspable facts, enslaved realities,

and seemingly insurmountable divisions, but rhetorical readers come to grips with how art or literature can reorder and restructure such mysteries into a cohesive, all-inclusive understanding of what shared, empathic imagination can possibly transform.

On Ecological and Reparative Storytelling: The Rhetoric of Two-Way

Narrative Movements

Critical conversations spanning across ecocritical thinking and studies of narrative have delved into the interconnectivity among literary form, ecological entanglement, and the ethical dimension of rhetorical communication. Erin James and Eric Morel pinpoint rhetorical approaches to narrative ethics, which foreground the persuasive, reader-oriented facet of storytelling, and the merging of ecocritical and cognitive perspectives on readers' encounters with literature as key research directions in eco-narratology (James and Morel 9–10). They seek to yoke together devices of rhetorical communication and the pressing concerns of our physical environment, exploring how literary representation of the nonhuman, environmentally responsible narration, and cognitive simulation of narrative environments challenge readers to rethink human selfhood under the backdrop of ecological crisis (5–12). Alexa Weik von Mossner and Marco Caracciolo have likewise systematically explored how affectively charged formal strategies tap into readers' tendency to engage with aesthetic works on a bodily level, enmeshing them in virtual (narrative) environments and the intertwining of human-nonhuman realities.¹⁴ As Mossner puts it, “an ecocritical approach that draws on the insights of cognitive science and the equally interdisciplinary field of cognitive cultural studies can give us a better understanding of how we interact with [narratives foregrounding ecological issues and human-nature relationships]” (3). Repeatedly Mossner emphasizes that storytelling invites readers to care for their interconnection with nonhuman others through invoking their embodied, sensuous enactment of narrative events, characters, and environments (3–7). In the same vein, Caracciolo has an eye on how rhetorical effects of environmental narratives are achievable through embodiment, which he understands as the “main act of story” (*With Bodies* 10). Caracciolo

writes, “our engagement with narrative representation is channeled through imaginative and affective dynamics that are embodied through and through. Reframing the categories of narratology in embodied terms allows us to specify the contribution that embodied experience makes to the understanding, appreciation, and interpretation of narrative” (*With Bodies* 10). By tapping into readers’ embodied experience of interacting with the world, strategic textual designs make up emotionally charged interlocking forms to close the gap between human-scale realities and the nonhuman world (*Narrating the Mesh* 1–9).

This chapter explores a different interdisciplinary approach to flesh out the ecological dimension of storytelling and narrative craft.¹⁵ While Caracciolo’s cognitive approach underscores the dynamic interactions between the text and readers, my rhetorical approach puts more stress on authorial agency. Caracciolo invokes Timothy Morton to illuminate how artful textual construction invites readers to imagine mesh-like patterns of the human-nonhuman interdependency, but I perform (implied) authorial readings to illuminate the epistemological and ontological aspects of ecological craft. By synthesizing James Phelan’s rhetorical narratology, creative writer Charles Baxter’s insights into writing fiction, and cognitive perspectives on inference generation and coherence construction, this chapter unpacks how writers can integrate forward narrative progressions with implicit backward narrative movements to convey what Morton has termed the ecological thought—the fundamental interconnectedness of all beings and forms of thinking.

With this interdisciplinary framework, I argue that the ecological dimension of literary craft or what I understand as “ecological storytelling” comes to life through the internal resonance of writerly craft, the coherence construction during reading, and the metaphorically represented mesh of coexistences. As in my case studies, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Yann

Martel's *Life of Pi*, the actions that half-rhyme with each other via backward movements, together with the tensions and complexities that fuel forward narrative progressions, may propel readers toward a holistic picture of life, which brightens up blemished realities through illuminating "interconnectedness in the fullest and deepest sense" (*Ecological Thought* 7). This ecological interconnectivity encompasses how human beings are connected with one another and with nonhuman beings, as well as the coexistence of different areas of thinking, such as love, loss, open-mindedness, and compassion (*Ecological Thought* 2, 7). Crucially, Morton's ecological thought operates on both epistemological and ontological levels. Ecology rests not only on its content but also on its very form of thinking; and art forms are ecological in the sense that they compel us to rethink aspects of our fundamental coexistence (*Ecological Thought* 4, 8–9). On an epistemological level, therefore, ecology has to do with how we reframe our knowledge of the world through visualizing coexistence out of disconnected beings and ideas. As Morton puts it, "the *form* of the ecological thought is at least as important as its *content*. It's not simply a matter of *what* you're thinking about. It's also a matter of *how* you think" (4). Rhetorical reading is ecological in the sense that rhetorical readers draw connections among seemingly disparate craft elements to achieve cohesive and holistic understanding. On an ontological level, ecology can also be defined as the idea that "we're deeply connected even when we say we are not," for ecology "has to do with you and me" (4, 8). The ontological truth about ecology can be summarized as follows: we have more in common than we have differences, even when we do not yet see the connections at the present moment. In this sense, rhetorical reading is ecological also because rhetorical readers are committed to the principle that literary worlds are grounded in shared meanings and communicative connection across differences. While my rhetorical readings of *Frankenstein* and *Life of Pi* do not foreground

explicit environmental concerns, they both weave together the epistemological and ontological aspects of ecological thinking and storytelling. Striking a balance between coherence and complexity, Shelley and Martel's craft designs may propel, slow down, and deepen rhetorical readers' experience of the proposed harmony and entanglement among seeming divisions: the human and the nonhuman, the natural and the unnatural, literary knowledge and scientific thinking, and religious narration and rational worldview.

Not only do my case studies embody ecological storytelling, but they also capture the essence of what I understand as reparative storytelling—the art of subsuming blemished realities and stark divisions under a hopeful, improved light and an expanded, shareable vision of life. In *Frankenstein*, advancement in science and technology fosters a physically unnatural creature, which challenges contemporary people's cognition. Shelley visualizes the harmonious coexistence of scientific, empirical thinking and literary, broad-minded imagination as a reparation for the alienation between the creature and its human environment. In *Life of Pi*, seemingly insurmountable tensions and differences exist between the human boy's love for life and the forbidding danger posed by his nonhuman environment as well as his tiger companion. Martel then shows how imaginative storytelling driven forward by love can guide readers to navigate their rational awareness of differences and, ultimately, transport them into an expansive realm of hope.

While ecological and reparative storytelling both center upon the capacity of literary imagination to visualize shared interconnection and ecological entanglement, they approach the core concept of sharing through slightly different angles. Ecological storytelling sheds light on the importance of decentering our preexistent selves and realities to connect with our different selves and realities, whereas reparative storytelling sets opposing or different worldviews into

interactive interplay and then expands outward toward a broader vision of hope. My concept of reparative storytelling builds on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's canonical essay "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading." In this essay, Sedgwick makes a case for "the ecology of knowing"—the harmonious coexistence of and dynamic interactions between two epistemological practices: the paranoid theoretical act that deciphers systemic oppression and injustices and the reparative one that generates hope, love, and nourishment (145). Sedgwick describes paranoid reading as follows: "Subversive and demystifying parody, suspicious archaeologies of the present, the detection of hidden patterns of violence and their exposure: as I have been arguing, these infinitely doable and teachable protocols of unveiling have become the common currency of cultural and historicist studies" (143). Reading from the reparative position, by contrast, means to view blemished, bleak, and even horrifying realities with an openness to surprise and a sustained willingness to pursue pleasure and explore alternative possibilities (137, 150–51). Sedgwick writes, "to read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader *as new*" (146). Since the reparative practice is a way of organizing, generating, and maximizing the affective affordances of knowledge, it can also be revised to denote a means of crafting stories—a form of writing that recreates extratextual reality by bringing love and hope out of inimical or seemingly impossible contexts. The key difference between reparative reading and reparative storytelling resides in the fact that the former is a critical, epistemological practice, whereas the latter an imaginative, creative act operating on both epistemological and ontological levels.

This chapter concludes with the idea that rhetorical criticism is also a creative, reparative act of storytelling. In putting forward an interdisciplinary framework synthesizing rhetorical

narratology, creative writing advice, and cognitive science, I seek to combine literary theory's systematic rigor and creative writing's forward thinking, assimilating their productive differences into a visionary framework of what writers and readers can possibly share. Far from reducing authorial craft to fixed meanings and authoritative origins, I set out to expand its creative ingenuity by unpacking textual criticism into aesthetic philosophies undergirding masterful—ecological and reparative—communicative acts.

Rhetorical Reading: Forward and Backward Coherence Construction

Before launching into my case studies, I will establish an interdisciplinary framework synthesizing Phelan's theory of forward narrative progression, Baxter's concept of backward rhyming action, and cognitive perspectives on forward and backward coherence construction. In doing so, I seek to explore how ecological and reparative communicative acts are achievable through the continuity between the internal resonance of writerly craft and readers' shared tendency toward advanced—holistic and coherent—reading.

Phelan's account of forward progression emphasizes the cause-and-effect logic underlying the movement of narrative from beginning through middle to ending, as well as the logical order in which readers process and respond to authors' rhetorical designs. He defines narrative beginning as "that which generates the progression of the narrative by introducing unstable relationships between characters (instabilities) or between implied author and authorial audience or narrator and authorial audience (tensions)" (*Experiencing Fiction* 16). The instabilities and tensions become complicated in narrative middles, advancing readers' multidimensional experience and inviting them to make corresponding ethical, aesthetic, and interpretive judgments. Such unstable relationships are resolved, "in whole or in part," during

narrative endings, which may cause readers to reconfigure and conclude their “ethical and aesthetic judgments” of narrative wholes (20–21).

While Phelan concentrates primarily on explicit forward progression, Baxter, who analyzes movement from the craft perspective, brings to light the implicit backward progression and its potential effects on readers. Baxter advises aspiring writers to cultivate an eerie sense of repetition and assonance by crafting actions that half-rhyme with one another. Such slant rhymes occur “when narratives move in reverse—when they come dramatically or imagistically to a point that is similar to one they have already seemingly passed” (113). Baxter refers to this time reversal as rhyming action: when half-remembered actions resurface, they produce echo effects that “surprise us with their sudden correctness” (116). In other words, slant rhyming actions move readers backward in time, making it possible for them to experience an action and a nuanced and varied repetition of it simultaneously. For Baxter, rhyming actions are aesthetically correct and meaningful: “That is what I mean by beautiful action. It’s like a couplet” (121). To illustrate this concept, Baxter unpacks the use of visceral multisensory imagery in the novel *Lolita*. Lolita’s innocence has been visually identified with her chewing pink bubble gum, and a varied repetition of the pink bubble appears again on Clare Quilty’s lips in a later act of dying. The big, bloody pink bubble on the lips of the man who violated Lolita reminds readers of the early sections and the fact that he has taken her innocence. Readers’ expectations and the satisfaction of such expectations are slightly out of alignment: they are seeing blood and death while simultaneously seeing innocence and youthfulness, thereby moving backward in time. As Baxter puts it, “There she is, her visual tracteries coming out of his mouth. He has taken her innocence, and it’s inside him. The gum is still echoing there, but now it’s grown up, gone through adolescence, and become bloody” (117). By invoking the visceral, embodied imagery of

vision and motion that slantly rhymes with the earlier action of chewing gum, Nabokov invites readers to perceive the interconnectivity among different narrative parts through their bodily experiences. In fact, our action system is not only responsible for performing actions but also responsible for language comprehension and making backward inferences, which also explains why understanding action language may evoke motor resonances in our bodies (de Vega 205).¹⁶

At the same time that craft and narratological perspectives shed light on how two-way progressions make possible narrative instabilities, tensions, and nuanced and multilayered meanings that work toward internal resonance and continuity, research on cognition also relates successful reading to the comprehension of how different components of a text cohere to form interconnected wholes. Paul van den Broek and his collaborators have done extensive research into the cognitive processes involved in reading comprehension and coherence construction. They have found that readers share the tendency to construct causal coherence to account for cause-and-effect relations among different parts of a text; and readers also tend to establish referential coherence between the referring expressions and the objects and persons in the prior or upcoming text (Broek, Ridsen, and Hartmann 353–71). It is notable that the inferential processes during reading include both the generation of forward predictions about the upcoming text and that of backward causal and referential inferences, which often involve readers' reactivation of their memory for the prior texts to grasp the connectedness of what they are reading and prior events (Broek, Ridsen, and Hartmann 353–71).

