

¹Is Narrative “The Description of Fictional Mental Functioning”? Heliodorus Against Palmer, Zunshine & Co².

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Abstract

This essay challenges concepts that consider the theory of mind to be key to our response to narrative from a historical perspective. Although the classical modern novel lends itself to the claims of Palmer, Zunshine, and others on account of its prominent consciousness presentation, the ancient novel as well as modern *paralittérature* cannot be adequately described as “the description of fictional mental functioning.” An exemplary reading of Heliodorus’ *Ethiopica* draws our attention to an aspect that is in danger of being downplayed in cognitive narratology, namely the temporal dynamics of narrative.

1. THE THEORY OF MIND IN PSYCHOLOGY AND NARRATOLOGY

The allure of cognitive studies for narratologists is unbroken. Various concepts, mostly adapted from soft cognitive science, are recruited to elucidate the interface between mind and narrative. “The most popular of these imports,” as Marie-Laure Ryan notes in an article titled “Narratology and Cognitive Science: A Problematic Relation” is the “theory of mind” (485). The concept of the theory of mind, sometimes also circulating under the label of folk psychology, was first developed by comparative psychologists who investigated the ability in primates to impute mental states to others (Premack and Woodruff). It was then applied to the human mind in developmental psychology and triggered a wave of clinical research. Broadly defined as the human capacity to explain the behavior of others in terms of their beliefs, feelings, and desires; the theory of mind has been identified by literary scholars as a key to the reader’s engagement with narrative across media.

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² I wish to thank the two readers for *Style*, Marie-Laure Ryan and Alan Palmer, as well as Eva von Contzen, Jim Phelan, Lisa Zunshine, and John Knapp for their comments on this paper. I have also benefited from discussions with the members of the Heidelberg research group *Experience and Teleology in Ancient Narrative*. This paper is part of the work of this project funded by the ERC (312321, AncNar).

Let me single out the approaches of two particularly influential scholars from the bulk of works that claim the notion of theory of mind for literary scholarship.³ In two monographs, Alan Palmer advances the thesis that “narrative is the description of fictional mental functioning” (*Fictional Minds* 12).⁴ Some aspects of “fictional mental functioning” are covered by investigations of speech categories, focalization, characterization and plot structures, others come to the fore in possible-worlds theory; yet, Palmer reckons that we need the new label of “fictional minds” to fully grasp what hitherto had been called the presentation of consciousness. Following characters’ fictional mental functioning” is, he claims, “the fundamental and principal way by which we understand narrative” (*Social Minds* 17). For Palmer, the theory of mind, which helps us to navigate our social world is at the core of our response to narrative.

To describe the reading process thus envisaged, Palmer coins the term “continuing-consciousness frame,” that is “the ability to take a reference to a character in the text and attach it to a presumed consciousness that exists continuously within the story-world between the various, more or less intermittent references to that character” (*Social Minds* 10). The readers’ activity produces what Palmer calls “embedded narratives” in his first book and “cognitive narratives” in his second book (*Social Minds* 11–12): “the total perceptual and cognitive viewpoint, ideologic worldview, memories of the past, and the set of beliefs, desires, intentions, motives, and plans for the future of each character in the story as presented in the discourse” (11). It is through such “embedded/cognitive narratives” that readers access the story-worlds.

Palmer offsets his investigation against traditional approaches to the presentation of consciousness by focusing on “the social nature of thought” (*Fictional Minds* 11). Besides intramental thought, there is intermental thought. While the former is located within the individual mind, the latter is shared by a group, be it a couple, a nation, or a random crowd. Believing that socially distributed cognition is important in real life, Palmer argues that it is also pervasive in the novel. One of his test-cases is Eliot’s *Middlemarch*. There is a Middlemarch mind formed by the inhabitants of the town embracing various subgroups.

³ For further recent literary scholarship indebted to the theory of mind, see, e.g., Mar, Djikic, and Oatley; Oatley; Leverage et al.; Herman, “Introduction;” and Pagan.

⁴ Cf. Palmer, *Social Minds* 9: “Fictional narrative is, in essence, the presentation of mental functioning.” While advancing close readings of new texts, the theoretical agenda of *Social Minds* is more or less the same as that of Palmer’s *Fictional Minds*, parts of which are simply rephrased or repeated verbatim.

Palmer goes out of his way to assert that his use of mind in this case is not metaphorical: “The town actually and literally does have a mind of its own” (*Social Minds* 74).

Like Palmer, albeit from a different angle, Lisa Zunshine considers the theory of mind pivotal to the reading process. In her book *Why We Read Fiction*, she draws on the work of cognitive evolutionary psychologists like Dunbar and Baron-Cohen who understand the theory of mind as an evolutionary adaptation: “The emergence of a theory of mind “module” was evolution’s answer to the “staggeringly complex” challenge faced by our ancestors, who needed to make sense of the behavior of other people in their group, which could include up to 200 individuals” (7). Works of fiction, she argues, “provide grist for the mills of our mind-reading adaptations that have evolved to deal with real people” (16–17). Besides subscribing to an evolutionary approach, *Why We Read Fiction* puts much stock in psychologic investigations that explain autism as a drastically reduced ability of mind-reading. “Fiction presents a challenge to people with autism because in many ways it calls for the same kind of mind-reading—that is, the inference of the mental state from the behavior—that is necessary in regular human communication” (11).⁵

Zunshine argues that fiction confronts us with multiple embedded levels of intentionality that often exceed the complexity of real-life encounters. Here, her take is nuanced differently from Palmer’s. While Palmer is inclined to stress the transparency of the minds of others in real life, Zunshine gives more space to the possibility of misunderstanding and highlights that “the joys of reading fictional minds are subject to some of the same instabilities that render our real-life mindreading both exciting and exasperating” (20). Nonetheless, novels and other narratives “test the functioning of our cognitive adaptations for mind-reading while keeping us pleasantly aware that the “test” is proceeding quite smoothly” (Zunshine 18).

As central as the notion of the theory of mind is in the works of Palmer, Zunshine, and other literary scholars, it has been forcefully challenged in recent psychology.⁶ To start with, the usage of the term theory of mind varies significantly. Some limit the theory of mind to the so-called “theory theory,” that is, approaches that presume that our inferences about other people hinge on a theory or quasi-theory of minds. Then the theory of mind is opposed to

⁵ Most recently, Zunshine has recanted her position on narrative and autism. In an interview with the neuro-scientist Ralph John Savarese, she advocates a dialogue between literary studies and the approach of neurodiversity in the sciences (Savarese and Zunshine).

