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# DISSONANT AND CONSONANT NARRATORS: DORRIT COHN'S CONCEPTS, NARRATORIAL STANCE THEORY AND COGNITIVE LITERARY STUDIES

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## Abstract

Our paper reconsiders the notions of dissonance and consonance introduced in Dorrit Cohn's *Transparent Minds* (1978). Cohn applies the terms to psycho- and self-narration and defines them with reference to the narrator's prominence, distance/intimacy as well as moral and cognitive privilege with reference to the character. Taking advantage of stance theory, we argue that dissonance and consonance are best taken as dimensions of the narrator's attitude towards the character and/or the narratee, we relate aspects of consonance/dissonance to the basic facets of focalization – emotional, interpretive, and evaluative – and we analyze them in terms of convergence or divergence and further, in the case of divergence, in terms of superiority or inferiority. We claim that there is no automatic correlation between narratorial consonance/dissonance and reliability. Overall, we believe that narratorial consonance/dissonance deserves much attention because it has great impact on the reader's reception of the narrator and characters.

## Key words

*Consonant narrator; dissonant narrator; narratorial stance; Dorrit Cohn*

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## Introduction

Olga Tokarczuk's 2019 Nobel Prize lecture bears the meaningful title "Tender narrator". She explains this concept in the following lines:

... we can regard this figure of a mysterious, tender narrator as miraculous and significant. This is a point of view, a perspective from where everything can be seen. Seeing everything means recognizing the ultimate fact that all things that exist are mutually connected into a single whole [...]. Seeing everything also means a completely different kind of responsibility for the world, because it becomes obvious that [...] a decision taken in one part of the world will have an effect in another part of it, and that differentiating between 'mine' and 'yours' starts to be debatable. (2019: 21)

Literature, the novelist explains, “is built on tenderness toward any being other than ourselves” and tenderness is “the most modest form of love” (2019: 24).

The final claim may sound a bit idealistic but does not seem as controversial as the idea implied in the above quotation that the ideal narrator is a tender narrator.<sup>1</sup> Some short stories and novels by Tokarczuk herself, which feature ironic and detached narrators (e.g. *Flights* (*Bieguni*) or “Preserves” (“Przetwory”)), show that great literature can do without tender narrators. At the same time there is no denying that narratorial attitudes are a very impactful element of any work of fiction; indeed, many narratologists argue that the reader’s response to the text hangs on the narrator’s attitude towards the character (cf. Lanser, Bal, Margolin (2009) and Landert). Even so, in classical narratology they remain by and large neglected.

The aim of our essay is to reconsider the notions of dissonance and consonance introduced by Dorrit Cohn in her *Transparent Minds* (1978) – a study of narrative techniques for presenting mental states of literary characters. Cohn uses the terms for special kinds of psycho- and self-narration and defines them with reference to the narrator’s prominence, distance/proximity as well as moral and cognitive privilege with reference to the character. In our essay, we first review Cohn’s initial proposal and its subsequent development in narratological theory. We then place the notions of consonance and dissonance in the context of narratorial stance theory. Next, we present our proposal: we argue that dissonance and consonance are best taken as dimensions of the narrator’s attitude towards the character and/or the narratee; we relate aspects of consonance/dissonance to the basic facets of focalization – emotional, interpretive, and evaluative; we analyse those aspects in terms of convergence and divergence and, further, in the case of divergence, in terms of superiority or inferiority; finally, we claim that there is no automatic correlation between narratorial consonance/dissonance and reliability. We illustrate these considerations with passages exemplifying diverse kinds and effects of narratorial consonant/dissonant stance towards characters. We close our paper with a more speculative section on the significance of the narrator’s stance for the reader’s reception of narrative texts.

## Dorrit Cohn’s proposal

The terms narratorial ‘consonance’ and ‘dissonance’ were proposed by Dorrit Cohn for two types of psycho-narration in the section of her book devoted to this technique for presenting mental states. Introducing the terms, Cohn explains that

In psychological novels, where a fictional consciousness holds center stage, there is considerable variation in the manner of narrating this consciousness. These variations range between two principal types: one is dominated by a prominent narrator who, even as he focuses intently on an individual psyche, remains emphatically distanced from the consciousness he narrates; the other is mediated by a narrator who remains effaced and who readily fuses with the consciousness he narrates. (1978: 26)

Thus, essential for consonant psycho-narration is an inconspicuous narrator who comes close to the characters, while crucial for dissonant psycho-narration is a prominent narrator who remains remote from the characters.

Cohn illustrates the two types with passages from Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* and James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*. With reference to these texts she catalogues textual manifestations of consonance: narratorial discourse coloured by the character's discourse, emotionally-engaged tone, use of figurative language to capture mental experiences, disorderly presentation of mental life – emotions and sensations mixed with thoughts (Cohn 1978: 30–33), and of dissonance: narratorial authoritative comments on the character's mental experience, use of abstract terms and mental vocabulary, explanatory and evaluative take on the experience, gnomic statements formulating general truths concerning human experience, either ironic or reportorial tone, and 'distancing appellations' (1978: 28–31). Discussing these texts, Cohn notes that in consonant psycho-narration the narrator shares the character's view of life (1978: 31), while in the dissonant variant he has cognitive and/or moral advantage over the character (1978: 29). She also claims that consonance and dissonance may fluctuate in the text as happens for instance in *Immoralist* by André Gide (Cohn 1978: 158–60).