More importantly, readers' inferential activities are guided by their standards for coherence—the “types and strengths of coherence that the reader aims to maintain during reading,” which “consist of a set of implicit or explicit criteria that a reader adopts for a particular reading situation, reflecting his/her desired level of understanding” (Broek et al. 124–

25). To put this another way, the levels of comprehension readers pursue in fact determine the extent to which readers construct coherent pictures of the texts and draw connections between what they are reading and earlier textual information that needs to be reactivated from memory (Broek et al. 124–25). With the purpose of learning or fulfilling certain standards, for example, readers tend to process textual information in a more focused manner: “they spend more time reading, make more connecting inferences, and build a more coherent mental representation of the text” (Oudega and Broek 43). This chapter will examine rhetorical readers’ potential interactions with the implied author’s literary craft and ambition—the ways that actual readers seek to join the author’s ideal audience by coming to grips with the overarching logic behind the entire set of the author’s narrative choices and then evaluating the overall quality of authorial craft “at the level of the whole narrative communication” (*Somebody Telling* 203).¹⁷ Since rhetorical readers by definition read for author-audience communication and thus engage in demanding or advanced inferential activities, it is reasonable to infer that they have higher standards for coherence and strive for holistic pictures of how seemingly dispersed craft elements in fact beautifully interconnect.

The Lack of Ecological Coexistences in *Frankenstein*

In this section, I will show the affordances of my interdisciplinary reading practice and illustrate what I understand as ecological and reparative storytelling via a rhetorical reading of *Frankenstein*. I will first analyze how the unstable relationships among fictional characters drive the forward progression of the story and the unfolding of author-audience interrelations; then I will discuss how this novel also implicitly moves backward through rhyming action. This two-way narrative movement, generated by the (implied) Shelley, may guide rhetorical reader(s) to the interconnection among Robert Walton, Victor Frankenstein, and the creature, as well as that

among the environment, literary comprehension, and scientific, empirical thinking. By directing narrative nuances and complexities toward internal logic and continuity, Shelley cultivates a literary form that reflects a sense of fundamental interconnectedness and a broad-minded perception of ecological coexistence.

Morton characterizes *Frankenstein* as an unconventionally ecological novel. He argues: The novel might make one consider how we treat other life forms; about what constitutes a human as opposed to a non-human—urgently, it mediates on the uncanniness of the nearly-or-not-quite-human; the novel explicitly addresses topics in vegetarianism. None of these has an easy-to-identify, traditional ‘ecological’ resonance, especially if one believes that ecology is about studying and preserving something definitely non-human called Nature” (“*Frankenstein* and Ecocriticism” 144).

By contrast, ecology in *Frankenstein* resonates strongly with its ambition to challenge preexisting beliefs about the natural world. Morton contends that ecological criticism needs to transcend the sharp distinction between the natural and the unnatural as well as the established “differences between the normal and the abnormal” (146). Such hierarchical and binary lines of thinking blind human beings to envisioning how they can share an intimate interconnection with their nonhuman environment, as nonhuman entities and realities may not conform to their standard beliefs about nature (146–47). Just like Frankenstein’s creature, the environment has an unnatural quality; but such unnaturalness should not be the basis for us to turn away from it or stop caring for it. “It is as if the creature were a full-frontal, fully visible incarnation of environmentality itself,” writes Morton, “the shock of the unpredictable must give way to compassion and solidarity” (156). Rather than viewing Victor Frankenstein’s unnatural creation as erroneous in nature or understanding the novel as a cautionary tale on technological

intervention in nature, Morton reads the story as a warning against our incapacity to think beyond natural boundaries.

Morton's argument poses a potential counterargument to Anne K. Mellor's canonical reading of the novel. Mellor has famously attributed the tragic denouement of the novel to technological and unnatural forms of creation. She asserts, "the destruction of the female implicit in Frankenstein's usurpation of the natural mode of human reproduction symbolically erupts in his nightmare following the animation of the creature" (115). Mellor considers the scientist as an overreacher who steals nature and women's prerogative of reproducing life and altering the way nature functions. She pinpoints the creature's unnatural outward appearance as a manifestation of the dangers inherent in manipulating "life-forms in ways previously reserved only to nature and chance" (114). As Mellor poses this question: "can the creature, born with a grotesquely oversized and unsound body, ever develop a sound mind?" (51). While Mellor illuminates the lesson that *Frankenstein* is concerned with moral implications of uninhibited scientific investigation, her critique of the unnatural mode of creation and the essential falsehood of technological intervention may inhibit the novel's imaginative energy.

Literary scholar Rebecca Baumann argues against this "most common reading of the novel": "Don't overreach. Don't play God. Don't be curious. Don't go poking your profane fingers around in nature's hiding places" (xvi–xvii). She writes: "This is an oddly conservative reading for a novel written by a young woman who was the daughter, lover, and friend of anarchists, atheists, feminists, and sexual rebels—and who shared many of their views and practices" (xvii). Baumann shifts the critical focus from the warning against science to the representation of literature, unpacking how the fictional characters in Shelley's society have all been shaped by their reading experiences. For example, the creature forms an understanding of

himself through comparing himself to Milton's Satan (xviii). Baumann goes on to list what the creature has learned from reading literature:

It is through reading, then, that the monster learns of the social organization of the world, that heredity and wealth dictate one's position in society. It is through reading, essentially, that he learns to hate himself, and he wishes that he could have remained in the woods as a kind of noble savage...The monster's experiments in language ultimately fail him...At the end of the day, language and literature cannot save the monster. The books he reads only cause him greater despair, as he comes to understand all the things he will never have—nurturing parents, kind companions, and a mate to whom he can give his love” (78).

At the same time that Baumann points out how reading has cultivated the creature's sense of virtue and justice as well as a love for life, she is also careful to note that language and literature is unable to overcome his “essential ugliness” and his despairing sense of loneliness and isolation, thereby incapable of preventing the novel's ultimate tragedy (78). Baumann's analysis of literature is grounded in empirical facts about the plot and narrative events; she does not address how the novel evinces the bonding power of literary imagination in a profoundly metaphorical sense.

My reading of the story shares Baumann's disagreement with the canonical warning against science as well as her interest in the representation of literature. Rather than reading the story as a cautionary tale on technological transgression against nature, I argue that Shelley attributes the novel's tragedy to the imbalance between literary and scientific forms of thinking.¹⁸ The key difference between Baumann's argument and mine, however, is that I foreground the positive affordances of reading and literary imagination. The role of literary knowledge, as

Shelley's complex and coherent craft envisions, is to equip people with the complementary wisdom to navigate changes brought by technology. By invigorating the humane values capable of guiding the application of scientific discoveries, literary thinking yields the potential to foster meaningful bonds across empirical and imaginative realities as well as natural and unnatural entities. Through their mind's eye, rhetorical readers can come to realize a shared, all-inclusive vision of the metaphorically embodied ecological thought.

Frankenstein consists of three narrative layers with three narrators—Walton, Victor, and the creature; the novel's beginning can be understood as Walton's narrative, in which “global instabilities [unstable relationships between characters]”—“those that provide the main track of progression”—are introduced to readers (*Experiencing Fiction* 16). Near the end of Walton's narrative, global unstable tensions form around Victor's warning to him and effectively launch the story forward. Captain Walton, as his letters to his sister show us, is commanding an Arctic expedition that has the potential to discover a new world, foster international networks to the North Pole, and find the magnetic force—“the wondrous power which attracts the needle” (7). While Walton's expedition may lead to beneficial consequences, Victor cautions him against seeking knowledge:

You may easily perceive, Captain Walton, that I have suffered great and unparalleled misfortunes... You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been (20).

This uncertain relationship between Walton and Victor slows down readers' processing of the story through formulating compelling questions for them to consider: why does Victor

sympathize with Walton and transcribe his own story to warn Walton against making technological advancements? What makes knowledge harmful and dangerous?

The initial global instability becomes complicated in Victor's and the creature's narratives, which together constitute the novel's middle—the “development of the global instabilities and/or tensions” and readers' evolving responses to the “overall development of the narrative” (*Experiencing Fiction* 19–20). In Victor's narrative, Shelley represents his lack of maternal responsibility in his command of technology as potentially harmful, especially to his child. As Victor describes his contempt and fear after he wields electricity to produce a creature, “breathless horror and disgust filled my heart...I escaped, and rushed downstairs. I took refuge in the court-yard....listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life” (46). Rather than being aware of his parental obligations and providing his child with care and guidance, Victor abandons him, rendering him vulnerable to hunger, coldness, loneliness, and outside dangers. Furthermore, Victor appears to associate his physical abnormality with inner monstrosity, a line of thinking that leads to the second major complication of the global instability, developed in the creature's narrative. Immersing readers in the creature's heart-rending description of his repeated failure to find the sympathy and companionship he seeks, Shelley makes visible how people uniformly spurn and ostracize someone who looks different and unpleasant. The lack of open-mindedness makes Victor's technological child dangerous by contributing to his transformation from an innately sympathetic, kind-hearted, and humane being into a bitter and malicious one. The moment marking the creature's transformation occurs when he abuses the primordial form of technology—fire—and turns it into a harmful, dangerous tool. Disappointed at the cottagers' refusal to befriend him, the creature “lighted the dry branch of a tree, and danced with fury

around the devoted cottage...[He] fired the straw, the heath, and bushes” and eventually destroys the cottage (113). In endowing the theme—the different uses of technology and their results—with nuanced and multilayered meanings, Shelley guides readers towards the complex interpretive judgment that mastering technology can lead to disastrous consequences if not directed by humane ideals such as sympathy, a capacious mindset, and a sense of responsibility. Rather than depicting technological pursuits as essentially erroneous, Shelley implies that technology can be rendered either harmful or beneficial, depending upon the cooperation and balance between its empirical uses and the lines of thinking behind it.

Frankenstein's ending can be identified as Walton's letters that offer the “resolution” of “the global instabilities or tensions,” which leads to “the conclusion of the readers’ evolving responses to the whole narrative” (*Experiencing Fiction* 20–21). In this section, Victor delivers a passionate speech to encourage Walton's sailors to continue their voyage. As he says, “did you not call this a glorious expedition?...You were hereafter to be hailed as the benefactors of your species; your name adored, as belonging to brave men who encountered death for honour and benefit of mankind” (207–08). Though Walton “hoped that, with reflection, [his sailors’] courage would return,” they are “unsupported by ideas of glory and honour” and decide to return to their home country. In this sense, Shelley ends Walton's expedition and leaves him humbled by his failure (208). Allowing him to come back home safely yet shamefully, Shelley does not portray his voyage as inherently blasphemous or unforgivable, but she prevents him (as well as his sailors) from pursuing glory and satisfying vanity, which appears to be the main motive for his expedition. The conclusion of the novel thus endorses the interpretive and ethical judgment readers may have formed when experiencing the middle of *Frankenstein*, that a sense of superiority and lack of moral consciousness can make technological advancement problematic.

Just as Victor and other people treat the creature as the marginalized Other, so Walton's honor-driven pursuit of knowledge can lead to dangerous consequences, like the mistreatment of possible inhabitants living near the North Pole. As Phelan's rhetorical framework illustrates, the forward momentum of the novel is accompanied by tensions, uncertainties, and complications that slow down readers' experiences and work toward internal logic and continuity. Shelley's coherent craft design may thus tap into readers' shared tendency to construct causal coherence and attain holistic pictures, empowering them to draw parallels among Walton's, Victor's, and the creature's interactions with technology and ultimately grasp the complex, nuanced ideas associated with this theme. While different readers will surely have nuanced understandings of the idea of technological application, they may still share the common ground that the heart-rending deaths of the scientist and his creature originate not from technology itself but from the lack of cooperation between scientific foresights and humane lines of thinking.

Having interpreted *Frankenstein* from the theoretical lens of rhetorical narratology, I will proceed to demonstrate how it can work in tandem with Baxter's analysis of craft. Actions that rhyme, says Baxter, are like "prophecy [running] backward," which "gives the participant a power of understanding" and "has something to do with insight" (112). The half-remembered action and the recurrence of it are like two lines of verse that are separated by time but "go together perfectly" to form a "couplet" (121). Their rhyming logic is a slant one; the half-registered memory "does not have to attach itself to its replica in our present moments. It can be oblique, sidling, scary and luminous in its distant relatedness to us" (125). When the half-forgotten action is effectively used again and repeated in a varied way, these two similar events create compelling echo effects that grant readers insights and power of reasoning.