⁶ See, for example, Hutto, “Folk Psychology without Theory;” *Folk Psychological Narratives*; and the contributions to Leudar and Costall, *Against Theory of Mind*.

simulation theories, which identify empathy as the key to our social interactions.⁷ Other scholars, however, are happy to subsume both theory theory and simulation theory under the heading of theory of mind.⁸

More disconcerting than such terminological issues are the methodological flaws of the experiments on which the theory of mind is premised, especially the “false-belief” task. The experiments that test the ability to meta-represent, that is, to distinguish somebody’s thought about an object from its reality, not only require no theory or quasi-theory about minds, but they also prove nothing about how our interaction with other humans proceeds: “...the experiments themselves were stipulative, defining the very phenomenon they claim to investigate” (Leudar and Costall 6–7). There are alternative modes of conducting social interactions: often social rules permit us to make sense of the behavior of others, and instead of inferring the desires and beliefs of others, we can ask them directly (Hutto, “Folk Psychology without Theory” 44–46). The experimental focus of theory of mind has also led to a neglect of the social circumstances in which communication takes place. Although the experiments concentrate on third-person contexts, many of our interactions are second-person (Gallagher, *How the Body* 213). Theory of mind, it appears, is far less salient in our social lives than its advocates take for granted.

It has also been criticized that the theory of mind is predicated on a dualism: the juxtaposition of behavior and mind underlying the idea of mind-reading is superseded by more recent approaches that aim at integrated and embodied concepts of mind (Leudar and Costall 10). Psychologists and philosophers have further marshalled the concept of intersubjectivity to identify a primordial connection with other individuals and to question the idea of a primary separation between self and other on which the theory of mind is premised (Zlatev). The arguments of Zunshine’s *Why We Read Fiction* in particular are challenged by the discovery that many people diagnosed with autism are actually able to meta-present (Boucher 223–41). To cut a long story short, a glance at recent literature on the mind shows that by invoking the theory of mind, literary scholars are building their theories on a cognitive approach that has lost much of its luster since the 1990s.⁹

⁷ Cf. Goldman. For a juxtaposition of theory theory and simulation theory, see the double issue of *Mind and Language* 7(1–2) 1992.

⁸ E.g., Gallagher, “The Practice of Mind.” See also Palmer, *Social Minds* 24, who uses the term “in a more general sense, as a kind of umbrella or generic label for our ability to understand others.”

⁹ It is odd that Herman, *The Emergence of Mind* adduces some recent critics of the theory of mind to destabilize the assumption that we have no access to other minds in the everyday

In this essay, I wish to challenge the general claims about the theory of mind and narrative, so popular in current scholarship, from a historical perspective, and to highlight an aspect that is in danger of being downplayed in cognitive narratology.¹⁰ Palmer, Zunshine, and other disciples of the theory of mind tend to focus on modern narrative, particularly the classical modern novel.¹¹ This genre lends itself to them on account of its prominent consciousness presentation, but once we start to look outside this narrow canon it is hard to sustain the assertion that the anthropological significance of narrative is predicated on the theory of mind.

My test-case will be an ancient novel, Heliiodorus' *Ethiopica*. Although recent work shows that character portrayal in the ancient novel is more intricate than has been widely assumed, the reader of the *Ethiopica* does not get much mileage out of the theory of mind. Instead Heliiodorus' novel draws our attention to the temporal dynamics of narrative (section 2). What is more, the reflections on narrative and response encapsulated in the *Ethiopica* highlight that the reader is enticed primarily by such features as suspense and curiosity (section 3). If we look beyond the ancient novel, we can see that much narrative, including the vast field of paralittérature is invested more in the mimesis and reconfiguration of time than the presentation of consciousness (section 4). By no means, however, should time be played off against character. Their entwinement in narrative can be grasped, I will finally suggest, by the concept of experience, which is also capable of capturing the cognitive processes of readers as well as characters (section 5).

2. HELIODORUS' *ETHIOPICA*: FROM FICTIONAL MINDS TO NARRATIVE TIME

Recent scholarship has been eager to correct the traditional view that the characters in the ancient novel are 'figures without a soul' ("seelenlose Gestalten,") merely 'jointed dolls'

world, but fails to draw the appropriate conclusions for its applications to narrative. How can a theory that is insufficient to account for social interaction furnish a model for our response to narrative that claims to be based on everyday cognitive processes?

¹⁰ For a critical assessment of Zunshine's approach, see Boyd. A special issue of *Style* on social minds (45[2]) also features essays that are critical of Palmer's work (see especially Bortolussi; Hogan; and Jahn), but while most of these articles disagree with the notion of intermental thought, I will try to challenge the application of theory of mind.

¹¹ The contributions to Herman, "Introduction" are a noteworthy exception. While not going so far as to question the theory of mind, some of the chapters reveal that in premodern narrative fictional minds work differently.

("Gliederpuppen") (Rohde 476). Gender studies in particular have inspired a more refined analysis of these novel's protagonists (Egger; Konstan; Goldhill; Haynes; Jones). Most recently, De Temmerman presented a monograph on characterization in the novel from a literary point of view (De Temmerman). Mustering the five ancient Greek novels that have been fully preserved, he argues that their heroes are by no means only typified, idealistic, and static characters, but dynamic, realistically sketched and well individuated. De Temmerman challenges in particular Christopher Gill's take on characterization in ancient literature.¹² Gill juxtaposes the ancient emphasis on moral judgment, which constitutes *personality* in his terms, with what he labels *character*, shaped essentially by introspection and the Cartesian idea of selfhood. De Temmerman takes pains to trace the subjective aspects of *character* in the ancient novel. The reader is invited not only to evaluate, but also to understand the protagonists. However, the qualifications of De Temmerman and others notwithstanding, the heroes in the Greek novels are not portrayed in a way that puts the theory of mind in the center of the reader's response. It is not the consciousness of the characters, but the temporal dynamics of the plot that pull the reader into the story.

I wish to illustrate this claim throughout the *Ethiopica*. Heliodorus' novel follows the pattern that we know from the other ancient and also early modern romances.¹³ A couple, in this case Theagenes and Charicleia, has to brave various ordeals before they are united in marriage. After the first scene of the *Ethiopica* shows us Theagenes and Charicleia on a beach at the mouth of the Nile, most of the novel's first half is taken up by an embedded narrative in which the Egyptian priest Calasiris reveals the prehistory: in Delphi, Theagenes meets Charicleia, an Ethiopian princess raised by a priest of Apollo. They fall in love and escape with his help. After a first series of adventures, notably a sea storm, an encounter with pirates, and several men who lust after Charicleia, the hero couple arrives in Egypt. The second half of the *Ethiopica* is more straightforward: undergoing further trials, including separation, captivity, and a lecherous woman, Charicleia and Theagenes come to Ethiopia and are finally married.