Consonance and dissonance are in Cohn first of all types of psycho-narration (1978: 26). But they are also types of self-narration – the counterpart of psycho-narration in homodiegetic narratives, in which the narrating self looks back on the experiencing self (performing thus the roles analogical to the narrator of heterodiegetic narratives). In Cohn's study, Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* exemplifies dissonant self-narration and Knut Hamsun's *Hunger* illustrates consonant self-narration. Their manifestations are analogous to those of the two types of psycho-narration.

Confining the terms to psycho-narration and self-narration, in the context of narrated or quoted as well as self-narrated and self-quoted monologues – the remaining techniques for presenting mental states – Cohn speaks of either ironic or empathetic narrator (1978: 139). Discussing quoted monologue, she speaks of "neutral or opinionated, friendly or hostile, empathic or ironic" perspective in which the narrator places the character (Cohn 1978: 66–76). There is, Cohn argues, a certain correlation between authorial and figural narrative situations and the ironic or empathetic effect of quoted monologue:

In authorial narrative situations [...] monologues tend to increase the distance that separates a narrator from his character, to induce ironic remove by dramatizing figural fallacies. In figural narrative situations monologues are most effective when special devices are brought into play to insure the smooth blending of the narrating and the figural voices [...]. (1978: 76)

Apparently, depending on figural or narratorial focalization, similarity or difference of the narrator's and the character's languages, presence or absence of signals of quoted monologue and the like, we can have irony or sympathy, distance or blended voices (Cohn 1978: 76), but not consonance or dissonance.<sup>2</sup> The situation with narrated monologue is analogous:

[...] no matter how ‘impersonal’ the tone of the text that surrounds them, narrated monologues themselves tend to commit the narrator to attitudes of sympathy or irony. Precisely because they cast the language of a subjective mind into the grammar of objective narration, they amplify emotional notes, but also throw into ironic relief all false notes struck by a figurative mind. (Cohn 1978: 117)

In the whole section on “Irony and Sympathy” in the narrated monologue there is no reference to either consonance or dissonance (Cohn 1978: 116–26). This seems puzzling given that the narrators who use monologic forms (quoted or narrated monologues and their homodiegetic counterparts) for presenting mental states as well as narrators who have no insight into characters’ minds can be emotionally distant or close to the characters, prominent or effaced, inferior in their cognitive faculties to the characters or superior to them, just like the narrators using psycho- or self-narration.<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, in passages of pure quoted and self-quoted monologues, where the only voice is the voice of the character, one cannot speak of either dissonance or consonance.

In brief, for Cohn dissonance and consonance are types of psycho- and self-narration. They are determined with reference to the narrator’s prominence, emotional distance towards the character, and advantage relative to the character’s knowledge and/or moral judgment. Both types have their specific manifestations in the text.

Surprisingly few narratologists have tried to use Cohn’s concepts of consonance and dissonance, and – to the best of our knowledge – no one has really tried to elaborate on them. The terms are used by Patrick O’Neill in *Fictions of Discourse* (1994), Monika Fludernik in *Towards a Natural Narratology* (1996), Suzanne Keen in *Narrative Form* (2003) and Alan Palmer in “Thought and Consciousness Representation (Literature)” (2007). No mention of these terms can be found in classical handbooks of narratology such as Susan S. Lanser’s *The Narrative Act* (1981), Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan’s *Narrative Fiction* (1983) or Mieke Bal’s *Narratology* (1985), or in more recent narratological publications, classifiable as postclassical: Alan Palmer’s *Fictional Minds* (2004) or David Herman’s *The Emergence of the Mind* (2011). We have been unable to find relevant articles in narratological periodicals either except for one essay by Franz K. Stanzel (1992).

In his article “Consonant and Dissonant Closure in ‘Death in Venice’ and ‘The Dead’” Stanzel argues that the concept of narratorial consonance or dissonance may help define narrative closure (he even speaks of ‘dissonant ending’ or ‘clausal function’ of consonance). As he explains, the narrator who becomes clearly dissonant (as in “Death in Venice” by Thomas Mann) or, on the contrary, clearly consonant (as in “The Dead” by James Joyce) helps show the integrity of the ending with the main part of the story, thus contributing to the sense of closure. Stanzel’s study thus shows that the terms ‘consonance’ and ‘dissonance’ can be of use in analyses of other aspects of a narrative work than presentation of mental states. Notably, Stanzel redefines the notions. He defines ‘consonance’ in terms of complicity and ‘dissonance’ in terms of antagonism (Stanzel 1992: 114); in his analyses, though, he tends to see consonance as similarity of the narrator’s mind

(ideas and emotions) to the protagonist's mind, and dissonance as an analogical difference. Consonance and dissonance are no longer a type of psycho-narration but first of all a quality of the relationship between the narrator and the character. Unlike Cohn, Stanzel does not limit the use of the terms to the context of psycho- and self-narration. When relating them to specific literary techniques for presenting mental states, he notes that free indirect style (in Cohn's terms – narrated and self-narrated monologues) gives most opportunity for “various degrees of consonance (or dissonance) between narrator and protagonist” (Stanzel 1992: 121).<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Stanzel notes that the phenomenon has been neglected by scholars, as he explains, on account of its “subliminal way of affecting the reader” (1992: 114). He thus notes that the consonance (or dissonance) of the narrative voice impacts the reader's response to the text but at the same time escapes her attention.