Early in the novel, Walton and Victor both narrate how the environment inspires them to pursue scientific knowledge. Walton writes that he feels “a cold northern breeze play upon [his] cheeks, which braces [his] nerves, and fills [him] with delight...Inspired by this wind of promise, [his] day dreams become more fervent and vivid.” (7). Walton’s narration evinces how wind gives him courage, hope, and happiness and how it ignites his passion for exploring the Arctic region and making technological advancements.

Similarly, Victor also narrates the environment’s invigorating power:

When I was about fifteen years old, we witnessed a most violent and terrible thunderstorm...I remained, while the storm lasted, watching its progress with curiosity and delight. As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak...and soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak has disappeared...The catastrophe of the tree excited my extreme astonishment; and I eagerly inquired of my father the nature and origin of thunder and lightning (29).

This passage shows that a thunderstorm performs the action of arousing Victor’s desire for knowledge and igniting his deep interest in electricity, which he later employs to create life; at the same time, the thunderstorm also brings joy, awe, energy, and excitement to him. Victor’s deep interest in the origin of thunder and lightning inspires him to pursue natural philosophy. He systematically investigates the origin and complex phenomena of the empirical world through first-hand observation as well as collection and analysis of empirical facts, seeking overarching principles governing life and death. As Victor narrates his experience of examining corpses:

Now I was led to examine the cause and progress of this decay, and forced to spend days and nights in vaults and charnel houses. My attention was fixed upon every object and the most insupportable to the delicacy of the human feelings. I saw how the fine form of man

was degraded and wasted; I beheld the corruption of death succeed to the blooming cheek of life; I saw how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain. I paused, examining and analysing all the minutiae of causation, as exemplified in the change from life to death, and death to life” (40).

Devoting meticulous attention to the causal connections between life and death through systematic investigation of the empirical world, Victor’s methodology exemplifies scientific lines of thinking that aim for objectivity, rationality, and empirical evidence-based reasoning.

As readers proceed to the creature’s narrative, they may come to grasp how the environment’s previous action of inspiring one to seek knowledge while also bringing spiritual fulfillment and exciting interest, thoughts, and emotions is re-performed by a different agent—literature. By the time the creature narrates his story, readers are just far enough away from the environment’s previous action so that they may only half-remember it; literature’s action thus half-rhymes and forms an intriguing pattern with the environment’s. By literature, I refer to the works of fiction and non-fiction that enlighten the creature about humane ideas. As the creature reads *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, his feelings and worldviews are refreshed and enriched: “so many opinions are canvassed, and so many lights thrown upon what had hitherto been to me obscure subjects, that I found in it a never-ending source of speculation and astonishment” (Shelley 119–20). Not only does literature spark his curiosity, offer him intellectual insights, and invigorate his critical thinking, but it also elicits deep emotions from him and teaches him to sympathize with someone whom he does not resemble. Even though the creature neither completely understands nor agrees with Werther’s general philosophies of suicide, he feels Werther’s sorrows and “inclined towards the opinions of the hero, whose extinction [he] wept, without precisely understanding it” (Shelley 120). In motivating the

creature to identify with someone who does not think like he does, literature inspires him to think beyond boundaries and develop a capacious mindset. The creature further hones his critical thinking skills through ruminating on what he has read and poses philosophical questions: “Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? (Shelley 120). In addition to encouraging the creature to acquire philosophical knowledge, literature also instills a sense of moral responsibility in him. After reading *Plutarch’s Lives*, the creature “felt the greatest ardour for virtue rise within [him], and abhorrence for vice” (Shelley 121).

Literature’s action, when working in conjunction with the environment’s action, functions as an answer to a former statement, a response to the previous call, and “the action flung back on itself” (Baxter 120). As the half-forgotten action resurfaces, it inflects the representation of literature with a sense of sudden correctness and drives the narrative progression backward. The humane values (sympathy for the unnatural Other, open-mindedness, and moral consciousness) brought forth by literature moves back into and ultimately fuses with the pursuit of scientific knowledge inspired by the environment. As extensive empirical research suggests, readers tend to reactivate their prior memory when constructing backward referential coherence between pieces of textual information in the present section and the parts that have not been processed recently (Van de Broek et al. 366–67). Combining craft and cognitive insights, I argue that rhetorical readers may connect the referring idea—literary imagination and comprehension—back to the antecedent it obliquely, distantly echoes: the inviting, enchanting power of science knowledge. In light of the fact that readers slow down their reading pace and make overarching, holistic inferences when restoring backward referential coherence, it is also reasonable to infer that literary craft that strikes a balance between complexity and continuity may deepen readers’ experience of narrative wholes (Van de Broek et al. 367).

While Phelan's rhetorical theory can illuminate the danger of technological applications unguided by humane ideals, Baxter's framework of half-memory, half-rhyme, half, implicit backward progression can shed light on the close coexistence of scientific exploration and literary knowledge. If we combine narratological and craft perspectives, we can discover that, in delivering a cautionary tale, Shelley argues that the enlightening ideas promoted by literature are potentially capable of helping people navigate the changes and possibilities brought by technology, which include the birth of someone who looks unnatural. To put this another way, *Frankenstein* is a cautionary tale on the lack of harmonious coexistences rather than one on the essential falsehood of technology. While technology is advanced enough for Victor to artificially reproduce a creature with compassion and literary talent, people's mentalities are not developed enough to bond with the creature across differences and beyond their fear of the abnormal. The novel's two-way narrative movement imagines a vast mesh of metaphorically represented coexistences proposed by Shelley, ones that her fictional society lacks. Through the forward progression, Walton, Victor, and the creature become fundamentally connected: they all wield technology to produce beneficial and dangerous results. Through rhyming action, the environment (wind and thunderstorm), literary values, technological advancements, and the three main characters all become deeply, metaphorically connected with one another. Borrowing insights from Morton's ecocriticism, I am able to make the case that Shelley encourages readers to think ecologically by bringing us into intimate contact with the many aspects of our interconnection and coexistence, which include the harmony among natural and unnatural, human and nonhuman beings and that among different areas of thinking. Drawing attention to the vast mesh of interconnection, *Frankenstein* underscores the fact we have more in common than we have differences, and that the creature is not that different from Walton or Victor. As

Morton states explicitly, “Think...*Frankenstein*: the ethics of the ecological thought is to regard beings as people even when they aren’t people” (Morton 8).

It is undeniable that, in the empirical world of *Frankenstein*, cognitive barriers and perceived physical differences hinder different individuals and groups from empathizing and bonding with one another. Shelley, however, taps into readers’ shared tendency toward forward and backward coherence construction, empowering them to visualize how storytelling assimilates empirical realities and scientific, rational worldview into a broader vision of what we can possibly share. Literary critic Jeanne M. Britton also highlights the distinction between failed visual sympathy in *Frankenstein*’s empirical reality and the power of literary imagination to repair and transform reality via shared sympathy. Britton offers a succinct encapsulation of her argument:

But if sympathy in the novel can be said to fail because it is madly but fruitlessly pursued or disastrous in its results, it might alternatively be understood to succeed in that it leads, as I argue, to the textual production and narrative levels that structure the novel itself. *Frankenstein* offers a version of sympathy that is constituted by the production and transmission of narrative as compensation for failures of face-to-face sympathetic experience” (3).

Britton notes that Shelley reframes sympathy not as visual identification but as auditory participation and literary transcription. Whereas visual sympathy is nearly impossible due to perceived physical differences, sympathy is renewed through the novel’s storytelling technique itself; that is, sympathy activates the different narrative layers and different people’s shared acts of retelling and listening to others’ stories. This idea that *Frankenstein*’s novelistic form extends “sympathy beyond physiological resemblance” is further corroborated by Janis Caldwell’s

observation that “*Frankenstein*’s readers, from the Romantic period to the present, have uniformly sympathized with the creature” (Britton 18; Caldwell 42). I thus conclude that Shelley’s ecological and reparative craft works to expand readers’ empirical understandings of insurmountable preconceptions and divisions toward a shareable vision of hope and ecological interconnection.

Ecological and Reparative Storytelling in *Life of Pi*

In this section, I will use my second case study *Life of Pi* to further flesh out ecological and reparative storytelling. The protagonist Pi Patel survives his 227–days ordeal in the unforgiving Pacific Ocean through enlisting his capacity to love and imagine an alternative story. The novel’s two-way narrative movements propel readers toward a holistic picture of how Pi learns to coexist with both his inner animality and the harsh and challenging environment by maintaining his faith in the ecological interconnection between humanity and the non-human. Also carefully woven into Pi’s reparative story are the complex and interrelated ideas: the fundamental interconnectedness of different religions and forms of storytelling, the literary account of reality as guidance for the scientific, rational worldview, and so forth. By “[organizing] the fragments and part-objects” of his story toward internal coherence, Martel cultivates an expanded, all-inclusive sense of hope out of the ecological enmeshment of different realities (Sedgwick 146).

The beginning of *Life of Pi* can be identified as “Author’s Note,” in which the novel’s first narrator, a struggling writer who interviews middle-aged Pi and aims to transcribe Pi’s extraordinary life story, cultivates a sense of instability and uncertainty by tasking (rhetorical) readers with pursuing compelling questions: Is fiction about the “selective transforming of reality? The twisting of it to bring out its essence?” What is the essential element of

storytelling—“that spark that brings to life a real story?” Why does Pi’s story make us believe in God? (viii–ix). The narrator and (the implied) Martel further complicate the idea of aesthetically meaningful storytelling by indicating that a novel, however authentic, ambitious, elegantly built, and intellectually rigorous it may be, is doomed to fail if it is emotionally dead (viii–ix). As the narrator puts it, “Your story is emotionally dead, that’s the crux of it. The discovery is something soul-destroying. I tell you. It leaves you with an aching hunger” (ix). Extraordinary craft that brings stories back to life, the narrator suggests, makes readers believe in God (x–xi). Yet Martel is careful to note that such stories extend beyond explicit religious concerns (x). Concluding his note with a reflection on the faith in creative visions, the narrator stakes a strong claim: “If we, citizens, do not support our artists, then we sacrifice our imagination on the altar of crude reality and end up believing in nothing and having worthless dreams” (xii). The instabilities introduced in the narrative beginning thus confront readers with this overarching question: how do we write good stories that are emotionally vibrant, filled with faith in God, and exemplary of the power of our imagination?

As indicated in my first chapter, psychologists Moritz Lehne and Stefan Koelsch have pinpointed tension-resolution patterns—the evocation and resolution of instability and uncertainty accompanied by feelings of suspense and anticipation—as an effective artistic device that taps into “general principles of human cognition” (Lehne and Koelsch 286). Such tension-resolution patterns take advantage of our brain’s tendency to reduce uncertainty and minimize prediction errors, guiding us toward forward-looking pictures of narrative development (Lehne and Koelsch 288, 290, 298). In this sense, cognitive perspectives further substantiate Phelan’s rhetorical theory, which predicts that complexities and instabilities introduced in a narrative’s

beginning fuel forward progression and readers' evolving expectations and interpretive judgments.

The narrative middle of *Life of Pi* can be identified as part one and part two, or chapters one through ninety-four, during which the instabilities driving the main track of narrative progression are considerably complicated and developed. The unfolding function of storytelling and the imagination, which manifests through the complex relationship between Pi and the tiger Richard Parker and that between religious narratives and rational worldviews, takes center stage in this section. At first sight, the story of Pi surviving a shipwreck on a lifeboat with a tiger may appear unbelievable, but Martel takes pains to lay the groundwork to enhance its plausibility. At the core of the science of zookeeping is to provide animals with water, food, and shelter and diminish flight distance: the "minimum distance at which an animal wants to keep a perceived enemy" (39). Such knowledge establishes context for Pi's coexistence with Richard Parker on the lifeboat, which resembles a zoo enclosure. Specifically, Pi constructs a raft to maintain a safe distance from the tiger and manages to obtain seafood and fresh water to satiate the tiger's hunger and thirst. Literary critic Sarah E. Mcfarland observes that the "traditional human/animal hierarchy is overturned as the boy privileges the tiger's needs over his own human ones. Correspondingly, Richard Parker provides Pi with companionship, motivation, and a purpose" (Mcfarland 159). It cannot be ignored that the science of zookeeping establishes the essential (and dangerous) differences between humanity and the nonhuman, and that Pi keeps in mind the caveat that he should never touch or pet a tiger. As he reflects on this important lesson: "I learned the lesson that an animal is an animal, essentially and practically removed from us, twice: once with Father and once with Richard Parker" (31). Nevertheless, Martel subsumes this rational and logical awareness of human-nonhuman differences under a broader humane

framework of love and faith. Pi envisions the tiger as his companion and his different self, using his literary narration and religious faith as guidance for his application of scientific and rational knowledge. He reflects on how religious storytelling has shaped his capacious worldview, which joins the dots among the secular and the divine, humanity and the non-human:

Here too I am a Hindu. The universe makes sense to me through Hindu eyes. There is Brahman, the world soul, the sustaining frame upon which is woven, warp and weft...with our poor words we sew a suit for it—One, Truth, Unity, Absolute, Ultimate Reality, Ground of Being...Brahman expressed not only in gods but in humans, animals, trees, in a handful of earth, for everything has a trace divine in it (48).