Written probably in the third or fourth century CE, the *Ethiopica* has been called "the ancient world's narratological summa" (Lowe 258). Heliodorus had a huge impact on the emergence of the modern novel and was extolled by such critics as Scaliger;¹⁴ nowadays,

¹² See especially Gill, "The Character-Personality Distinction;" *Personality in Greek Epic*.

¹³ On the plot dynamics of the *Ethiopica*, see, for example, Lowe 249–58; Whitmarsh 139–252, for a discussion of the narrative dynamics of all five ideal Greek novels.

¹⁴ For a survey, see Sandy 95–124.

however, his novel is studied mostly by a small, if devoted, group of experts.¹⁵ As I hope to show though, its formal complexity and high degree of reflexivity make it a text worthy of the attention of students of narrative. I will begin with the portrayal of the heroine, taking De Temmerman's reading as my touching point, then consider the use of internal focalization in the starting scene, and finally discuss Charicleia's *Scheintod* at the beginning of book 2.

According to De Temmerman, two features in particular define Charicleia: mental strength (*phronema*) and chastity (*sophrosyne*) (246–58). De Temmermann argues that while both traits may seem to be static at the beginning, their dynamic and shapable nature comes to the fore as the narrative proceeds. Calasiris narrates how Charicleia's mental strength is challenged by her passion for Theagenes and reinforced when she learns about her royal descent: *noblesse oblige*. Charicleia first sees her chastity threatened by Theagenes; she is then, however, instructed by Calasiris that only sex, not marriage, is incompatible with chastity. This reassessment allows her to keep her vows while eloping with Theagenes. De Temmerman stresses Charicleia's clever use of rhetoric to defend her chastity (258–77). In book 1, she successfully fends off the brigand Thyamis who is eager to marry her. Pretending to be a priestess of Artemis and the sister of Theagenes, she makes Thyamis postpone his marriage plans until they reach Memphis. As we learn later in Calasiris' narrative, he taught her the art of speaking "as a basis for choosing the best way of life" (De Temmerman 264). Further on, in the second half of the *Ethiopica*, Charicleia tries to pass on her skills to Theagenes, who has now become the victim of illicit desire.

De Temmerman brilliantly teases out the nuances of the portrayal of Charicleia. And yet, even his overly subtle analysis yields a strictly confined character sketch that throws into relief the limits of characterization in the ancient novel. The development for which De Temmerman argues is minimal. Neither the reassessment of chastity nor the confirmation of mental strength furnishes a serious change of character. Charicleia's character is tested rather than transformed in the way of a modern *Bildungsroman*. Note also that the traits by which Charicleia is defined have a strong moral bearing. Both chastity and mental strength firmly belong to the realm of Gill's *personality* and do not impinge on the inner features that are part of a *character*. There is far more to evaluate than to understand in Charicleia.

Most importantly, it is clearly not the character of Charicleia and other protagonists that drives the narrative and entices the reader. Take for instance Charicleia's dealings with

¹⁵ Pavel is a noteworthy exception in granting Heliodorus a prominent place in his genealogy of the novel (*La pensée*). See also Zunshine, who refers to the *Ethiopica* as an ancient example of what she considers a triangulation of minds ("1700-1750").

the head of the brigands, Thyamis, in book 1 (De Temmerman 258–69). Beguiled by Charicleia’s beauty, Thyamis falls for Charicleia. Although she is in his hands, he avoids the use of force and instead proposes marriage. Charicleia senses that she is not in a position to reject this proposal; hence she slyly asks him to wait until she has had a chance to lay down her priesthood at the Apollo temple in Memphis. In their exchange, Thyamis reveals himself to be a righteous brigand while Charicleia showcases her savviness and shrewdness. That is fair enough, but the reader’s attention is directed less at the nuances of their characters than at the plot. On the one hand, the reader is bound to wonder about the identity and prehistory of Charicleia and Theagenes.¹⁶ We have followed the beautiful couple from the mouth of the Nile to the village of the brigands and still do not know who they are and what brought them to the shores of Egypt. Charicleia’s self-identification as the sister of Theagenes is obviously a ruse, and yet the reader wonders whether her speech to Thyamis could also feature true elements. Her claim that they suffered shipwreck chimes with the tableau of the initial scene, but did they actually come from Ephesus and were they really on a religious mission? On the other hand, the reader will feel suspense as to whether or not Charicleia’s strategy will work out. Thyamis accepts her story, but for how long will she be able to postpone the wedding? Once in Memphis, she will have to marry him. It is not so much the psychogram of Charicleia and Thyamis as the plot that engages the reader.

Priority of plot over character can also be noted in other passages. Take for example the last book: Theagenes and Charicleia have been caught by the Ethiopian army and are due to be sacrificed. Before that, however, they need to undergo a chastity test, as only virgin victims are legitimate. This proliferates an intriguing tension: an oracle reported at the end of book 2 suggests that Charicleia and Theagenes will eventually be married on account of their chastity. Now, however, Charicleia is liable to be sacrificed if she turns out to be a virgin. De Temmerman notes that the scene deconstructs both the “Artemisian” and “Apollinian” sides of Charicleia, the former concerning her chastity, the latter her rhetorical skills (293–94). When Charicleia’s sexual abstinence almost leads to her sacrifice, then “the novelistic topos of chastity is fundamentally perverted” (De Temmerman 293). At the same time, Charicleia’s rhetorical shrewdness fails to reach its goal this time. She does not manage to convince the Ethiopian king and queen that “as their daughter, she is not a suitable victim for sacrifice in a

¹⁶ On the delayed revelation of essential information in the *Ethiopica*, see Winkler 1990: 296–307; Morgan, “The Story of Knemon” 265–69.

ritual that traditionally requires foreign prisoners of war” (De Temmerman 294). It is only through the intervention of the crowd that she will be spared sacrifice.