O'Neill applies the notion of consonance to both the narrator and the implied author in their focalizing function. In *Small World* by David Lodge, as O'Neill explains, in the sentence in which Cheril, a check-in clerk at the airport, notes that a certain professor “spoke very good English, apart from a little trouble with her aspirates”, her focalization is combined with the narrator's (or the implied author's), where the latter focalization can be described as dissonant (one might otherwise speak of narratorial irony here; O'Neill 1994: 97–98).

Also Fludernik relates the terms to focalization. In the fifth chapter of *Towards A Natural Narratology* she uses them when discussing the techniques of reflectorization and figuralization, in which the focalizer is problematic. In the case of reflectorization, the focalizer is (often vaguely) identifiable with a character or a group of characters; in figuralization there is no character or narrator persona who could be identified as the focalizer. The former technique is as a rule dissonant (ironic), the latter is consonant (empathetic), though Fludernik notes that reflectorization can also be consonant (e.g. in Henry James's fiction). Fludernik seems to locate dissonance and consonance both in the relation between the vague focalizer and the implied author and in the relation between the vague focalizer and the character.

Unlike O'Neill and Fludernik, Keen applies the terms to narration, but, unlike Cohn, she restricts their application to homodiegetic fiction, translating them into temporal distance between the narrating and experiencing selves. When the distance is big, we mostly have dissonant narration (as in *Great Expectations* by Dickens), when it is small, we usually have consonant narration (as in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*). The dissonant narration can easily be judgmental. Consonance/dissonance may vary within a text – typically in Bildungsroman narration becomes less dissonant, more consonant with time (Keen 2003: 36–37). Keen further loosely connects the homodiegetic narrator's dissonance to the reader's assessment of the narrator's high reliability (2003: 43).

To sum up, the terms introduced by Cohn have not been universally accepted. This might be related to her decision to limit them to the single technique of presenting characters' mental states in narratorial discourse and/or, possibly, as suggested by Stanzel, to the subtlety of consonance and dissonance. Those critics who have decided to use the terms have changed their meaning and application.

The terms are used with reference to (i) the relationship between the narrator and the character especially manifest in narrated monologue (Stanzel), (ii) narratorial focalization (O'Neill) and, more specifically, reflectorization and figuralization (Fludernik), (iii) homodiegetic fiction and narrator (Keen); and they mean (iv) complicity (or similarity) vs. antagonism (or disparity) between the narrator and the character (Stanzel), (v) narratorial or authorial irony and empathy (Fludernik, O'Neill) and (vi) temporal distance or proximity (Keen). Above all the authors show that analyses of various elements of narrative texts (e.g. closure, focalization, the narrator's reliability) can benefit by taking the distinction into account. As most insightful we perceive the following ideas: (a) focalization is the original context for consonance and dissonance (O'Neill, Fludernik), (b) the techniques work subliminally (Stanzel), (c) the terms have application beyond psycho- and self-narration (most authors), (d) consonance and dissonance should be seen in terms of a relation and, derivatively, of the narrator, not in terms of narrative techniques (Stanzel), (e) the implied author too could be perceived as either consonant or dissonant, being one of the focalizers (O'Neill). It is these ideas, excluding the last one,<sup>5</sup> that we want to develop.

### **Narratorial stance theory**

If one adopts Stanzel's redefinition of 'dissonance' and 'consonance' as kinds of relationships between the narrator and the character (rather than narrative techniques for presenting mental states), it becomes clear that narratorial stance theory<sup>6</sup> should provide best frames for analyzing the two concepts, narrator's stance being defined as the narrator's relation with the story, esp. with the characters (Margolin, "Narrator" 2009: 361). One can find a brief discussion of the narrator's attitude already in Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). As Booth explains, the narrator can be "more or less distant from the characters in the story", and may differ from them morally, emotionally, intellectually and temporally (Booth 1961: 156). The narrator's detachment (opposition) or involvement (identification) may take different forms "ranging from deep personal concern [...] to a bland or mildly amused or merely curious detachment" (1961: 158).