By taking on the identity and responsibility of a zookeeper, Pi regards the tiger as his treasured companion, subverting the binary and hierarchical distinctions between the human and the nonhuman. Pi realizes that it is Richard Parker that keeps his hope and dreams alive, and that they share similar challenges of navigating life's ups and downs: "We were, literally and figuratively, in the same boat. We would live—or we would die—together" (164).

In addition to suggesting the possibility of Pi coexisting with the tiger, Martel complicates our picture of reality by gesturing toward another related possibility, that the tiger only exists via the imagination. It metaphorically represents Pi's inner animal nature and his fear brought forth by the challenges of navigating life on the open, relentless Pacific Ocean.¹⁹ Martel establishes the parallel between Pi and the tiger's shared primal imperative, juxtaposing Pi's unquenchable, unbearable thirst and "parched throat" with the tiger's original, baptized name "Thirsty" due to the way it "raced to the water's edge, where it drank eagerly" (133, 135). Also, Martel presents readers with the ironic truth that Richard Parker who "scared [Pi] witless to start with was the very same who brought [him] peace, purpose...even wholeness" (Martel 162). Pi

comes to realize that in order to conquer fear, one must learn how to express it, fighting hard to “shine the light of words upon it” (162). In alluding to the power of words to compensate for fearful circumstances, Martel further develops the unstable relationship between Pi and the tiger, suggesting that it may not be a concrete entity. It is highly likely that Pi learns to cope with his fear by imagining an alternative reality in which he not only loves, tames, and internalizes the surprising aspects of life but also moves toward a broader, more hopeful moral understanding of his interconnection with the environment. Pi explicitly reflects on the need to generate hope through imagination when he nearly dies of malnutrition and severely declining health: “If you’re not happy with this figment of your fancy, pick another one” (243). It is precisely during such moments of hallucination that Pi also confesses he committed murder and cannibalism, and that he once subsisted on human flesh since Richard Parker had butchered and dismembered a human being. As Pi’s brutal side comes to life under extreme circumstances, readers are tasked, once again, with thinking through if the tiger is a separate entity or is representative of the way Pi comes to peace with his animal self. Richard Parker, therefore, embodies the power of literary imagination to transform empirical reality. It is precisely through Pi’s effort to maintain faith in storytelling that he is able to survive:

If I still had the will to live, it was thanks to Richard Parker. He kept me from thinking too much about my family and my tragic circumstances. He pushed me to go on living. I hated him for it, yet at the same time I was grateful. I *am* grateful. It’s the plain truth: without Richard Parker, I wouldn’t be alive today to tell you my story (164).

Through imagining and narrating his coexistence with his literary companion, his animal self, and the formidable environment, Pi comes to embrace the fact that in order to cultivate hope, one

has to assimilate the inevitable tragedies and losses in life into a broad-minded framework of love and interconnection—the essence of ecological and reparative storytelling.

By nuancing, reinforcing the idea of imaginative storytelling and refracting it through the lens of faith or religious narration, Martel suggests, throughout the middle of his novel, that literary, creative visions encompass scientific and rational worldview. It is notable that Pi practices three religions: Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, which all speak the language of harmonious coexistence. Love forms the foundation of the central narrative of Christianity; “brotherhood and devotion” serve as the founding principle of Islam; and Hinduism dictates that “That which sustains the universe beyond thought and language, and that which is at the core of us and struggles for expression, is the same thing” (48–49, 61). Religion, or the passion for creating and sharing stories grounded in love, improves and brightens scientific, crude versions of reality (xii, 27).²⁰ Ultimately, Pi’s faith in religion alters his way of approaching reality, empowering him to think beyond empirical boundaries and imagine how different entities may share things with one another:

Whereas before the road, the sea, the trees, the air, the sun all spoke differently to me, now they spoke one language of unity. Tree took account of road, which was aware of air, which was mindful of sea, which shared things with sun. Every element lived in harmonious relation with its neighbour, and all was kith and kin...I felt I saw her, a vision beyond vision (62–63).

In fleshing out how different realities—empirical and visionary, different beings—human and nonhuman, and different forms of thinking—scientific and religious—are all fundamentally intertwined, Martel endows the very concept of storytelling with an ecological touch. Consider, once again, Morton’s philosophy of ecological thought: “The ecological thought is the thinking

of interconnectedness. The ecological thought is a thought about ecology, but it's also a thinking that is ecological" (*Ecological Thought* 7–8). The ecology of narration and imagination comes down to the "founding principle of existence"— "what we call love, which works itself out sometimes not clearly, not cleanly, not immediately, nonetheless ineluctably" (63). Teenage Pi comes to the epiphany that an all-encompassing moral worldview is the most enlightening source for our understanding of how the universe functions. He concludes: "a quickening of the moral sense, which strikes one as more important than an intellectual understanding of things; an alignment of the universe along moral lines, no intellectual ones" (65). Alongside Pi, rhetorical readers come to visualize how our moral mentality and forward thinking cultivated by literary imagination may encompass and serve as guidance for our scientific, intellectual understanding of the world.

With reverberating repetitions, Pi's abiding faith in love harmoniously coexists with and serves as guidance for his rational awareness of surrounding danger. Pi's father, who embodies the usefulness of reason and concrete scientific facts, has warned Pi of the extreme danger of touching a tiger. Pi's biology teacher, Mr. Satish Kumar, believes that religion is darkness, whereas scientific knowledge and intellectual understanding are the ultimate sources of light. He argues:

There are no grounds for going beyond a scientific explanation of reality and no sound reason for believing anything but our sense experience. A clear intellect, close attention to detail and a little scientific knowledge will expose religion as superstitious bosh. God does not exist...It wasn't God who saved me—it was medicine. Reason is my prophet and it tells me that as a watch stops, so we die" (27–28).

While the concrete facts Mr. Kumar lays out are verifiable on an empirical ground, Pi (as well as rhetorical readers) grows to realize that a rational understanding of the world is only partial and incomplete if not subsumed under a reparative vision of moral responsibility. It is only through Pi's effort to imagine a story that he is able to apply reason and empirical knowledge to find harmony among fear, loneliness, and interactions with a forbidding environment. Throughout this journey, Pi grows up to understand the importance of balancing his personal needs and social expectations or social obligations to the environment. In imagining his metaphorical coexistence with the tiger, Pi ensures his safety and responsibility as a zookeeper and protects both Richard Parker and himself by balancing his two fears: "being too close to Richard Parker and being too far from the lifeboat" (155). Literary imagination proves to be reparative in the sense that it expands, transforms environmental challenges into a legend of growth and empowerment. The initial instabilities introduced during the narrative beginning, which form around the question of how to write fiction that helps us maintain faith, develop into more compelling questions in the narrative middle. That is, how does meaningful storytelling foster connections among seeming differences and sustain us through the nightmares in life? How does literary imagination create the "harmony of order" and "give things a meaningful shape?" (285).²¹

The overarching sense of ecological interconnectedness is further felt through the way that the literary form concludes former instabilities beautifully and meaningfully. During the novel's ending, which can be identified as part three or chapters ninety-five through one hundred, Martel invites readers to rethink and conclude their interpretive, ethical, and aesthetic judgments about the narrative whole (*Experiencing Fiction* 21). The different versions of Pi's life story work together to pose this concluding question: "Which is the better story, the story with animals or the story without animals?" (317). In the first story with animals, the ship sinks,

and Pi, a hyena, an orangutan, a zebra, and a tiger get on the lifeboat; the hyena kills both the zebra and the orangutan, and the tiger then kills the hyena. In the story without animals, the ship sinks, and Pi, Pi's mother, a cook, and a sailor get on the lifeboat; the cook kills both the sailor and Pi's mother, and Pi then kills the cook and eats his liver. While the second story is more believable, Pi argues that believability may not be the criterion for a good story: "Love is hard to believe, ask any lover. Life is hard to believe, ask any scientist. God is hard to believe, ask any believer" (297). The first story is less believable, but it compels us to "see higher or further or differently" and rethink crude realities in an improved and reparative light (302). This highly imaginative narrative assimilates dark truths about cannibalism and the shattered faith of humanity into a broader framework of human resilience and the interconnection between humanity and the nonhuman world. In fact, the first story extracts the imperfect, incomplete raw materials from the second story and reworks, reshapes them to deepen readers' comprehension of life.

Although the second story does not contain Richard Parker, it works in synergy with the first story to facilitate readers' visceral, embodied experience of ecological interconnectivity. In chapter thirty-seven, we see Richard Parker struggling to swim for a lifebuoy: "He revived and started beating the water with vigorous, desperate strokes...With his last energies he stretched forward and took hold of it...He was kicking vigorously with his legs...He reached up and pulled himself aboard" (98–99). By invoking the multisensory imagery of vision and motion, Martel invites readers to feel the tiger's strong physical movements and survival instincts across sensory modalities and in their own bodies. As G. Gabrielle Starr maintains, "visual imagery and vision may feed into or build on motor imagery because vision allows for (and in sighted persons is preparatory to) motion" (Starr 80). The concrete, visceral embodiment of one's primal urge

primes readers' memory for chapter ninety-nine, in which Pi's action of swimming for the lifeboat when facing death forms a beautiful slant rhyme with the tiger's previous action. Pi tells us that swimming in the Pacific Ocean is a strenuous, physically challenging task: he keeps kicking and swallowing water, nearly loses his strength, and finally climbs aboard (303). Rhyming action, therefore, exemplifies how ecological interconnectivity also operates at a formal and epistemological level. Through the implicit, half-backward narrative movement, the two versions of Pi's life story—the story with the tiger and the story without the tiger—beautifully merge. By tapping into readers' tendency to reactivate prior memory when restoring backward referential coherence, the two stories work together to evoke an integrated mesh of backward and rhythmic correspondences across the temporal frame of the narrative (Broek, Ridsen, and Hartmann 366–67). As a result, rhetorical readers may experience how Pi's love for life echoes his evil self, how the travail of confronting danger and adversity alludes back to the brighter story of adventure and coexistence, and, ultimately, how the faith in love and literary imagination subsumes gruesome realities under a philosophical and broad-minded perspective.

Conclusion

Fiction writer Philip Pullman has cited poet William Blake to make a case for the capacity of literary imagination to nourish our minds: "you never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough" (Pullman 293). Pullman argues that believing in stories unverifiable by scientific proof is nonetheless valuable in the sense that they stretch the limits of what we know to foster our moral understanding (Pullman 289, 292–93). Indeed, the effort to connect with writers' literary ambition may empower rhetorical readers to see the proposed harmony and cooperation between literary values and scientific pursuits in Shelley's seemingly dark, tragic tale of science fiction.²² They may also see how, in *Life of Pi*, the abiding faith in

love and literary imagination eventually prevails over and recreates gruesome realities.²³ These two case studies speak powerfully to why our world needs ecological and reparative storytelling—one that keenly captures the grim, challenging fragments and divisions in life but subsumes them under a broader perspective, an expanded vision of hope and ecological interconnection. *Frankenstein* unveils the danger of unguided scientific exploration and possible consequences of technological application; but it also moves readers toward a holistic picture of how literary knowledge may guide scientific and technological advancements through offering a moral understanding of shared feelings and experiences. *Life of Pi* confronts the harshest, darkest aspects of life and humanity, but it also illuminates the possibility that the willingness to co-write our life stories with our different selves and with unexpected forces can sustain us through the waters of our formidable yet kaleidoscopic life. Through the mechanism of two-way narrative movements, nuanced narrative complexities are brought together to convey the overarching, reverberating language of ecological coexistence. In working toward internal logic and continuity, the tensions, instabilities, half-rhyming complexities, and nuanced multitudes ignite, slow down, and deepen rhetorical readers' imaginative engagement. They tap into our shared tendency to establish forward and backward coherence, invite us to connect the dots among even the starkest differences, and ultimately propel us toward a shareable, all-inclusive vision of life.