De Temmerman nicely teases out how the virginity test undercuts central traits of Charicleia’s earlier presentation, and yet his own analysis ultimately drives home that character portrayal is not at the core of the scene: “At this point, then, the ‘Artemisian’ side of her character, highlighted since the first pages of the novel, turns out to be the main obstacle to a happy ending” (293). It is not the presentation of Charicleia’s character in itself, but its role as an “obstacle to a happy ending” that arrests the reader’s attention. The virginity test is one of many events that creates suspense by veering off into a direction that conflicts with the anticipated ending. As John Morgan notes in his fine analysis of the narrative dynamics of the *Ethiopica*’s final book: “The narrative is full of signs that point wrong trails” (“A Sense of Ending” 318). Seen in this light, Charicleia’s response to Theagenes’ query of why she does not simply reveal her identity to her parents has a meta-narrative quality to it (9.24.4): “Great ends can only be achieved by means of equal greatness. A story whose beginnings heaven has made convoluted cannot be quickly resolved.”¹⁷

Furthermore, the initial scene of the *Ethiopica* hammers home that Heliodorus is more invested in the dynamics of plot than the intricacies of character:

“The smile of daybreak was just beginning to brighten the sky, the sunlight to catch the hilltops, when a group of men in brigand gear peered over the mountain that overlooks the place where the Nile flows into the sea at the mouth that men call the Heracleotic. They stood there for a moment, scanning the expanse of sea beneath them: first they gazed out over the ocean, but as there was nothing sailing there that held out hope of spoil and plunder, their eyes were drawn to the beach nearby. This is what they saw: a merchant ship was riding there, moored by her stern, empty of crew but laden with freight. This much could be surmised even from a distance, for the weight of her cargo forced the water up to the third line of boards on the ship’s side. But the beach! – a mass of newly slain bodies, some of them quite dead, others half-alive and still twitching, testimony that the fighting had only just ended. To judge by the signs this had been no proper battle. Amongst the carnage were the miserable remnants of festivities that had come to this unhappy end. There were tables still set with food, and others upset on the ground, held in dead men’s hands; in the fray they had served some as weapons, for this had been an impromptu conflict; beneath other tables men had crawled in the vain hope of hiding there. There were wine bowls upturned, and some slipping from the hands that held them; some had been drinking from them, others

¹⁷ Cf. Morgan, “A Sense of Ending” 308–309; Elmer 429–30; Whitmarsh 230–31.

using them like stones, for the suddenness of the catastrophe had caused objects to be put to strange, new uses, and taught men to use drinking vessels as missiles. There they lay, here a man felled by an axe, there another struck down by a stone picked up then and there from the shingly beach; here a man battered to death with a club, there another burned to death with a brand from the fire. Various were the forms of their deaths, but most were the victims of arrows and archery. In that small space the deity had contrived an infinitely varied spectacle, defiling wine with blood and unleashing war at the party, combining wining and dining, pouring of drink and spilling of blood, and staging this tragic show for the Egyptian bandits. They stood on the mountainside like the audience in a theater, unable to comprehend the scene: the vanquished were there, but the victors were nowhere to be seen; the victory was unequivocal, but the spoils had not been taken, and the ship lay there by herself, crewless but otherwise intact, riding peacefully at anchor as if protected by a great force of men. But although they were at a loss to know what it all meant, they still had an eye for plunder and a quick profit. So they cast themselves in the role of victors and set off down the hillside.”

A camera-like movement gives the description a cinematographic quality:¹⁸ the narrator starts with a pan-shot of the scenery—the reference to “men in thievish attire” is restricted to what can be seen—and, in a type of reverse-shot, turns around to adopt the viewpoint of these men. Following the movement of their gaze, the narrator describes first the sea and then the beach. His report adheres to the perspective of the internal beholders, reporting only what they see and reckon without imparting any additional information: “this much could be surmised even from a distance ... to judge by the signs this had been no proper battle.” The beginning of the *Ethiopica* is an impressive instance of internal focalization in ancient narrative.¹⁹

Internal focalization is an important means of giving the reader access to the minds of protagonists. It thus figures prominently in studies of “fictional minds.” At the beginning of the *Ethiopica*, however, internal focalization is not used to interest the reader in the protagonists whose perspective the narrative adopts. The brigands through whose eyes the reader sees the beach play no further role; they simply leave when another group of brigands arrives. The limitation of sensual and intellectual perception to the perspective of an internal audience serves to put the reader right on the spot of the action. It makes the account mimetic

¹⁸ Cf. Bühler on the cinematographic character of the *Ethiopica*'s opening. See also Winkler 289–93; Morgan “Reader and Audiences” 86–90. I am unconvinced by the argument Telò makes for far-reaching allusions to the *Odyssey* in the *Ethiopica* that imply a predatory poetics.

¹⁹ Cf. Effe 152–7.

and bestows on it the graphic vividness that ancient critics label *enargeia*.²⁰ More specifically, the *enargeia* at the beginning of the *Ethiopica* reinforces the reader's curiosity, which the scenic description is bound to arouse. What has happened on the beach? How can the mysterious blending of party with war and wine with blood be explained? Who is the couple that the narrator describes in the subsequent paragraphs, a gorgeous girl, statue-like with a bow in her hand, and at her feet a young man, heavily injured, but nonetheless of astounding beauty? Instead of engaging the reader in the process of mind-reading and involving her with the protagonists, the internal focalization on the first pages of the *Ethiopica* inserts the reader into the plot. In an artful play with different storylines and embedded narratives, the *Ethiopica* will continue to tickle the reader's curiosity—the prehistory which lets the reader understand the starting scene will not be revealed fully until the end of book 5.

By now it should be clear that the *Ethiopica* fails Palmer's formula for narrative as a "description of fictional mental functioning." It is not the theory of mind, however understood, that grabs the reader's attention and inserts her into the world of the *Ethiopica*. We do not access the story through "embedded/cognitive narratives;" rather, we are gripped by the forceful plot. Of course, the narrator reports on the feelings, motives, and goals of the characters. However, what entices the reader are not the rather schematic consciousness processes, but the drive of the action. A small but pertinent formal observation reinforces this point: there seems to be no free indirect discourse in Heliodorus. A crucial device of consciousness presentation in the modern novel is nearly completely missing in the ancient novel and in ancient narrative in general.²¹ There are, of course, other means of rendering internal reflection, notably direct thought representation and thought report; yet, the absence of free indirect discourse, which blends the character's subjectivity and language with the narrator's voice, is emblematic of the minor role that the presentation of consciousness plays in the *Ethiopica* and other ancient narratives.

While challenging the claims of Palmer, Zunshine, and others, the examples just discussed suggest another model for narrative, a model that has not consciousness but time at its core. Suspense and curiosity have emerged to be more prominent than character portrayal. They form two of the three master tropes that constitute narrative according to Meir Sternberg: "I define narrativity as the play of suspense/curiosity/surprise between represented and communicative time (in whatever combination, whatever medium, whatever manifest, or

²⁰ See Zanker; Manieri; Otto; Webb 87–130.