The next highly important contribution comes from Susan Lanser. In her study of the point of view in fiction, Lanser discusses the narratorial stance towards characters under the heading of the psychological stance, which is partly determined by spatio-temporal and phraseological stances, whose function is subsidiary. The psychological stance consists above all in the degree of the narrator's affinity/distance (detachment/involvement) to the character, which is communicated among others by the amount of 'space' devoted to the character, as well as the subjective vs. objective, and deep vs. superficial kind of information about the character (these complement Cohn's list of typical manifestations of consonance and dissonance). It also covers the narrator's judgement over the character, which oscillates between approval and disapproval. Most importantly, in her study Lanser takes into consideration both "narrating and focalizing consciousnesses" and approaches them both in isolation and "in complex constellations of

intersubjectivity” (1981: 185). Like Cohn, Lanser notes that each time available options entail whole spectra. Finally, Lanser emphasizes the importance of the affective relation of the narrator to the character for the text’s reception (1981: 184–225, esp. 201–15).<sup>7</sup>

Next comes Robyn Warhol (1986) with her ‘distancing’ and ‘engaging’ narrators. By the way the narrator addresses the ‘you’ she either helps the reader identify with the narratee or the “‘you’ inscribed in the text” (‘engaging narrator’) or prevents such identification (‘distancing narrator’, 1986: 811). Apparently by extension, Warhol also speaks of ‘engaging’ and ‘distancing’ narratives and narrative situations. Though Warhol focuses specifically on strategies that shape the reader’s relation with the narratee, her text is worth noting in that it is a rare text recognizing the significance of the narratorial stance towards the narratee.

In his much more recent (2009) discussion of the narrator’s stance, based on Lanser, Uri Margolin notes briefly that it can be “straightforward, ironic, sympathetic”, but then lengthens the list to “neutral vs. judgmental, sympathetic vs. detached, involved vs. distanced, cynical, sentimental, emotionally charged, curious, amused, bewildered, and so on” (Margolin, “Narrator” 2009: 358, 361), implying, that the narrator’s attitude cannot be reduced just to two options. Margolin notes further that the narrator’s stance, reflects on her as well as shapes the reader’s response (“Narrator” 357, 361).

Still more recently (2017), Daniela Landert approaches narratorial stance in the context of pragmatics of fiction (2017: 496–98). Taking advantage of recent linguistic research, she defines stance as “the expression of evaluative, epistemic and affective attitudes” (Landert 2017: 489), where epistemic stance is related to the status and source of narratorial information (2017: 490–91). Landert notes that stance can be communicated not only explicitly, verbally, but also in non- or para-linguistic ways: “for instance through the use of special fonts, formatting (large font or boldface), capitalisation, emoticons and emojis” (2017: 492). Unlike Cohn, Landert believes that covert narrator does not express her stance: “the absence of stance in narratorial voice is one of the defining features of a covert narrator” (Landert 2017: 496). Though Landert does not limit the use of ‘stance-taking’ to narrators, she pays much attention to their stance because: “A stance expressed by the narrator is part of the communication between the fictional text and the reader and evaluations and assessments of characters and events influence the reader’s perception of the story” (2017: 496).

When it comes to contemporary linguistic approaches to stance, what is most striking is the emphasis placed on its intersubjectivity. This is very clear, for example, in Tiina Keisanen and Elise Kärkkäinen’s work as they argue in favour of “viewing stance as a dialogic, intersubjective and interactionally organized construct”, and not “a (relatively isolated) mental position or interior state of an individual person” (2014: 296, 300–14). Interestingly, the authors also note that in real-life conversations the negotiation of the stance by the interacting parties is often more important than communication of facts (Keisanen and Kärkkäinen 2014: 298–99) and that the stance that is presented is not necessarily the stance that is experienced (2014: 299–300, 313). Similarly, John W. Du Bois in his work emphasizes the intersubjective dimension of real-life stance-taking: how apart



from evaluating an object, a stance-taker also positions herself with reference to the object and aligns herself with reference to other subjects involved in the exchange.

Clearly, the theory of narratorial stance encompasses the narrator's consonance and dissonance, but not much progress has been done here either. Most precious for our proposal are Lanser's perception of spatio-temporal stance as subsidiary and her recognition that both discourse and focalization are relevant to stance, as well as Keisanen and Kärkkäinen idea that the manifested stance need not be the experienced stance (which lends further weight to the theoretical distinction between narratorial focalization and narratorial presentation of characters). Landert's choice to distinguish epistemic aspects of stance (cf. also Keisanen and Kärkkäinen 2014: 297), on the other hand, seems less vital as in narratology the questions of the quality and source of the narrator's information seem to be already covered by the concept of narratorial reliability. Interestingly, in the context of the linguistic research on stance reviewed above, narratorial stance appears to be highly unnatural as it is not created in the process of interaction, has minimally intersubjective character (except perhaps for situations involving a narratee, but even there narratee is in principle passive, i.e., minimally engaged in interaction), and rarely entails para- or non-linguistic manifestations (the text being verbal).<sup>8</sup>

### Consonance and dissonance as narratorial stance

Before we propose our revision of the narrator's consonance and dissonance, a comment is due on the narrator's status. The narrator, a textual construct, can be taken within postclassical narratology as a quasi human being, or at the very least a quasi human mind, since this is how the reader interprets them on the basis of the narrator's story-telling activity. To cite Uri Margolin, "... insofar as we postulate an individual fictional mind and its activity as the origin of the narration, it behooves us to adopt the appropriate cognitive perspective for describing the process at work" (2003: 280).<sup>9</sup> This anthropomorphisation of the narrator (interpretation of the narrator in terms of a fictional mind, somehow analogous to human minds), *pace* purists, is consistent with the reader's response and productive in terms of narrative theory (Margolin 2003: 273–74). It is on these grounds that we do not de-anthropomorphise the narrator in our account of consonance and dissonance.