As I hope to have shown, examples of masterful craft—bonding, ecological, and reparative storytelling—expand the fixed boundaries of the empirical world and transport readers into an imaginary world of interconnection and forward thinking. Extraordinary craft rewrites the “what” of life into complex and coherent representations of “so what,” directing nuanced ethical stakes toward internal resonance and readers' renewed, holistic comprehension of life. Such overarching ethical ideas then metamorphosize into future-oriented questions of “now what.”

That is, how do we navigate the mysteries, challenges, stark divisions, and elusive realities of life toward an all-encompassing view of shareable empathy and wisdom among different individuals, groups, and species? How do we use the stories we have read and loved to rewrite, repair the stories of our lives?

By the same logic, rhetorical criticism can delve into the textual core, rewriting the “what” of craft construction into complex and coherent representations of what constitutes masterful and shareable narration. In experimenting with an interdisciplinary framework of what writers and readers can possibly share, I aim to integrate the systematic rigor of theoretical criticism with the creative forward-thinking of storytelling. The ethical implication—the “so what”—of my interdisciplinary reading practice thus resides in its exemplification of reparative storytelling. It assimilates the productive differences between literary criticism and creative writing into an interplay of complementarity, extracting overarching structures from the textual core and then expanding outward toward an amalgamation of reading and storytelling. The “now what” of my project concludes as follows: how does rhetorical criticism serve as guidance for apprentice writers through cultivating empathic and imaginative conversations between craft and critical reading?

Reviving Mimesis: Unnatural Storytelling and its Reparative Fire

Combining Craft and Criticism: From Reading to Storytelling

This chapter continues chapter two's mission of exploring reparative storytelling via an interdisciplinary framework of narratology, creative writing, and cognitive science, with the modification that this chapter puts screenwriting, rhetorical narratology, and unnatural narratology into dialogue. While the film script is only one part of the cinematic apparatus, perspectives on screenwriting nevertheless shed universal light on what constitutes masterful storytelling across genres and media. Screenwriting insights should be differentiated from film narratology, which examines filmic narration in the context of cinematic culture and production. Seymour Chatman's *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* and Peter Verstraten's *Film Narratology* are both canonical works of film narratology. Chatman analyzes the particularity of film as a communicative medium and its creative translation of literary features through structuralist systematization and narratological terminologies, whereas Verstraten unpacks the various narrative aspects of cinema via a poststructuralist lens, surpassing the binary opposition between filmic visuality and narrative studies. Screenwriting books and studies, on the other hand, unequivocally foreground story or storytelling as the single most important element. In *On Screenwriting*, film scholar, screenwriter, and cinematographer Freddie Gaffney argues: "The essential starting point for studying screenwriting is to realise that screenwriting is *story*. Story is the essential, non-negotiable ingredient that will make or break a screenplay, and is the component that drives everything connected to the screenplay" (11). Veteran writer Lance Lee, in *A Poetics for Screenwriters*, argues that the fundamental story elements and patterns in drama can be integrated seamlessly into film: "Great screenwriters

belong in the same company as great dramatists: screenwriting is only our own current variant of playwrighting” (1). The study of screenwriting thus boils down to the universal question of how to write a good story or what makes the right story. In this sense, screenwriting studies and craft books share rhetorical narratology and fiction writing’s quest for exploring what constitutes rhetorically effective and aesthetically meaningful storytelling.

This chapter argues that the concept of unnaturalness—the idea sitting at the very core of unnatural narratology—can be integrated into creative and cross-interdisciplinary practices. While unnatural narratology sets out to explore how highly inventive narration may reshape the extratextual world, the antithetical opposition unnatural narratology establishes between mimesis and unnaturalness obscures this theoretical paradigm’s real-world communicative affordances. Possibilities of imaginative narration, as I will demonstrate, acquire their rhetorical force—their bonding and reparative affordances—precisely through reconnecting the audience with the life-like qualities unnatural narratology aspires to reform. In weaving together literary critics and screenwriters’ perspectives on the transformative power of narration, this chapter puts forth what I understand as unnatural and reparative storytelling—one that visualizes the complementary wisdom capable of reforming the deficient materials and depleting holes in life, assimilating dark realities into an inventive, broad-minded picture of hope and shared empathy. If masterful storytelling can indeed be universal, its universality resides in this transhistorical, cross-genre truth that Mary Shelley, Yann Martel, Karen Joy Fowler, and screenwriters have all taken pains to craft: what we share is more important than how we divide. Not only does an inclusive view of unnaturalness subsume the mimetic demystification of life under a heightened vision of life-enriching wisdom, but it also demonstrates the bonding and reparative effects of masterful craft, which have been systematically examined in my first two chapters. By invigorating the bonding

and reparative potentials of unnatural storytelling, this chapter furthers the possibility that literary criticism may serve as guidance for apprentice writers.

The relationship between mimesis and unnatural modes of narration has been vexed, contested, and productively complex. Brian Richardson and Jan Alber have both defined the mission of unnatural narratology as to illuminate how antirealistic, highly imaginative and innovative narratives expand the real-world parameters of literary comprehension. Alber relates unnaturalness to impossibilities that violate “physical laws, logical principles, or standard anthropomorphic limitations of knowledge” (“Unnatural Narrative”). By the concept of impossibility, Alber refers to fictional events and scenarios that could not exist in our extratextual world. While Richardson shares Alber’s ambition of remolding mimetic frames of textual and extratextual realities, he views anti-mimesis differently, foregrounding its freedom from the constraints of verisimilitude. For Richardson, anti-mimetic representations “violate mimetic expectations and the practices of realism,” calling attention to their transgressive inventions (*Unnatural Narrative* 3). Although Richardson positions unnatural narration as radically different from mimesis, his approach is inclusive and dialectical: “unnatural elements function best in a literary context when framed by, combined with, or in a dialectical relation with other mimetic elements of narrative” (20–21). By the same logic, Richardson calls for a comprehensive theoretical model capable of explaining the dynamic interactions between mimesis and anti-mimesis. The nuanced differences within the unnatural paradigm are productive to understanding the ways in which experimental modes of narration challenge our preconceptions and reshape our understanding of the world.

It is notable that unnatural narratology is a cross-genre, transhistorical approach. Alber and Richardson state its mission as follows: “By definition, a purely mimetic model cannot

comprehend antimimetic works that violate the rules of mimetic representation...We work toward a binocular vision and a dialectical poetics, one that is able to address fiction as fiction, as well as pretended nonfiction” (Alber and Richardson 6). In his chapter on unnatural characters transcending humanistic and cognitive models, Richardson traces the emergence and development of anti-mimetic characters all the way back to before Aristotle’s time. His comprehensive anti-mimetic character theory unpacks examples as different as the imperfectly human characters in Gertrude Stein, contradictory characters in Alain Robbe-Grillet and Martin Crimp, fused characters that merge with others in James Joyce, Tony Kushner, and Salman Rushdie, and so forth. Richardson also offers an illuminating account of the inhuman combination of traits in Maya Sonenberg’s “Nature Morte.” He writes:

Just such an impossible entity appears...the story’s first cubist child, a baby born to an unwed mother from Avignon in 1911. Visually, he is odd...The other boys do not want him to play baseball with them...His relationships to space and time are skewed...Though his body seems to lack a third dimension, his mind transcends all three: He is even able to watch his own birth (“Transcending” 142).

Richardson suggests that unnatural narratology aims to conceptualize such under-theorized fictional characters, who break traditional frames of narration and cannot be adequately explained on a mimetic ground.

At the same time that Richardson’s unnatural paradigm sets out to synthesize the radical oppositions of mimesis and anti-mimesis, screenwriting instruction blurs the lines between the two, suggesting that truthful, life-resonant storytelling also has a creative and transformative dimension. In his canonical book *Story*, Robert McKee advises aspiring screenwriters to appeal

to the audience's "innate sensitivity to the truth" and approach story—the most essential element of screenplay—with a sense of morality. A well-told story, argues McKee, harmonizes our emotional and intellectual experiences and refreshes, reshapes our chaotic quotidian existence by endowing it with additional depth and meaning. (25, 111–12). In other words, storytelling merges the world of writerly imagination with that of the audience's participation via a "creative metaphor for life" (113). Screenwriter John Truby would agree with McKee on the universality of a masterful story form, for Truby emphasizes the rhetoric of conveying moral truths or a heightened vision of the complexities in life (3, 9). Truby defines story as a form of communication that visualizes how people become better versions of themselves and shows forth "life as human beings imagine it *could* be" (7–9).²⁴ Brian McDonald shares this emphasis on the amalgamation of visionary inventiveness and moral truthfulness, suggesting that screenwriters build an "armature"—an overarching moral message that holds together the whole piece (*Invisible Ink* 20). The armature is an invisible truth more resonant and profound than our ordinary knowledge, palpable only through our effort to share the world of artistic craftsmanship and imagination.

This chapter will offer an interdisciplinary reading of the Oscar-winning screenplay *Anatomy of a Fall* by Justine Triet and Arthur Hirari. In doing so, I seek to flesh out how the story is sculpted around an invisible armature, an overarching moral on extracting love and nourishment from elusive realities through the mind's eye. Then my argument will extend outward toward a discussion of productive interactions between a more factual, paranoid mode of storytelling and a more truthful, reparative mode, as well as the interactions between literary criticism and creative writing. While unnatural narratologists are skilled at compartmentalizing and synthesizing mimesis and anti-mimesis, screenwriters tend toward a more rhetorical

approach, formulating general tenets underlying stories' communicative achievements. If we merge critical and craft perspectives under an inclusive vision, we will see the unnaturalness fused within the Aristotelian concept of mimesis, which concerns not with exact, mechanical copies of reality but with the capacity of narration to stretch the limits of our moral comprehension, thereby generating a profound sense of relatability and reformation. I conclude that the *unnaturalness* of *Anatomy of a Fall* resides precisely in its *mimetic transformation of life's possibilities*. Masterful storytelling, as Triet and Harari suggest, is concerned not with factual, realistic demystification of life's hidden inimical forces but with truthful, mimetic imagination of life's forward momentum. Whereas the former is driven by the paranoid aversion to uncertainty, the latter generates shared empathy and life-enriching emotional wisdom. Facts are fragmentary, but truths resonate with our shared effort to piece together the fragments of grim realities to re-envision the stories of our lives.

The Creative Reformation of Mimesis: Paranoid and Reparative Storytelling in *Anatomy of a Fall*

The core story of *Anatomy of a Fall* can be understood as a juxtaposition of paranoid/realistic storytelling, which uncovers dark facts to forestall surprise and pain, and reparative/unnatural/mimetic storytelling, which reassembles grim realities into a healthy whole via empathic imagination. The story takes the audience into a journey to investigate the facts hidden beneath the fall of Samuel Maleski from an attic window as well as an injury that must have preceded the fall. Since several pieces of evidence—including his secret recording of a nasty fight with his wife Sandra Voyter—incriminate Sandra for potential involvement in his death, Sandra needs to present a compelling narrative demonstrating her innocence and Samuel's inclination toward suicide. During the trials, the couple's life story begins to unfold: their

marriage deteriorates after an accident that damages their son Daniel's optic nerve. Bearing responsibility for this accident, Samuel manages to make up by spending more time with his son but still suffers from guilt, which renders his ambition of becoming a devoted writer even more challenging. Sandra copes with her emotional stress through immersive fiction writing and sexual flings. While it is nearly impossible to attain a realistic, objective picture of the fall of their marriage, the film shines a light on the beauty and promise of not seeing clearly with our eyes. This difficult case ultimately comes down to Daniel's final testimony. Although Daniel lacks the incisive factual information, he decides to see rightly with his heart. Daniel imagines that Samuel committed suicide because he had already spent a rich, full, and extraordinary life caring for his son and shielding his son from danger. Daniel's highly imaginative yet highly truthful narrative thus generates an unbounded sense of hope. Samuel becomes a hero who always sacrifices his own needs for the needs of others; and Sandra is absolved from incrimination. In protecting his parents, Daniel narrates a visionary truth about the agency of storytelling. That is, life has power over us because it is unpredictable, heavy, and reflective of the inevitability of death. Rather than seizing control over life by reproducing its inimical force, a storyteller can repair and piece together its fragments with love and empathy. Daniel's testimony exemplifies unnatural storytelling with a reparative touch. Instead of seeking to pin down factual happenings, Daniel expands the parameters of our real-world knowledge and transforms grim pieces of life into opportunities to start afresh. It is also worth highlighting that the unnatural and creative energy of Daniel's narration does not spring from an effort to escape from the elusive and disappointing fragments in life. Instead, he embraces them, repairs them, and then integrates them into an all-inclusive vision of shareable truths. Within Daniel's imagination, Samuel has successfully fulfilled his life cycle, which teaches Daniel that death is

an inevitable and fundamental aspect of the natural process. Life comes into fruition not only through eventual results but also through the collective experience of crafting, sharing, and renewing memories.