²¹ Cf. Laird 201–03 on the absence of free indirect discourse from the ancient novel. On free indirect discourse in ancient literature, see also Bakker 121–22; Beck 139–40.

latent form)” (“Telling in Time [II]” 529). Sternberg’s definition of narrativity has been linked to Ricoeur’s understanding of narrative as a mode of coming to grips with time (Grethlein, “The Narrative Reconfiguration”). It is the interplay of narrated time with narrative time, as described by Sternberg, which reconfigures time and allows the recipient to engage with time. The reader is subjected to the same temporal structure as in the everyday world albeit without pragmatic strains. The narrative orchestration of time yields a reflection on time, not an explicit meditation, of course, but, more profoundly, a playful enactment of our temporality in the frame of “as-if”. Given the *Ethiopica*’s virtuoso play with suspense and curiosity, such an approach captures their dynamics much better than theories honing in on consciousness presentation. While the first half of the novel has the reader try to grasp the prehistory, the second half sends her on a roller coaster of suspense. Both make the reader experience the force of time in the safe framework of “as-if.”

Surprise, Sternberg’s third master trope, also comes into play in the *Ethiopica* as the following example illustrates. In the village of Thyamis and his brigands, Theagenes and Charicleia meet a young Athenian, Cnemon, who tells them of his adventures. Roughly summarized, Cnemon is the victim of his stepmother, Demainete, whose love he rejected. Out of revenge and with the aid of a servant named Thisbe, Demainete schemed against Cnemon, who was then driven into exile and, once in Egypt, fell into the hands of the brigands. When the village of the brigands is attacked, Thyamis hides Charicleia in a cave. Sensing that the battle is lost, he rushes back to the cave to kill her so she will not fall into the hands of his enemies. After the raid, Theagenes and Cnemon enter the cave in order to fetch Charicleia. Finding a corpse, Theagenes breaks out in an excessive lament. It turns out, however, that Charicleia is alive—the corpse is Thisbe’s!

Heliiodorus gives a detailed description of Theagenes’ mourning that is partly rendered in direct speech. And yet, the report does not aim at rousing the reader’s empathy through the piercing description of an individual’s feelings. Brimming with rhetorical commonplaces, the lament rather prepares the surprise that Heliiodorus springs on both characters and readers when they learn that the corpse is Thisbe’s. Charicleia wonders (2.8.3), “How can someone suddenly be spirited away by a sort of theatrical special effect, out of the heart of Greece to the remotest parts of Egypt?” In the words of a modern critic: “As if by magic, Thisbe emerges from the pre-history and unexpectedly turns out to be directly involved in the main action” (Pinheiro 3157). Familiar with the conventions of the novel, the reader may expect that the corpse is not Charicleia, but nothing steers her to suspect that it is Thisbe. Only now

is the reader informed of how Thisbe also had to leave Athens and finally came to Egypt. Note that the readers' surprise does not hinge on an engagement with the characters' minds but is triggered by the action. The surprise does not require that the readers access the story through Theagenes's "embedded/cognitive narrative"; it is caused by the appearance of Thisbe.

In addition to drawing on Ricoeur in order to grasp the existential dimension of narrative time, I think Sternberg's theory needs to be modified in one important respect. Surprise, it seems, is not really equivalent to curiosity and suspense. Whereas the latter two describe a durative expectation, surprise is a momentary feeling.²¹ Strangely, the master strategy that Sternberg treats first and to which he devotes the most attention is less important for the reading process than suspense and curiosity. It is easy, though, to see why surprise has this prominent place in his system. Sternberg starts from Aristotle and finds in surprise the only element in the *Poetics* that works well for his approach focusing on the tension between narrative and narrated time. It is the Aristotelian heritage that prompts Sternberg to overrate the significance of surprise.

Sternberg's definition of curiosity as retrospection and of suspense as prospection also needs qualification. It makes good sense to distinguish the desire to learn something about the past from expectations about the future, but it is important to note that these temporal directions refer only to the level of narrated time. Narrated time, however, is mediated by narrative time, which only moves forward. Thus, not only in suspense, but also in curiosity, which is levelled at the past of narrated time, attention is directed at the future of narrative time. While in suspense the prospection towards the futures of narrative and narrated time converges, curiosity embeds the retrospective turn to the past of narrated time in the prospective movement of reading. As important as the refraction of narrated time in narrative time is, it is based on the simple sequence of signs.

To avoid misunderstanding, I am far from claiming that the *Ethiopica* lacks the presentation of consciousness. There are "fictional minds" in Heliodorus, and yet it is clearly not the engagement with them that drives the reading process. Heliodorus speaks loudly against the view that the theory of mind is "the fundamental and principal way by which we understand narrative" (Palmer, *Social Minds* 17) and the anthropological reason for our infatuation with narrative. He alerts us to the significance of time for narrative, an aspect that

has been given ample attention in the Neo-Aristotelian and phenomenological traditions,²² but receives short shrift from cognitive scholars obsessed with the theory of mind.²³ Not mind-reading, but the temporal dynamics of the plot entice the reader of the *Ethiopica*. Suspense, curiosity and surprise let the reader engage with time.

3. REFLECTIONS ON NARRATIVE AND TIME IN THE *ETHIOPICA*

The *Ethiopica* themselves reflect the significance of the narrative reconfiguration of time for captivating readers. Winkler's seminal paper on "The Mendacity of Kalasiris and the Narrative Strategy of Heliodorus' *Aithiopika*" has drawn our attention to the novel's strong self-referential dimension. Especially the long embedded narrative in which Calasiris reveals the prehistory to Cnemon can be read as a nuanced reflection on narrative and its reception. Winkler argued that the *Ethiopica*'s self-referentiality throws into relief its narrative complexity and the need for a sophisticated reader. In this section, I wish to show that the temporal dimension of narrative looms large in the *Ethiopica*'s implicit reflections, corroborating my argument for their orientation toward plot.

In his extended narration, Calasiris reproduces Charicles' report on how he received Charicleia. An Ethiopian ambassador asked him to take care of the child. The ambassador had to leave before he could inform him about the origin and identity of the child, but promised to do so the next day. However, he did not show up for this meeting (2.32.3): "I trudged home with heavy heart, stunned and like those who have received a heavy blow, because I had not had the chance to hear all about the girl – who she was, where she came from, who her parents were." "It is not surprising," said Cnemon. "I am dismayed myself not to have heard. But perhaps I shall." "Indeed you will," said Calasiris." Cnemon's response resembles the disappointment Charicles himself felt and simultaneously prefigures that of Heliodorus' reader. The embedded audience, namely Cnemon, signals the alignment of reader with character: our curiosity is piqued like that of Charicles. Charicles, Cnemon, and we alike puzzle about Charicleia. Cnemon's response thus reflects the dynamic of curiosity that draws the attention of the reader to the prehistory of the plot.