1. We propose that the concepts of consonance and dissonance be best interpreted as qualifying the narrator's attitude towards a character and/or the narratee. The term 'attitude' seems preferable to 'relationship' (used by Stanzel) as the latter covers also the reciprocal attitude of the character towards the narrator, which is usually missing from the text. We thus resign from applying the terms in the first place to the narrative techniques for presenting mental states. Indeed, the narrator can adopt a certain stance towards characters regardless of whether the character's inner experience is revealed or not. The narrator can even adopt a (speculative) stance to characters whose mental life – motivations and beliefs –

is unknown to her. Derivatively, one can also speak of consonant and dissonant narrators. The two passages below – (a) using narrated monologue, (b) offering an ‘objective’ account of the incident (with no insight into the character’s mind) – illustrate the narrator’s consonance towards John.

(a) There was nothing to explain, was there? He had failed her, his Marie, his love, his wife... He had failed himself. He had failed their dog. Comically as it might sound, that was how he felt. That was all.

(b) We never get a chance to grow up on time. John never got a chance. His infidelity happened to him the way things happen to every one of us. It’s always only *post factum* that we become aware of what we should have done. For hours on end John stood motionless in front of Marie, who couldn’t or wouldn’t stop crying.

In passage (a), the narrator’s consonance consists in the confluence of the narrator’s voice with the character’s voice; in passage (b), it consists in the narrator’s attempt to justify John’s failure by suggesting that it is part of the human condition that we meet challenges without being ready for them as well as by implying that on account of his ignorance, John is a passive victim of his own misconduct.

The narrator’s consonance/dissonance is relative to a given character (this idea is implicit in Cohn’s analyses, though less obvious if the terms refer to narrative techniques) and can fluctuate (as noted by Cohn). In the following passage (c) the narrator is consonant towards John and dissonant towards Marie.

(c) There was nothing to explain, was there? He had failed her, his Marie, his love, his wife... He had failed himself. He had failed their dog. Comically as it might sound, that was how he felt. That was all. He felt nothing about the other woman. Marie simply told him to move out. “Just get out” she said. “And take your dog. It’s over.” The mortified expression on his face seemed to satisfy her. She was naive enough to think that hurting him could bring her relief.

The passage opens with narrated monologue – a combination of the voices and perspectives of John and the narrator; then, with the sentence “Marie simply told him to move out”, focalization changes to narratorial (it is ‘Marie’, not ‘his wife’). The last two sentences express narratorial stance towards Marie (the voice and perspective are narratorial): first in the form of a hypothesis concerning satisfaction she derives from John’s mortification, then of a psychological analysis of the mechanism underlying her emotional reaction. While the narrator seems to share John’s experience of things, towards Marie he is critical (the word ‘naive’ is explicitly pejorative).

There is also the question of the narrator’s attitude to the narratee. One might argue that narratorial consonance/dissonance towards characters covers also the case of prominent narratees, and such narratees should be treated as characters for the purpose of such analyses. This, however, is a simplification, for while some narratees are indeed characters: involved in the story, they inhabit fictional reality (like Padma in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*), others are not. They can be imaginary figures in the fictional reality (as in *Waterland* by Graham Swift) or outside the story world (as ‘you’ or ‘dear reader’ in *Midnight’s Children*; cf. Grzegorz Maziarczyk’s analysis of these novels, 2005: 151–57; 165–70).

*Nota bene*, Maziarczyk calls the last kind of narratee the narratee-potential-reader/listener (cf. the typology of narratees, 2005: 52–56). Given that, as argued by

Fludernik, in some 2<sup>nd</sup>-person narratives, the borderline between the narratee and the implied reader becomes blurred (2002: 252, cf. 256), one might theoretically consider extending the notion of the narrator's consonance and dissonance also to the narrator's attitude towards the implied reader (or perhaps even to the real reader, as "the implied reader figure" is "potentially a role that the real reader may want to empathize with"; Fludernik 2002: 252). The following passage (d) illustrates the narrators' dissonance towards the narratee who is not classifiable as a character.

(d) Mind your next step? Don't you know in life there are no such warning signs? Things simply happen. One day you're innocent, another day you're guilty. That's all. You are naive to think John might have acted differently. Or Marie, for that matter.

2. We perceive the narrator's stance as primarily connected with his narratorial function, but at the same time inherently connected with the narrator's focalization.<sup>10</sup> Inspired by the authors who suggest that focalization is the proper location of the narrator's consonance and dissonance, we accommodate focalization in our approach. We do so on the assumption that the narrator is always a focalizer, as argued by O'Neill (cf. "... *the narrator is always a focalizer, having no choice whether to focalize or not (just as he/she/it has no choice whether to verbalize or not), only how to do so*", 1994: 90). Further, the case of an unreliable narrator who tells the story in a way that is inconsistent with his experience of the story (characters included)<sup>11</sup> clearly proves that the two functions of the narrator (i.e., focalization and narration) can sometimes be decoupled.