Before I fully unpack unnatural and reparative storytelling in my case study, let me first return to and expand on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concepts of reparative reading and paranoid reading. The paranoid critical practice sets out to expose the realities of "large and genuinely systemic oppressions" (124). For all its intellectual rigor and promised truthfulness, paranoid reading fixates on the very exposure of objective facts and can thus blind us to the creative affordances of knowledge as well as the rhetorical interactions among the text, the knower, and the teller (124). Paranoid readers, when insisting upon the single dominant method, stay vigilant of the danger in our environment only by replicating its inimical force. By contrast, a reparative reader is able to integrate the paranoid materials—namely, the surprises and injustices that would otherwise evoke fear—into a broad-minded framework of possibilities. The reader is able to transform and nourish the "hateful and envious part-objects that one defensively projects into, carves out of, and ingests from the world," reassembling one's resources to "'repair' the murderous part-objects into something like a whole...not necessarily like any preexisting whole" (128). In restoring paranoid realities to a renewed state of integrity and wholeness, reparative reading extracts love and hope out of an environment uncongenial to their growth (137). Since paranoid reading and reparative reading are mutually interactive practices of seeking, offering, and organizing knowledge, their epistemological implications can be applied to the realm of creative writing. As my case study will demonstrate, paranoid storytelling exerts a destructive force over reality by exposing and reproducing its hostile dynamics. Paranoid storytelling resembles paranoid reading in that they are both objective, empirical, and non-creative acts. By

contrast, reparative storytelling embodies the future-oriented, transformative energy of creative writing and is more inclusive than reparative reading. Reparative storytelling assimilates the rhetoric of verisimilitude into an empathic, imaginary world shared by knowers, characters, and tellers. Its unnaturalness resides in its resourceful, panoramic creativity. As Richardson suggests, an unnatural view of narration may move us beyond a realistic understanding to an all-encompassing one that “embraces both mimetic and antimimetic narrative practices” (*Unnatural Narrative* 4). My conception of paranoid, reparative, and unnatural storytelling highlights the ethical stakes of using language as an agency to shape lives and transform realities.

In *Anatomy of a Fall*, Sandra is an accomplished writer known for her realistic style. The screenplay opens with a literature student’s description of Sandra’s novel:

ZOE. To be honest, the way you describe the son’s accident is disturbing. It’s so raw and vivid.

You go into such detail, like in a documentary. It’s troubling to the reader, probably because it’s your life. (Triet and Hariri 2)

Although Sandra does not have first-hand knowledge of Daniel’s accident, she gives a factual and objective presentation of it by imagining or investigating what must have happened during the accident. Sandra’s approach to fiction writing thus aligns with the realistic aesthetic—the idea that literary works empower readers’ immersive experience through a faithful reflection of our world (Martin 57). As a prominent characteristic of nineteenth-century literature and a broader idea of artistic representation, realism has become a mode of storytelling featuring objective, systematic demystification of “inherited assumptions about life” and a “truth of experience that we knew, however dimly, all along” (Martin 58, 60). Throughout the story,

Sandra repeatedly draws attention to the importance of seeing reality clearly, by which she refers to a balanced and in-depth view of complex materials:

SANDRA. That recording is not reality. If you take an extreme moment in life, an emotional peak, and focus on it, it crushes reality. It may seem like irrefutable proof, but it actually warps everything. This is not reality. (43)

While Sandra aims to maintain a logical and unbiased view of life and her relationship with Samuel, her insistence on deciphering and exposing their hidden dynamics betrays her paranoid aversion to surprise and pain. Sedgwick explains that paranoia is both replicative and anticipatory. It “requires that bad news be always already known,” emphasizes “knowledge in the form of exposure,” and makes sense of life’s dangerous possibilities through embodying them (130, 131, 138). When presented with the question of whether she had any resentment toward Samuel after Daniel’s accident, Sandra first evades the question and then indicates that she only resented him for a few days. The exquisite surface tension, however, gestures toward congested subtextual matters. During their recorded conversation, Sandra refuses to listen to Samuel’s request to readjust how they share parental and household responsibilities such that he can gain more time to write. She says, “First of all, I don’t believe in the notion of reciprocity in a couple. It’s naive and frankly depressing. And yes I think discussing it is a waste of time considering the state you’re in, seriously” (103). By “state,” Sandra means Samuel’s failure to meet his aspirations as a writer and his inability to ward off his guilt about the accident. She points out that his seeming devotion to his family only “conceals something dirtier and meaner”—that is, his fear of failure (107). Sandra also deflects the testimony of Samuel’s psychiatrist, denying that she made Samuel give up writing to pay for the accident, and that her aloofness to his pain exacted psychological burdens on him (86). Repeatedly Sandra exposes her

husband's fragility and mediocrity: "His pain came from a deeper place/ His pain went further back" (116). By lavishing details on Sandra's seeming aloofness and her persistent, paradoxical effort to simultaneously expose reality and avoid reality, the screenwriters invite us into the story's subtext: Sandra's unexpressed, overcharged grief. She has never forgiven Samuel for the accident that severely, permanently impaired Daniel's sight. Despite the ambiguity of Samuel's physical fall, it is unambiguous that her fiction destroys the promise of his reality.²⁵

For all Sandra's realistic/paranoid approach to crafting fiction, her reparative motives shine through the way she holds the weight of reality to protect Daniel. Let us listen to her:

SANDRA. Earlier, the doctor called it a tragic situation. I very quickly refused to see it that way.

I never saw Daniel as handicapped. I wanted to protect him from that perception. As soon as you pigeonhole a child that way, you condemn him to not imagining his life as his own; whereas in fact he should feel it's the best life because it's his own. He reads books, goes on social media like any other kid, he dreams, he plays, he cries, he laughs...He's a lively kid. (88)

In extracting hope and life's myriad possibilities from a tragic situation, Sandra demonstrates that love can prevent a child from losing sight of what he can possibly achieve. Sandra's reparative view of the accident, however, differs from Sedgwick's reparative reading and meets short of my standard for unnatural storytelling. Refusing to embrace the painful and tragic fragments in life, Sandra does not assimilate them into a more wholesome, all-inclusive framework. It is also important to take Sandra's words with a grain of salt since she aims to appear as innocent as possible during the trials. As shown through the stories she creates, language can serve as a powerful agency for concealing, constructing, or crushing reality.

Although Sandra and Samuel share the paranoid tendency to compete for power over reality, their vulnerability in fact stems from the love and commitment they once braved to share. Like his wife, Samuel also copes with grief by working on a novel about a tragic accident. Sandra describes a passage from his draft:

SANDRA. This passage was about a guy imagining how his life would've been without the accident that killed his brother. One day he wakes up and finds himself in two parallel realities: One where the accident is the center of his life, and the other where the accident never happened. (117)

Samuel's storytelling resonates with Sandra's in that he also copes with bad surprises in life by simultaneously replicating and deflecting them. By adopting the paradoxical approach to avoid pain and reproduce pain, Samuel aspires but fails to repair and reshape a broken family story. Having been inspired by Sandra's realistic aesthetic, Samuel also records moments in his life to gather materials for a documentary project. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that he transcribed their final argument in order to falsely incriminate Sandra, using his fiction to destroy her reality. The couple seem to have forgotten how the passion for language and storytelling—the creative gun they now use to take revenge—once united them and generated shared empathy.²⁶ In a private conversation, Sandra confesses to her old friend/lawyer: "I'd spent my life not understanding my family and friends, and then he came along...I felt like I understood what he was saying" (48). Once lonely and lost, Sandra saw her missing self in Samuel. Their first languages are different, but they were able to connect across differences and identify with each other's languages, hopes, and ambitions. It is precisely their courage to bond with each other, however, that might have also generated vulnerability. Brené Brown has famously argued that vulnerability is the "core, the heart, the center, of meaningful human experiences" (12).

Being vulnerable means that one risks being emotionally exposed to frustrated expectations and overcomes what Sedgwick understands as the paranoid aversion to uncertainty (34). The ultimately tragedy of the Sandra–Samuel connection thus lies in their blindness to their shared vulnerability. After all, to love—to open oneself to the potential bad surprises in life—is difficult, and both characters are incapable of piecing together the beautiful fabric that life has torn off a once wholesome vision of marriage.

As the story reaches Daniel’s final testimony, it suddenly expands with visionary energy. In the scenario narrated by Daniel, Samuel compares himself to their dog Snoop. He tells Daniel that Snoop is an extraordinary dog in the sense that he has spent his life taking care of his family and imagining others’ needs. One day Snoop will die, and at some point his energy will be exhausted; but Daniel will be able to recover from the inevitable loss of Snoop. While Daniel lacks an accurate depiction of reality, he attests to the truthfulness of empathic imagination. When we cannot decide what happened exactly, we can imagine how something happened and why it happened (136). With the empathic effort to share beyond crude and objective facts, we will be able to integrate the fragments of loss and death into an all-inclusive perspective. In visualizing how his father helps him grow up to navigate life’s cycle, Daniel regenerates hope from the forward progression of their story. A reparative writer views characters as “at once good, damaged, integral, and requiring and eliciting love and care,” crafting hope as “a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience” (Sedgwick 137, 146). Daniel comes to see that the reparative promises of life—growth, love, and family—are always intertwined with paranoid elements. As a result, it is up to a storyteller to imagine a past that “could have happened differently from the way it actually did” as well as a future of bravery and freedom that stretches the boundaries of a fixed, painful reality (Sedgwick 146). The screenplay concludes with a

broad-minded picture of the full family. Daniel's testimony absolves Sandra, and they reconcile; Snoop lies down against Sandra, and Sandra caresses him. Within the reparative vision, Snoop carries forward Samuel's dream of creating and sharing an extraordinary story of his family.

Masterful craft, as screenwriting books illuminate, visualizes deep, genuine emotional truths that tap into the audience's shared empathy and experiences. Price borrows Aristotle's perspectives on classical storytelling to guide contemporary screenwriters toward a holistic picture of author-audience communication. His cross-genre, transhistorical approach situates screenwriting within the "broader context of storytelling," bringing to light the elements that have stood the test of time and will also make a good screenplay (3). Specifically, Price understands good stories as representations of shared human experiences. As the audience see and feel "something universal of themselves and their world reflected back to them," they relate to such truths on cognitive and emotional levels, thereby fulfilling their shared need to learn about themselves "in order to grow and develop, as individuals, as a society, and as a species" (10). Price demonstrates that masterful stories are both mimetic and reparative. Not only does mimetic relatability facilitate the audience's empathic engagement, but it also propels them toward change and growth. As in *Anatomy of a Fall*, the screenwriters' creative invention taps into elusive human experiences to bring accessible, relatable truths out of their complexity. With Daniel's empathic vision, we come to grasp how we share the desire to love and connect with others—even though it is difficult to bear vulnerability. We yearn for a sense of connectedness and wholeness, hoping to piece together life's bits and pieces to carve out a landscape of possibilities. If we take a closer look at Aristotle's concept of *mimesis*, we'll feel its *unnatural ingenuity*: far from arguing for factual, historical replication of what actually happened, Aristotle

makes a case for reformative, future-oriented representation of what should happen or what poetry could possibly make happen.²⁷

In the same vein, McKee and McDonald's craft books on screenwriting firmly distinguish between facts and truths. McKee compares a storyteller/screenwriter to a life poet whose story “must abstract from life to discover its essences.... but not so verbatim that it has no depth or meaning beyond what’s obvious to everyone on the street” (25). To put this another way, a story is a metaphor for life rather than a life in facts. While facts are mere occurrences, truths are writers’ deep, creative thoughts on what happens. McDonald likewise contends that storytelling/screenwriting is concerned not with facts but with truths—the vital survival information writers pass down to the audiences (*Invisible Ink* 76). One foundational truth connecting stories of different genres and historical periods is what McDonald has termed the golden theme: *we are all the same*. McDonald writes, “And it is my firm belief that the closer a story comes to illuminating this truth, the more powerful and universal it becomes, and the more people are touched by it” (*Golden Theme* 4). By this golden message, McDonald speaks to the capacity of highly relatable stories to bond individuals and groups across differences. In creatively demonstrating how different people share commonalities and can potentially relate to each others’ struggles, storytelling can empower the audience to imagine themselves in fictional characters’ shoes and feel this golden truth with their heart. In the scenario McDonald illustrates, the way to invite the audience to empathize with hungry children in Africa is to combine their impoverished realities with photos of universal, accessible activities, like “a father helping a child tie her shoe before they went on their walk;” doing so helps the audience relate to those children and imagine themselves in unfamiliar situations (*Golden Theme* 87–89). The responsibility of a storyteller, as McDonald so powerfully invokes, is to impart the golden theme

to the audience in original and rhetorically impactful ways. The randomness of life and death is unsettling, but stories heal moments of silence and loneliness by allowing us to share feelings and move closer to one another (102, 104).