²² Besides the work of Sternberg, esp. *Expositional Modes*, "Telling in Time (I)," and "Telling in Time (II)," see also Baroni, *La tension narrative; L'oeuvre du temps*.

²³ Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 212–14 has some interesting remarks on the "thought-action continuum," but the few pages he devotes to it highlight that his interest lies with fictional minds.

At the same time, the brief dialogue intimates the rift between real life and reading experiences. While Charicles cannot know whether or not he will learn of Charicleia's origin at some point, Calasiris assures Cnemon and us that our curiosity will be satisfied. Calasiris' reply "indeed you will" highlights the fundamental gap that separates the characters from readers. In real life, the future is open and contingent. The universe of narratives, on the other hand, is closed. Narrative economy tends to avoid information that is unnecessary. Calasiris' assurance makes explicit the reader's expectation that questions raised will be answered.

Like curiosity, suspense and its spell on the reader of the *Ethiopica* are reflected in the response of internal audiences, for example, in Calasiris' account of a footrace at Delphi in which Theagenes challenges a prize-winning athlete (4.3.2–4.3.4):

"The whole of Greece thrilled with emotion at this dramatic turn of events and prayed for Theagenes to win as fervently as if each man were himself competing (*agōnizomenos*); for nothing wins the sympathy of beholders like beauty. Charicleia's emotion passed all bounds; I had been observing her carefully for some while and I saw every conceivable expression pass in succession over her face. The herald proclaimed the names of those entered for the race for all to hear, 'Ormenos of Arcadia and Theagenes of Thessaly.' The starting gate opened, and they were off, running at such a speed that the eye could barely keep pace. Now the maiden could not stay still; her feet began to skip and dance, as if, in my estimation, her soul were flying together (*sunexairomenēs*) with Theagenes and sharing his passion for the race (*sumprothoumenēs*). The viewers were all buoyed up, anticipating the outcome, and full of anxiety (*agōnias*); I myself even more so, now that I had decided to care for Theagenes in the future as for a son." "It is not surprising," said Cnemon, "that those who were there watching were anxious (*agōnian*). Even now, I fear for Theagenes and beg you to make haste and tell me whether he was proclaimed victor."

The passage nests multiple audiences into each other: we read about Cnemon listening to an account of the crowd witnessing the scene. The concentric circles of reception bridge the gap between reader and action, drawing her close to the footrace. Cnemon prefigures the reader in the framing narrative. Through his ears, the reader follows Calasiris' account that puts the internal and external audience into the shoes of the spectators present. The immersion of the spectators is explicitly stressed and subtly underlined by the repeated use of the stem *agōn* (*agōnizomenos*, *agōnias*, *agōnian*), which is poetologically charged. Ancient critics

refer to the involvement of the reader as *agōnia*.²⁴ Demetrius' *de elocutione*, a treatise on the four styles from the Imperial Era, for example, elaborates on suspense as constituting *enargeia*: "One should not say right away what has happened, but unfold it gradually, thus keeping the reader in suspense (literally: hanging up, *kremonta*) and forcing him to share the anxiety (*sunagōnian*)" (216). Heliodorus adopts this critical usage and grafts it onto a literal *agōn*. Using words of the same stem for the race and the beholders' response highlights their absorption by the scene. Cnemon's comment drives home that the listener is as affected as the viewers and makes explicit the workings of suspense that immerse the reader in the story.

The detailed account of the audience in the stadium illustrates the possibility of a variety of responses. All fever with Theagenes, but for distinct reasons and with different intensity. The crowd is allured by his beauty; Calasiris' feelings are even stronger because of his care for the runner; and the involvement of Charicleia, who is in love with Theagenes, is the most intense. The double use of compound verbs with the prefix *sun* linguistically expresses her bond with Theagenes (*sunexairomenēs*, *sumprothoumenēs*). Charicleia's immersion in his current situation goes so far that she starts moving her feet and thereby mimics his running. The graded response of the internal audience underscores the impact of identification on suspense. And yet, the different intensities notwithstanding, the entire audience is kept on their toes. Suspense is intensified by identification, but does not hinge on it.²⁵

The interaction of external and internal responses again merits our attention. When Cnemon begs Calasiris to hurry with his recital, he is fully absorbed by the story. The reader, however, who is equally eager to learn the outcome of the race, is forcefully reminded of the narratorial mediation: she does not witness the footrace, but attends to an account embedded in a narrative. Thus, instead of prefiguring the reader's response, Cnemon's absorption makes the reader reflect on the mediation. In another way, though, Cnemon's interruption may contribute to the spell the text casts on the reader. The retardation heightens suspense and thereby helps to bind the reader into the story. Here as in other cases, the responses of internal and external audiences do not fully map onto one another, but chafe in multiple ways against each other.

²⁴ In addition to Dem. *de eloc.* 216 quoted earlier, see, e.g., Ps.-Plut. *Hom.* 6 and *Scholion bT Il.* 7.479: "The poet rouses the reader beforehand and makes him feel anxious (*agōnian*) in view of the future events." Cf. Nannini 41–49.

²⁵ Cf. Baroni, *La tension narrative* 271–8.

Reflections on narrative suspense are by no means confined to Calasiris' report. They can also be found for instance in Cnemon's narration of how he came to Egypt (1.14.1–1.14.2): "Thus I was banished from my family home and the land of my birth; but Demainete, enemy to the gods, was not left unpunished. The mode of her punishment you will hear, but now it is time for sleep, for we are far into the night and you badly need rest." "But you only afflict us further," said Theagenes, "if you will leave the wicked Demainete unpunished in your story." The force of narrative suspense is so strong that Theagenes presses Cnemon to go on despite the hour and unflinchingly sacrifices his sleep. The phrase "if you will leave the wicked Demainete unpunished in your story" is metaleptic in that it suggests a direct interaction between narrator and character. The erasure of the boundary between the act of narrating and the world of the narrative underscores the immersive capacity of the story.

This passage is of special interest as it foregrounds the kind of suspense that is most prominent in the *Ethiopica*. Theagenes and Charicleia are informed that Demainete will be punished and have to wait to learn about the "mode of her punishment." Theagenes' feeling of suspense as to how Demainete will find her deserved end prefigures not only the reader's response at this particular juncture, but also mirrors the narrative dynamics of the *Ethiopica* at large. The strong generic conventions of the novel minimize the room for suspense as to what will happen. Instead, the suspense triggered by Heliodorus concentrates rather on how the known end will be realized. What Baroni calls "suspense moyen" is dominant in the *Ethiopica* (*La tension narrative* 269–78).