Even so, while finding focalization relevant, we associate consonance and dissonance in the first place with narration. In principle, how a person speaks about another is derivative of how she experiences the other; chronologically the experience comes first (in natural narratives). However, the subsequent act of telling may give meaning to the experience. More importantly, even if in real life experience comes before a story based on this experience, in fiction this temporal priority of experience is a matter of convention. The text offers the narrator's experience so to speak only after it has been verbalized (translated into a narrative). Also, in the context of the reader's reception of the text<sup>12</sup> what matters is the narrator's approach to the character *qua* narrator (not *qua* focalizer). It is her narratorial (not focalizational) function that gives the proper weight to the narrator's stance.<sup>13</sup> *Nota bene*, it is doubtful whether in practice it is possible to detect a difference in consonance (or dissonance) of the narrator in his role of focalizer as contrasted with his role of the narrator.

3. From the fact that the narratorial stance originates in focalization it follows that consonance and dissonance can be defined in terms of facets of focalization (cf. Rimmon-Kenan 1999: 77–82): perceptual, emotional, interpretive, and evaluative.<sup>14</sup> The reference to focalization gives thus theoretical background for the criteria of distance/proximity, moral and cognitive privilege introduced by Cohn, though not for her criterion of the narrator's prominence vs. self-effacement. Indeed, the latter seems replaceable with the well-established notions of covert and overt narrator and placed outside the concepts of consonance and dissonance. This is not to deny the existence of correlations between the narrator's stance and her covertness/overtness. Conspicuous narrator, as argued by Cohn,

is often dissonant; self-effaced tends to be consonant. The prominence of the narrator is in turn correlated with the type of narration: homodiegetic narrators tend to be more prominent than heterodiegetic ones.

Perceptual facet locates the narrator in spatio-temporal dimensions relative to the character (e.g., homodiegetic simultaneous narrator may share space and time with a given character, heterodiegetic and homodiegetic retrospective narrators in principle may not). The position of the narrator is not irrelevant to the question of consonance and dissonance: it may condition the narrator's emotional, interpretive, and evaluative experience of the character. But it is best taken as a subsidiary component of narratorial stance (cf. Lanser's analysis). Presumably distance correlates with neutrality, while proximity goes hand in hand with stronger emotions.

Related to the issue of experiential and narratorial spatio-temporal distance/proximity is that of the 'existential' difference/identity of the narrator and the character. The narrator may be different from a character, as in heterodiegetic narratives, or identical with a character, as in autodiegetic simultaneous fiction. There may also be blurry cases – as in much prose of Virginia Woolf in which the seemingly heterodiegetic narrator seems to coalesce with the characters. Arguably, the 'existential' difference/identity may condition the narrator's stance towards the character.

One more reason why the two characteristics – spatio-temporal distance/proximity and existential difference/identity – should not be prioritized when analyzing narratorial stance is that they do not seem to be (even 'conventionally') the narrator's choice. The choice is typically viewed as the prerogative of the implied author. The two characteristics in question should thus be viewed as important conditions (not components) of consonance and dissonance. Conversely, consonance and dissonance might be viewed as manifestations of the narrator's distance/proximity and difference/identity with reference to the character: very extensive consonance might reveal some kind of unification of the character and the narrator; while dissonance – except for self-conflicted characters – might imply existential difference.

We are thus left with emotional, interpretive and evaluative aspects of consonance/dissonance. When it comes to examples, (predominantly) *emotional* consonance can be found in passage (a); passage (b) illustrates *interpretive* consonance; while passage (d) exemplifies a combination of *evaluative and interpretive* dissonance in the narratorial attitude towards the narratee.

4. Stance in its various dimensions is gradable (as noted already by Cohn<sup>15</sup>) and ranges, generally speaking, between similarity and difference. More specifically, the stance ranges between interpretive convergence and divergence (visible in same or different interpretations of reality), evaluative consistence and inconsistency, as well as emotional antagonism and sympathy (as we can see, with reference to emotions, the general scheme of similarity/difference does not apply). We might further identify the position of neutral/objective non-attachment in between each pair of contrastive positions. This might help analyze the correlation between emotional aspect of narratorial consonance/dissonance and narratorial reliability (cf. the discussion below).

We thereby resign from viewing dissonance and consonance in terms of first of all the narrator's advantage or superiority and thus the character's disadvantage or inferiority. These terms remain relevant within the category of dissonance. *Nota bene*, dissonance may also be caused by the narrator's inferiority towards a character e.g. with reference to moral judgement.

5. Though this involves a major change with reference to Cohn's proposal, given that we can have a narrator who is emotionally consonant but evaluatively dissonant or emotionally empathetic but ironic in the interpretive dimension, one might consider differentiating various kinds of consonance/dissonance: emotional, interpretive, and evaluative, instead of talking about one consonance/dissonance composed of a number of aspects. In some passages, especially of short fiction, it might indeed be important to identify the type of the narrator's consonance/dissonance, especially in the cases of a narrator who is emotionally consonant but evaluatively or interpretatively dissonant. However, usually, especially if the text is longer, the narrator's consonance/dissonance will embrace emotional, interpretive and evaluative facets.