As it happens, the armature (organizing idea) of *Anatomy of a Fall* is extremely close to this golden truth. The screenplay teaches us that master storytellers rewrite life's beautiful and forbidding mystery not via replicative, paranoid exposure of how we divide but through mimetic, unnatural, and reparative imagination of what we can possibly share. Regardless of our idiosyncratic perspectives and backgrounds, we—just like Sandra and Samuel—share the need to be seen, understood, absolved from our past mistakes, and given opportunities to move forward. With future-looking inventiveness, Daniel's narrative may enlighten and heal paranoid readers by inviting them into the profoundly uncertain but profoundly promising prospects for reworking, reviving their life stories. The *unnaturalness* of the screenplay's meditation on reality, therefore, is experienced as a profound sense of *resourceful and transformational inclusivity*.

From an Interdisciplinary Perspective: The Shareable Truths about Masterful Storytelling

Having conducted a close reading of *Anatomy of a Fall*, I now proceed with a discussion of how cognitive studies may shed retrospective, holistic light on bonding and reparative craft. In *Mechanisms of Social Connection*, scholars delve into the psychological and physiological mechanisms underlying human beings' shared tendency toward social bonding as well as the maintenance and vulnerability involved in this process. As they illustrate this overarching concept of human connection:

In fact, we are wired by evolution to form social connections, feel pleased when new bonds are formed, become angry or sad when social bonds are broken, and devote much of our cognitive processing capacity to interpreting others' behavior in our social interactions, dyadic relationships, and groups. Social connections are crucial for psychological growth, well-being, mental health, and social functioning across the lifespan, beginning from the first hours of life (Mikulincer and Shaver 3).

As much as human beings incline towards bonding with and sharing our lives with others, our psychological makeup is blemished with contradictions and imperfections, which render the process of sharing social connections extremely challenging. Psychologists Justin V. Cavallo, Sandra L. Murray, and John G. Holmes have systematically investigated the mechanisms underlying the fundamental dilemma in close relationships. While we are often motivated to establish intimacy with romantic partners to satisfy our “fundamental belongingness needs,” increasing closeness with others inevitably exposes us to potential paranoia of rejection and heightened immediate vulnerability (237). Our fundamental need for connection is at odds with our natural tendency towards protecting ourselves and minimizing the risks inherent in interdependent relationships. As a result, people who fail to balance these two contrasting motivations may suffer from emotional pains and withdraw from the close bonds that they have so cherished. Love—the most reparative promise of life—is fundamentally intertwined with the paranoid elements of grief, loss, and uncertainty. Cavallo, Murray, and Holmes thus delved into the science of reconciling the competing goals of intimacy and self-protection, exploring the “operation of a risk regulation system that prioritizes connectedness or self-protection as relationship circumstances warrant, in order to assure that people are safe from potential rejection” (238). They explain that people rely on feelings of trust or distrust to evaluate which

goal to prioritize (238–42). Chronic trust and people’s cognitive understanding of being seen and valued by their partners play a central role in prioritizing the goal of connection. In low-trust relationships, however, people tend to devalue the importance of intimate relationships or retaliate and reciprocate their partners’ disappointing behavior. In addition to operating at chronic and conscious levels, trust also operates at an automatic and impulsive level to regulate interpersonal risks. The psychologists conclude their empirical studies as follows:

Examining how trust shapes self-regulation at both the automatic and controlled levels of processing, and how these self-regulatory strategies reciprocally shape feelings of trust, will advance our theoretical understanding of interpersonal relationships and perhaps yield a more complete model of how people regulate approach and avoidance conflicts that arise outside relational domains (251).

This conclusion suggests that to establish healthy interpersonal connections and reconcile competing impulses, cultivating mutual trust may be the essential step. By exploring our shared tendencies to engage with life, psychology demonstrates the human effort to comprehend and rewrite the human tragedy—that our reparative motives are at once incompatible with yet inseparable from the paranoid possibilities. While psychology may not offer conclusive solutions to this fundamental dilemma, it carves out a path toward hope and interconnection through elusive and complex real-life contexts.

Likewise, reparative storytelling in *Anatomy of a Fall* assimilates the tragic realities of human connection into a panoramic view of the betterment of human life. The screenwriters tap into the human desire to form social bonds, showing forth how Samuel and Sandra once bonded across different languages; they also tap into the fear and vulnerability that inhere in emotional

investment, showing forth how Samuel's unresolvable guilt and Sandra aversion to her husband both originate from the love they once shared. Then the screenwriters highlighted the character Daniel, who is a great storyteller not necessarily because of his technical skills but because of his capacity to trust. He trusts that his parents—despite all their failures—are at once “good, damaged, integral, and requiring and eliciting love and care” (Sedgwick 137). He also trusts that, however blemished the human narrative may be, love and the imagination can advance our narratives forward and, in doing so, cultivate the hope of shaping them into a beautiful landscape. The shareability of masterful craft—the fusion of mimetic truthfulness and unnatural originality—resides in writers' (and readers') shared effort to comprehend and reshape the stories of life.

As it happens, the human tragedy resulting from our blemished psychological makeup in *Anatomy of a Fall* resonates strongly with *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*. When reflecting on the fundamental difficulty of achieving empathy across individual and group differences, Rosemary dissects our competing psychological needs:

Dr. Sosa ended the last lecture of the quarter by telling us that our preference for our own kind begins at birth. We find it in three-month-old babies who prefer faces from the racial category they see most often to all others. We find it among young children who, when divided into groups along the most arbitrary of criteria—shoelace color, for example—vehemently prefer the people inside their group to the people outside. “ ‘Do unto others as you would have others do unto you is our highest, most developed morality’ ... ‘Do unto others’ is an unnatural, inhuman behavior. You can understand why so many churches and churchgoers say it but so few achieve it. It goes against something fundamental in our natures. And this, then, is the human tragedy—that the common

humanity we share is fundamentally based on the denial of a common shared humanity (Fowler 151–52).

Drawing attention to the utmost importance of empathy and the near impossibility of achieving it, Fowler confronts the darker sides of human psychology. At the same time that we share the tendency and capacity for empathizing with others' needs and emotions, we also share the competing inclination to refuse to see the common shared humanity in those whom we perceive as different. The obligation of a creative writer, as Fowler demonstrates, is to assimilate our fundamental dilemmas into a more wholesome framework of interconnection and reformation. Rosemary as a flawed character learns to cope with her unspeakable pain by narrating and coming to face her jealousy—a paranoid element at once incompatible with yet inseparable from the reparative promise of love. In growing up to embrace and make amends for her mistakes, Rosemary is able to re-establish connection with Fern and reshape the fragments of her life into a hopeful, forward-looking story. Both Triet and Harari's screenwriting and Fowler's fiction writing are bonding and reparative. They subsume the mimetic representation of life's tragedies under an empathic and visionary world shared by readers, characters, and storytellers.

Psychological research into empathy and intergroup competition also corroborates Fowler's literary argument, that the human tragedy may be written in our flawed psychological makeup. Psychologist Carsten Karel Willem De Dreu explains the neurobiological basis for our ability to empathize and bond with others, that brain oxytocin promotes the sociality of human beings by modulating “two functions underlying parochial cooperation, namely, ingroup trust and concern for (members of) the group” (392). De Dreu underlines the fact that the human tendency to empathize, cooperate, and care for others is only *parochial*. Oxytocin, the brain hormone and modulator facilitating ingroup other-concern, also poses fundamental challenges to

intergroup empathy. De Dreu unpacks the highly contingent nature of oxytocin-induced goodwill as follows:

Parochialism serves individual and group survival in both ancestral and contemporary societies (Darwin, 1873), and it appears to depend upon three interrelated psychological mechanisms: (a) social categorization of others as ingroup or versus not ingroup, (b) a tendency to trust people categorized as ingroup more than those viewed as not ingroup, and (c) a tendency to develop other-concern primarily for those categorized as ingroup rather than those categorized as not ingroup. Importantly, when the ingroup competes with rival outgroups, parochialism may manifest itself not only in ingroup cooperation but also in competitive behavior toward the outgroup (393).

By unpacking the dark side of oxytocin, De Dreu offers scientific explanations for Fowler's observation that we are naturally inclined to prefer our own kind and dismiss the common shared humanity in those whom we regard as different outsiders. Since we share the natural tendency to classify people into two types—someone who is one of us versus someone who is different from us, expanding empathy across boundaries and differences would be an unnatural act that can potentially recreate our life stories. Therefore, it is up to morally conscious storytellers—such as creative readers and critical writers—to offer a panoramic picture of our naturally competing motivations and, with the unnatural and reparative forward-thinking, rewrite a human history of what we can possibly share.

Reading as Storytelling: Literary Criticism as Guidance for Creative Writing

In conclusion, this chapter carries forward unnatural narratologists' ambition of navigating renewed representations of recognizable worlds. I should once again highlight that the

word “unnatural” has been used in versatile contexts. Alber’s approach to the unnatural fleshes out how narrative events deviate from established physical laws and logical principles, expanding the boundaries of our real-world knowledge. Richardson understands the unnatural as anti-mimesis, which he distinguishes from non-mimesis. For Richardson, non-mimetic representations merely add stylistic innovations or supernatural, fantastical elements to otherwise “mimetic depiction of the actual world” (*Unnatural Narrative* 4). Anti-mimetic narratives, by contrast, almost take on lives of their own and break free from the ground of our lived experience. “Mere self-consciousness is not enough,” argues Richardson, “the work must break the illusion of telling a true story about an actual world” (93). Richardson critiques narrative theory’s mimetic bias dating all the way back to *Poetics*, juxtaposing Aristotle’s mimetic view of epic and tragedy with Russian formalists’ defamiliarization—the foundational inspiration for unnatural narratology (23–25).²⁸ What Richardson may have missed, however, is that mimesis and defamiliarization are both concerned with how artistic craft brings extratextual truths back to life.

To expand the applicability or universality of unnatural storytelling, let me flesh out the fundamental intertwinement of defamiliarization and mimesis by returning to Victor Shklovsky and Charles Baxter’s insights into literariness and artistic values. In “Art as Technique,” Shklovsky credits artistic works with the capacity to defamiliarize—enrich and expand—the audience’s outlook on quotidian existence. To unpack this concept, Shklovsky illustrates the ways that Leo Tolstoy strips away names, forms, and usual meanings from familiar objects to place them in renewed visions. By stretching the duration and difficulty of readers’ aesthetic experience, defamiliarization refreshes their perception of “those mutable complexities of life,” empowering them to explore objects beyond their recognizable silhouettes (12,18). Rather than

distracting us from habitual realities, artistic devices work exactly to recover their obscured sensations, returning us to life's beauty and mysteries with enlarged awareness (11–12). Baxter acquires practical lessons on fiction writing from Shklovsky's critical wisdom, advising working writers to defamiliarize, derange their characters and narrative events such that they do not fit in neat patterns. Such contradictory characters and destabilized, paradoxical meanings revitalize the aesthetic pleasure of experiencing the unknown and the moderately strange (28). Baxter adds that defamiliarization should only be used in moderation because literature serves as a defamiliarizing lens for refocusing the ordinary. As he puts it, "You see a glimpse of someone reflected in that mirror, and a moment passes before you recognize that that person is yourself. Literature exists in moments like that" (39). Far from overcoloring stories and therefore deflecting readers' attention from everyday realities, defamiliarization invigorates readers' recognition of life's underlying complexities.