Theagenes' desire to see Demainete punished also draws our attention to another point: the character of an expected *telos* can help heighten suspense. Here, the end of Demainete is phrased in moral terms. Being ethically charged, the *telos* gains in momentum and enriches the suspense the audience is feeling. This applies to the *Ethiopica* at large: the purity of Charicleia and Theagenes and the depravity of their opponents endow the plot with a strong ethical dimension and heighten the reader's investment. The expectation of the *telos* is reinforced by its moral desirability.

As these passages illustrate, the reflexivity of the *Ethiopica* supports the salience of the interplay between narrative time and narrated time for which I have argued. While not directly prefiguring the response of the *Ethiopica*'s readers, the reactions of Cnemon and other internal audiences illustrate the process of reception. Not mind-reading, but the temporal dynamics of plot emerge as its foundation. Suspense and curiosity are pivotal to the

characters' experience of being immersed in the embedded stories and to the reader's absorption into the plot of the *Ethiopica*.

4. BEYOND HELIODORUS

It is difficult to gauge to what extent the modest role of consciousness processes in the ancient Greek novel is owed to a concept of selfhood that differs from our modern assumptions. One could argue that the limited focus on the characters' interior lives corresponds to a limited notion of self. However, the danger of circular arguments is great here, as the novel and other narratives play a crucial role in the reconstruction of ancient ideas about identity. What is more, grand narratives about the emergence of the self have been duly criticized and there is no lack of Greek texts that do not square with the view that the ancient notion of self was rudimentary.²⁶

Inversely, the dominance of plot over character for which I have argued in the ancient novel also applies to much narrative in other epochs including the modern Era. The corpus on which scholars like Palmer and Zunshine have based their general claims about fictional minds is slim indeed, mostly classical modern novels from *Middlemarch* to *Lolita*. If we venture, for example, into the vast field of what literary scholars label as *paralittérature*, we find similar features as in the ancient novel. Couégnas extracts in his investigation of nineteenth-century popular novels and the beginning of the *roman policier* the following list of criteria for *paralittérature*: besides paratextual elements, repetition, and the significance of all elements, the orientation toward plot and the rudimentary treatment of characters.²⁷

Such narratives as adventure novels, crime fiction, and the Western have pervasive generic conventions, thrive on suspense, and tend to draw on a cast of more or less stereotypical characters. A passage from Ian Fleming's *Casino Royale* may illustrate the parallels it shares with the *Ethiopica*. James Bond has just fallen into the hands of the evil Le Chiffre: "He [Bond] felt thoroughly dispirited and weak in resolve as well as in his body. He had to take too much in the past twenty-four hours and now this last stroke by the enemy seemed almost too final. This time there could be no miracles. No one knew where he was and no one would miss him until well on into the morning. The wreck of his car would be found before very long, but it would take hours to trace ownership to him" (105). As in the

²⁶ See, for example, Arweiler and Möller.

²⁷ For an instructive comparison of the ancient novel with *paralittérature*, see Fusillo.

scenes from the *Ethiopica* discussed earlier, it is not the hero's character and his interior life, but suspense that grips the reader. Like Heliodorus, Fleming creates a strong tension between the present state and the end that is dictated by generic conventions. We know that Bond will triumph, and "this last stroke *seemed almost too final*" gestures clandestinely to the solution of the tension. But how, we wonder, will he be able turn around the situation "this time"? As in the *Ethiopica*, it is "suspense moyen" that tickles the reader.

The parallels between the *Ethiopica* and James Bond novels are admittedly limited. Paralittérature rarely reaches the complexity of the *Ethiopica* and lacks its self-referential sophistication, and yet they are aligned by their plot-orientation. I do not risk much when I claim that Ian Fleming, Stephen King, and others enjoy a far broader readership than Henry James, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner. This could have various reasons, but it is worth noting that the narratives capitalizing on time seem to find a larger audience than narratives that privilege the presentation of consciousness at the expense of action. For scholars who envisage mind-reading as the core of narrative, this poses a serious problem.

I am far from claiming that the presentation of consciousness plays no role in the ancient novel and in paralittérature. Investigating the presentation of interior processes in narrative is a rewarding exercise. Much work indeed remains to be done from a diachronic perspective to explore the different presentations and articulations of fictional minds in the history of narrative. It is a pity that the high-flying agenda proposed by Palmer in *Fictional Minds* for a second book on the topic has not materialized (240–44). The monograph on fictional minds discussing both "the Bible (books from both the Old and New Testament)" and "classical narratives" as well as a wide array of modern narratives, as eloquently announced and advertised by Palmer over the course of five pages, would have been most welcome. And yet, it is easily understandable why Palmer instead wrote a book that concentrates on such texts as *Middlemarch* and *Little Dorrit*. A serious engagement with premodern texts, but also with modern literature beyond his canon makes it difficult to sustain the conviction that "following characters' fictional mental functioning" is "the fundamental and principal way by which we understand narrative" (Palmer, *Social Minds* 17).

5. THE ENTWINEMENT OF NARRATIVE TIME WITH CHARACTER: EXPERIENCE

The *Ethiopica* and modern paralittérature revolt against the concept of narrative as a "description of fictional mental functioning." The reconfiguration of time is more salient than

the presentation of consciousness in these and other narratives. By no means though do I wish to play off time against character. Both are important components of narrative; what is more, they are closely entwined with each other. In a final step, I will touch on this entwinement and suggest that the notion of experience is a more fruitful category for cognitive or phenomenological approaches to narrative than fictional minds.

To start with, modern consciousness novels go beyond a pure “description of fictional mental functioning” (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 12). They show the workings of narrative minds as part of a temporal sequence. Thoughts, feelings, and conjectures figure in a plot, weak as it may be. While putting much emphasis on processes of consciousness, the classical modern novel embeds the portrayal of the inner lives of characters in narrated time. Even experiential works that aspire to mimic spatial form are still bound to the sequential form of narrative.²⁸ On the other hand, action without introspection is in danger of being anemic. Narratives that avoid revealing the inner lives of characters provoke the reader into inferring their feelings and motives. In reading such stories as Hemingway’s *The Killers* we must constantly make conjectures about the minds of the characters.