6. Narratorial reliability<sup>16</sup> seems not to be systematically correlated with either interpretive or evaluative consonance or dissonance; it might, however, be correlated with emotional detachment. In her discussion of narrators, Keen loosely connects reliability with dissonance. A dissonant narrator is traditionally viewed as having interpretive and evaluative advantage over the character, and since knowledgeability and moral competence translate into reliability, Keen's proposal might seem reasonable. However, dissonant narrators can also be antagonistic, ironic, indifferent, judgmental and arrogant (willing to impose their view of reality onto the character), which makes them morally suspect. One might say that the dissonant narrator is in such cases reliable on account of his (moral) competence – the ability to discern between right and wrong behaviours – and unreliable on account of his moral comportment. Still, our decision to depart from Keen's analysis is more fundamentally grounded in our decision to see interpretive and evaluative dissonance not in terms of superiority/inferiority but in terms of above all similarity/difference between the narrator and the character. Given that narratorial consonance or dissonance is, further, relative to a given character, it cannot automatically be translated into reliability or unreliability. For example, a superstitious narrator may be interpretively consonant towards a superstitious character (they see things in the same way), but this consonance will not testify to the narrator's reliability, unlike the narrator's superstitious frame of mind, which will be negatively correlated with narratorial reliability. A cynical narrator, in turn, may be evaluatively dissonant towards a virtuous character (he will disparage the character's virtues), but this dissonance in itself will in no way testify to the narrator's reliability (it is the narrator's cynicism that makes him unreliable). The narrator's reliability with reference to characters consists in her ability to correctly inform about the character, interpret and evaluate him (or his actions). This reliability does not appear to be systematically correlated with either interpretive or evaluative consonance or dissonance, though within specific narrative conventions certain tendencies can probably be observed.

As regards the narrator's emotions (the narrator's emotional stance towards the character included), they are relevant to narratorial reliability only to the extent that they might influence narratorial descriptions, interpretations or evaluations of a character; they too are not relevant *per se*. If the narrator's sympathy towards a character makes her connive at a character's evil doings, this sympathy causes her to become unreliable. If, on the other hand, the same sympathy makes her open-minded and tolerant, it might contribute to the narrator's clarity of judgement, and thus reliability. Generally speaking, it might be reasonable to assume that narratorial reliability correlates most strongly with the position of emotional non-attachment, as strong emotions easily skew one's view of things one way or another.

7. Consonance and dissonance acquire different meanings in 1<sup>st</sup>-, 2<sup>nd</sup>- and 3<sup>rd</sup>-person narratives because of the different existential relations between the narrator and the character. In 1<sup>st</sup>-person narratives there is an existential relation between the narrating and experiencing selves usually combined with a retrospective perspective (hence on the reader's part there is an assumption of the narrator's cognitive limitations typical of humans). In 3<sup>rd</sup>-person narratives there is no such connection – the narrator might be anybody but the protagonist (except for some rare exceptions, such as Vladimir Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*) – the perspective can but need not be retrospective, the narrator's cognitive performance may exceed human capacity. Further, the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person narrator may be overt or covert, i.e. in some cases almost totally devoid of individualizing features, thus practically anonymous (this option is not available to 1<sup>st</sup>-person narratives). In 2<sup>nd</sup>-person narratives (which we define after Fludernik, as narratives in which 'you' is the protagonist; Fludernik 2002: 169), the narrator is most ambiguous: as argued by Brian Richardson, this may be the protagonist (in that case we have the existential connection) but need not be her (qtd. in Maziarczyk 2005: 50). Thus the 2<sup>nd</sup>-person narrator can be either homo- or heterodiegetic, as argued by Fludernik (2002: 169). When in 2<sup>nd</sup>-person narration, the narrating self and the experiencing self are existentially related, consonance and dissonance work basically as in 1<sup>st</sup>-person narratives (which are all homodiegetic). When the 2<sup>nd</sup>-person narrator and the character are different people, consonance and dissonance work more or less as in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person narratives (which are all heterodiegetic). But often the narratorial identity in 2<sup>nd</sup>-person narratives is ambiguous; additionally, because the tone of 2<sup>nd</sup>-person narratives tends to be exhortative, the reader may feel strongly invited to closely identify with the addressee,<sup>17</sup> all of which may strengthen the effect of consonance and dissonance. The two passages below illustrate the effect of consonance and dissonance in 2<sup>nd</sup>-person narratives. In passage (e) the 'dissonant' narrator seems to be the character, Marie, though her identity is to some extent ambiguous; in passage (f) the 'consonant' narrator is not Marie.

(e) Funny to think about it now, when all is over. Funny to realize it was your mistake, not his. No, not funny, that is a wrong word to use. Tragic. You meant tragic. Well, yes tragic, but also funny. Funny the way life is funny when you can stand apart and at last appreciate life's little ironies. Blaming him was your mistake, but one you could not have avoided being yourself. Maybe being yourself was a mistake?... Unavoidable?...

(f) It must've been a horrible shock to you... Six years of happiness gone in an instant. You probably had no idea what to do with yourself. The cheating dog, I mean John, played dumb until the end. I've never been in a situation like this, I'm glad I haven't... You did the right thing, Marie. It must've been hard, throwing your husband out like that. Truth be told, though, he deserved much worse.