In a similar way that Baxter learns from Shklovsky's literary criticism, Price transfers Aristotelian theory to a timeless paradigm for screenwriting. As he puts it, "[Aristotle's] treatise is really an investigation into *why* we tell stories, and from that function, an analysis of what makes a good one and how to tell it the best way possible" (xiv). Price adds his own comments and case studies to Aristotelian concepts such as the creative truthfulness of storytelling and the wholeness and closure of dramatic design, translating Aristotle's critical language into cinema scripting advice. Indeed, Aristotle's mimetic theory beautifully illustrates the principles underlying crafting life-resonant stories. Artists' creative rendering of reality, he argues, taps into the audience's shared tendency to acquire knowledge and take pleasure in reasoning through imitations of life (Zerba and Gorman 6). To shape the audience's coherent and emotionally engaging experience, writers of tragedy cultivate a cohesive flow from beginning through the

middle to the ultimate culmination in cathartic relief. This plot design, the Aristotelian passage to enlightenment, carves out life with a sense of structure, wholeness, and heightened morality.

Master storytellers provide philosophical imitation of “what it is possible and appropriate in any situation” and cultivate characters “who are better than we are” (Zerba and Gorman 12–13, 21).

It is thus reasonable to contend that Aristotle shares Shklovsky’s concern with creative demonstration of life’s profound aspects, which appeals to the audience’s shared inclination to gain insights and grow from aesthetic experience.

One theoretical breakthrough of unnatural narratology is its unequivocal emphasis on the capacity of narrative experimentation to constantly renew the resources of storytelling and expand our comprehension of how the world works. Covering examples from different genres and historical periods, unnatural narratology can potentially serve as guidance for creative writers who strive for alternative possibilities of narration. They aim for masterful stories that tap into our life experiences to recreate promises of shared learning and empathy. McDonald warns that the aspiration to be innovative can move writers farther away from the scratch of their craft; it is only through artists’ painstaking care to communicate with their audience that creativity sparks its life (*Ink Spots* 44). As a pioneering new paradigm in narrative theory, unnatural narratology throws light on the vast range of world-reshaping possibilities that inventive narration can offer its readers, but the way it is framed in radical opposition to mimesis obscures its communicative affordances. After all, defamiliarization is firmly rooted in its mimetic ground, and unnatural storytelling acquires its rhetorical force precisely through reconnecting the audience with their lives in unexpected ways. I thus propose to understand unnatural storytelling as the creative transformation of deficient materials into a corpus of life-enriching emotional wisdom.²⁹ For example, unnatural storytelling may transform paranoid pictures of injustices into

heightened moral visions of life's tragedies. Rather than setting aside the life-like qualities we seek to reform or establishing the antithesis between mimesis and unnaturalness, we can rework and recombine their definitions to reenvision possible applications of unnatural narratology within interdisciplinary conversations and, eventually, revive the reparative fire of life-changing imitations.

Endnotes

1. Shklovsky emphasizes that the purpose of art and defamiliarization is “not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object” (Shklovsky 18). Baxter adds that in creating special perceptions, moderately defamiliarizing narrative elements liberate meanings and renew our perspectives on quotidian existences (*Burning Down* 33, 38). Baxter’s positive reading of Shklovsky forms a contrast with Bakhtin and Medvedev’s negative reading, which takes Shklovsky for endorsing negation and loss of “meaning, thought, artistic truth, social content, etc.” (61).
2. David Miall and Don Kuiken’s empirical research suggests the intertwinement between affective and cognitive responses: “defamiliarization evokes feelings, and feelings guide ‘refamiliarizing’ interpretive efforts” (Miall and Kuiken, “Foregrounding” 392). Miall also illustrates how defamiliarization is bound up with bodily alertness and reports the finding that “the frequency of bodily responses to specific passages in the story correlated significantly with the occurrence of foregrounding [stylistic complexity]” (Miall, “Temporal Aspects” 24).
3. Vera Nünning argues that “the de-automisation and de-familiarization of perception and interpretation that unreliability can also serve to foster” may “give way to positive feelings towards the other” and aid readers in comprehending that “even highly unreliable narrators are perhaps not as different and alien as they might seem at first sight” (101–2).
4. Miall contends that “[one] of the prominent features of literary reading is a sense of defamiliarization: a passage describing an object, event, or person in the mundane world unexpectedly seems strange,” and that “among any survey of the reasons why we value literary works, we might expect to find that empathy has a prominent place, perhaps even the most important” (“Temporal Aspects” 15; “Enacting” 285).
5. My understanding of narrative empathy is grounded in Suzanne Keen’s. She defines this concept as readers’ “sharing of feeling and perspective-taking induced by reading, viewing, hearing, or imagining narratives of another’s situation and condition,” which would enable them to “catch the emotions and sensations of a representation (in other-directed attention)” (521–22).
6. As my introductory chapter emphasizes, Phelan’s implied author is a “version of the flesh-and-blood author responsible for the purposive design governing the text” (*Somebody Telling* 206). The author’s ideal audience or the authorial audience “shares the knowledge, values, prejudices, fears, and experiences that the author expected in his or her readers, and that ground his or her rhetorical choice” (7–9).
7. Rhetorical reading is interested in the dynamic interactions among a “narrative’s affective, ethical, and aesthetic effects” as well as those among readers’ “interpretive judgments about the nature of actions or other elements of narrative, ethical judgments about the moral value of characters and actions, and aesthetic judgments about the artistic quality of the narrative and its parts” (Phelan, *Somebody Telling* 5; *Experiencing Fiction* 9).
8. The craft books I consulted are *Burning Down the House* by Charles Baxter, *The Half-Known World* by Robert Boswell, and four works from Graywolf Press’s *The Art of* series: *The*

Art of Perspective by Christopher Castellani, *The Art of Intimacy* by Stacey D' Erasmio, *The Art of Subtext* by Charles Baxter, and *The Art of Mystery* by Maud Casey.

9. For more, see Oshin Vartanian's historical review of empirical aesthetics.
10. In the same vein, Dan Shen contends that rhetorical poetics "remains committed to the principle that our efforts to seek shared readings not only can help resolve critical controversy but also can enhance our appreciation of the communicative achievements of the authors whose works we love to read and to teach" (*Style and Rhetoric* 25).
11. Shen argues that "we can consider both the difference and the connection between [the implied and flesh-and-blood authors]," for "Booth's distinction between the IA (whose image is text-based) and the FBP (whose image is biography-based) is only a matter of the same person in the process of writing and in daily life" ("Implied Author" 149).
12. Phelan argues that in character narration, the "implied author communicates with his or her audience by means of the voice of another speaker [narrator] addressing another audience [narratee]" (*Somebody Telling* 99). In the case of Fowler's novel, however, the narratee seems to overlap significantly, if not entirely, with rhetorical readers. Fowler implicitly characterizes the narratee as readers who listen attentively to Rosemary's story. As Rosemary directly addresses the narratee/readers, "Now that you know me better, let's take a second look at that first encounter," and "I've told you the middle of my story now" (136, 284). For the purpose of analyzing this case study, I will conflate the narratee with rhetorical readers.
13. Gestalt psychology puts stress on a "*reflective mode* of engagement whereby viewers (Arnheim, 1971) and readers (Iser, 1978) search for coherence in complex works" (Cupchik 71). Literary scholar Dirk Vanderbeke offers a more contemporary perspective on Wolfgang Iser's theory, arguing that "gap filling exercise is far more prevalent than Iser's conceptualization suggests and that it is by no means restricted to the higher echelons of literature" (184).
14. For more, see *Affective Ecologies*, *Narrating the Mesh*, and *With Bodies*.
15. I stick with James Phelan's definition of form: the "particular fashioning of the elements, techniques, and structure of a narrative in the service of a set of readerly engagements that lead to particular final effects on the implied audience" (*Experiencing Fiction* 3).
16. David Miall also goes so far as to state that "abstract events that are modeled on a sensory mode are also represented bodily;" and "character descriptions are adopted by the reader as though they described the self, with consequent bodily feelings" (291).
17. As my first and introductory chapters have emphasized, rhetorical readers want to join the authorial audience—the "group that shares the knowledge, values, prejudice, fears, and experiences that the author expected in his or her readers, and that ground his or her rhetorical choices" (*Somebody Telling* 7). The implied author is defined as a "version of the flesh-and-blood author responsible for the purposive design governing the text" (*Somebody Telling* 206). Rhetorical theory is interested in implied intentionality because it seeks to explain the author's literary, textualized intentions and the principles underlying the author's overall aesthetic

construction. Furthermore, rhetorical narratologist Dan Shen argues that the implied author is essentially the flesh-and-blood author in the writing process, which is why we need to consider biographical materials about the flesh-and-blood author when comparing the two versions of the same author (Shen 149).

18. According to Marilyn Butler, in 1831 Shelley compromised her strong interest in contemporary scientific debates due to fear of press censorship, revising her novel in a way that suggests religious remorse for pursuing technological advancement (Butler 308–09). In the 1818 text, however, Shelley portrays Victor Frankenstein in the image of John Abernethy, who sought to unite the dated belief in religious spirituality with the current faith in science (Butler 309, 312). Butler concludes that “*Frankenstein* as first devised seems to know too little science rather than too much” (Butler 313).

19. During an interview, Martel explained that “the idea of a religious boy in a lifeboat with a wild animal struck me as a perfect metaphor for the human condition. Humans aspire to really high things, right, like religion, justice, democracy. At the same time, we’re rooted in our human, animal condition” (Suarez).

20. The flesh-and-blood Martel commented that “I discovered in writing *Life of Pi* that in a sense religion operates like fiction. A good novel works by making you suspend your disbelief...Religion works the same way...I think it’s acceptable to say that God is a fiction, if you understand that this doesn’t necessarily mean that this fiction doesn’t exist. It just exists in a way that is only accessed through the imagination” (Sielke 8). Martel also emphasizes that although religion appears imaginary and irrational, “with it we come together we come to a sound understanding of the universe” (“An Interview”).

21. The flesh-and-blood Martel views the function of art as to “order chaos so that it is not only more meaningful, but safer, better” (Hamya).

22. Scholarly interpretations of *Frankenstein* have discussed this novel from a wide range of perspectives. They have probed its historical and literary contexts, such as the Romantic, scientific, and political contexts, and related this novel to a wide range of critical topics, including race, queerness, the female Gothic, the frame narrative structure, and the posthuman. While these readings have at least touched upon the idea of scientific exploration in this novel, none of them has thrown light on the proposed harmony between literary values and the application of scientific discoveries.

23. Scholarship has kept returning to *Life of Pi*’s overarching themes of storytelling and interspecies relationship, relating them to critical concepts including the dichotomy between truth and name, the decentering of humanity in favor of the nonhuman, and postmodern survivor narrative. These readings, however, have not unpacked the author’s philosophical meditation on meaningful and successful storytelling and the significance of Pi’s acts of imagining and sharing his story with a tiger. Martel, in fact, goes into great depth to demonstrate that love and literary imagination can illuminate the possibilities of coexisting with and rewriting the formidable challenges of life.

24. Truby distinguishes between a more realistic approach to storytelling, which produces a “copy of life as it is,” and a more imaginative, visionary approach that portrays “human life condensed and heightened so that the audience can gain a better understanding of how life itself works” (9). Truby’s perspective on craft suggests that in transcending the parameters of real-world knowledge, a more unnatural or inventive storytelling method works not to estrange readers but to return them to the familiar ground with an empowered grasp of extratextual realities. The boundary between mimesis and anti-mimesis is thus a fluid one.

25. Sandra’s first two novels are also linked to the major events in her life: her mother’s death and a disagreement with her father. Sandra also explicitly indicates her commitment to creating fiction that exerts a destructive force over reality. Her second book has worsened the rift with her father (132).

26. The screenplay is written in half English and half French, reflecting the importance of cultivating a shared, all-inclusive understanding that bridges the rifts among different cultures and perspectives.

27. In the Norton critical edition of *Poetics*, Michelle Zerba and David Gorman note, “the poet’s function is not to report things that have happened, but rather to tell of such things as might happen, that are possible in accordance with probability or necessity...Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history, in that poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular fact (13–14).

28. Nevertheless, Richardson acknowledges that Aristotle gestures toward the possibility that a poet’s creative ingenuity may spice up extratextual reality (*Unnatural Narrative* 23). Richardson also notes that Aristotle is open to impossibilities in literary representations and the world-creation aspects of mimesis (Alber and Richardson 8). Although Richardson acknowledges that the unnatural can be understood through Aristotle’s mimetic lens, he views the unnatural as detached from its realistic foundation rather than as firmly grounded in life itself.

29. Utopian literature is exemplary of unnatural storytelling, provided that we understand it as a collection of creative works that speak to problems of contemporary societies and envision futuristic reforms. Utopian literature is infused with a sense of visionary hope, an aspiration to transform undesirable realities into empowered ones and make possible real-world changes (Vieira 6–8).

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