The duplication of time that Sternberg’s definition of narrativity zeros in on comes in tandem with a duplication of consciousness. Just as the sequence of reading is grafted onto the sequence of the action, the consciousness of the reader parallels the consciousness of the characters. The notion of experience, introduced to narratology by Monika Fludernik, seems apt to conceptualize the twofold duplication. Let me first point out my understanding of experience and then show how it lends itself to describing the reading process as well as the unfolding of the plot. My concept of experience deviates significantly from the one Monika Fludernik has made popular in narrative studies. For Fludernik, experience can be “quite uneventful” and center on “mental situations” (29). Opposing experientiality to the idea of plot, she states, with refreshing frankness, “In my view narrative thus properly comes into its own in the twentieth century when the rise of the consciousness novel starts to foreground fictional consciousness” (27). The historical perspective makes Fludernik’s “natural narratology” superior to general claims about narrative and fictional minds, but her approach fails to exploit the conceptual capacity of experience.

A look at continental philosophy can help refine our understanding of experience. The hermeneutic tradition provides a concept of experience that is apt to capture the sequential

²⁸ The classical treatment of spatial narrative is Frank, “Spatial Form,” re-published with more material in 1991 (*The Idea of Spatial Form*).

aspect of plot in addition to describing the interior lives of characters. Gadamer in particular has emphasized the temporal character of experiences (352-68). Harking back to G. W. F. Hegel, he emphasizes that experiences disappoint expectations. They are defined by a reversal undergone by our consciousness: “If a new experience of an object occurs to us, this means that hitherto we have not seen the thing correctly and now know it better” (359).²⁹ As Gadamer stresses, experiences ought not to be reduced to the insight gained through the reversal; they can only be understood as processes. In addition to being essentially temporal, experiences also make us sense time: “. . . experience is experience of human finitude” (363).³⁰ Thus understood, experience grasps not only the interior lives of characters, as the notion of mind also does, but additionally the sequential aspect of plot. It conveys the temporal dynamics that the notion of mind does not necessarily embrace.

Not only narrative characters, but also readers have experiences.³¹ We have, as we say, reading experiences. It is important though to heed the difference between real-life and reading experiences. While the heroes of a novel are tortured or killed, the reader sits comfortably in her favorite easy chair. Reading experiences are indirect. And yet, in attending to the plot, the reader’s consciousness forms the same chain of protentions and retentions that define everyday experiences. The reader retains what has happened and conjectures the future course of the plot. Reading thus exposes the consciousness to the same temporal dynamics as our everyday life, while bracketing it in the frame of “as-if.” Ancient critics in particular were highly sensitive to the intensity that reading experiences can acquire.³² Take for example Gorgias who comments on the power of words (11.9 DK): “Into those who hear it comes fearful fright and tearful pity and mournful longing, and at the successes and failures of others’ affairs and bodies the mind suffers, through the words, a suffering of its own.”

As we see, besides embracing the temporal dynamics of the plot as well as the presentation of consciousness, the concept of experience applies, with due qualifications, to both the world of the story and to its reception by the reader. The reading experience is shaped by its relation to the experiences of the narrative characters.³³ Depending on how the

²⁹ Gadamer 1986 (1960): 359 (English tr. 2004: 347): “Wenn wir an einem Gegenstand eine Erfahrung machen, so heißt das, daß wir die Dinge bisher nicht richtig gesehen haben und nun besser wissen, wie es damit steht”.

³⁰ Gadamer 1986 (1960): 363 (English tr. 2004: 351): “Erfahrung ist also Erfahrung der menschlichen Endlichkeit”.

³¹ On this, see Grethlein, *Experience and Teleology* 12–14.

³² Cf. Grethlein, “Aesthetic Experiences.”

³³ Cf. Grethlein, “The Narrative Reconfiguration” 318–27.

fabula is transformed into the *sjuzet*, the reader's experience can be aligned with or be distinct from the characters' experiences. While Homeric epic for examples capitalizes on tragic irony by privileging the reader over its characters, stream of consciousness novels make the reader perceive the story-world through the lens of characters.

And yet, it is important to note that the reading experience is not necessarily mediated through the experiences of the protagonists. In a thought-provoking attempt to make the model of the embodied reader more dynamic, Karin Kukkonen draws on recent work of cognitive research. According to these investigations, our embodied engagement with our environment implies predictive inferences about the future that are constantly reassessed on the basis of new observations. This, Kukkonen argues, also applies to the reading process. The reader not only concentrates on the embodied experience of the characters, but derives from it predictions of the further development of the plot. Kukkonen's model is much more sensitive to the temporal dimension of the reading process than other models of the embodied reader. And yet, I part company with her when she assumes that the reader's inferences about the future develop from that of the characters, either adopting or re-assessing them against the backdrop of further knowledge about the story-world. This may but need not be the case. The reading experience is not necessarily grafted onto that of the character; it hinges primarily on the sequential form of narrative.

We have already encountered some examples in the course of the argument, such as the reader's surprise at the appearance of Thisbe in Egypt, which parallels Theagenes's surprise without hinging on it, or the suspense as to how Bond will free himself from a seemingly inescapable trap. Let me add a further illustration: when the pyre on which Charicleia stands is about to be kindled, the reader feels suspense. This suspense does not build on how she or other characters feel and assess her future; it is immediately directed toward the further course of the action. The reader wants to know what his going to happen next, how the situation can be reconciled with the anticipated ending. The sequential form of narrative—whatever the medium—prompts the recipient to conjecture about the further course of the plot independently of the content and presentation of fictional minds. That said, an analysis of the dynamics of plot needs to take into account the characters' consciousness, as the reading experience receives its special character due to its relation to the experience of the characters. Time is the primary dimension of narrative, but it needs to be studied together with character.

All faults and problems notwithstanding, cognitive approaches have been successful in opening new horizons for the study of narrative. They have redirected the focus on reception, raising the important question as to how our response to narrative relates to our way of monitoring the everyday world. Sadly, the theory of mind which has taken center stage in many cognitive studies of narrative is not able to provide a satisfying answer. It is not only fiercely criticized in psychology, but also fails to account for a vast amount of narrative. Building on the study of the classical modern novel, the theory of mind does not provide a key for studying the plot-driven narratives that we find in the ancient novel and modern paralittérature. That the focus on mindreading has led scholars to neglect the temporal dynamics of narrative is palpable in Palmer's definition of it as a "*description* of fictional mental functioning." The lack of terminological precision unveils the lopsidedness of Palmer's concept of fictional minds. The concept of experience is a better tool to grasp the relation of processing narrative to processing the everyday world: besides embracing the consciousness processes targeted by the concept of fictional minds, it also captures the crucial aspect of time and allows us to do justice to the salience of plot for narrative.

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