In passage (e), Marie seems self-conflicted and the reader follows her stream of consciousness; in passage (f), the narrator admits to having no life experience parallel to Marie's (hence is not Marie) but strongly identifies with her, expresses her approval of Marie's conduct, appears to share her emotions.

### Consonant and dissonant narrators in cognitive literary studies

We hope that the above proposal might prove of interest in itself (as an abstract discussion of a certain literary phenomenon) and of use to scholars who try to understand how texts work on the basis of their narratological analysis. But we would like to conclude our discussion by introducing the context of cognitive literary studies, which examine the impact of the reader's cognitive faculties and mechanisms on her reception of narrative texts. We believe that for these studies, for their investigation of the reader's ability to empathise with a character and to read the character's mind (cf. Lisa Zunshine's theory that reading fiction we practice our mindreading competence), the narrator's consonance or dissonance might be crucial. For example, the reader's mindreading response and empathetic response to a character might be augmented if a reliable narrator is emotionally, interpretively and evaluatively consonant with him. An unreliable dissonant narrator might in turn provoke a defiant reaction and thus also increase the reader's involvement.

But the reader mindreads also narrators. The narrator, especially one who is not a character, is mainly known as a story-teller (the notion of narratorial stance seems especially pertinent in heterodiegetic narratives and homodiegetic retrospective narratives). A proper recognition of how the narrator relates to characters might help understand the narrator's beliefs and intentions.<sup>18</sup> Thus, reading the narrator's stance is part of reading the narrator's mind. Also, the narrator's stance might have strong impact on the reader's ability or willingness to empathise with him (cf. the contrast between, generally speaking, the consonant narrator in *Podróż ludzi księgi* (Journey of the People of the Book) vs. the dissonant narrator in *Bieguni* (Flights) by Tokarczuk; *nota bene* the narrator's dissonance seems mollified in English translations of some of Tokarczuk's texts).

In the context of cognitive studies, it might also be worth noting that many possibilities presented above – various constructions of the narrator-focalizer – might be unnatural (in the sense investigated by unnatural narratology). For example, in the light of the modular model of the mind, now highly popular among evolutionary psychologists, the sharp distinction between perception, emotion, comprehension and evaluation seems misconceived. As John Tooby and Leda Cosmides explain, the mind on this account resembles a naturally evolved computer with a number of subprograms dedicated to solving specific adaptive problems

related to reproduction (and survival necessary for reproduction; Tooby and Cosmides 2009: 114–15). The modules are activated and deactivated and coordinated by emotions – complex ‘information processing’ programs (2009: 116–17). They ‘supervise’, among other things, the work of subprograms responsible for perception, attention, motivational priorities, conceptual frameworks, evaluations, and feelings (valuation-related kinds of computation) (Tooby and Cosmides 2009: 118, 130). Each emotion controls diverse psychological mechanisms, cf. the following account of sexual jealousy:

*Physiological processes* are prepared for such things as violence, sperm competition, and the withdrawal of investment; *the goal* of deterring, injuring, or murdering the rival emerges; *the goal* of punishing, deterring, or deserting the mate appears; *the desire* to make oneself more competitively attractive to alternative mates emerges; *memory* is activated to reanalyze the past; *confident assessments* of the past are transformed into doubts; *the general estimate* of the reliability and trustworthiness of the opposite sex (or indeed everyone) may decline [...]. (Tooby and Cosmides 2009: 122, emphasis added)

In particular, emotions, as Tooby and Cosmides argue, are in charge of our perception and interpretation of reality (cf. “Emotions should prompt construals of the world in terms of concepts that are appropriate to the decisions that must be made”, 2009: 125) as well as the specialized inference system related to “attributions of blame and responsibility” (2009: 128). The analysis of dissonant and consonant stance into four distinct aspects or kinds (perceptual, interpretive, emotional and evaluative) – possible in fiction – might be impossible in real life, except for people in abnormal mental states: trained by meditation to disown their feelings (cf. Robert Wright’s study of the Buddhist meditation) or affected by some neurological disorders. If this theory is correct, apparently, for most people, these are emotions and desires that determine their perceptions, thoughts, and judgments.

## Conclusion

We would like to frame our text with another reference to Tokarczuk’s idea of the tender narrator. Tokarczuk calls this attitude a form of love as it consists in “the conscious, [...] common sharing of fate [...] deep emotional concern about another being”. We have already pointed out that many narrators in Tokarczuk’s works are not at all tender and the works no worse on that account. Apparently, tenderness is desirable first of all in real human beings, narrators of their own lives. In fiction meanwhile there is definitely place for both consonant and dissonant narrators, the important thing is that as literary scholars we should be able to identify them and appreciate their impact on the reader’s response to the text.



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Tokarczuk's Nobel lecture naturally drew the attention of readers all over the world to the notion of the narrator. But though the narratological interpretation of her ideas, which we adopt above, seems legitimate, the primary object of her interest is in fact spirituality. She takes the world to be a network of stories and humans to be their narrators, who ideally should be tender.
- <sup>2</sup> There is one sentence though, in which Cohn, speaking of the narratorial use of quoted monologue, uses the terms 'dissonance' and 'harmony', but their meaning is slightly different: "Depending on the dosage of irony and sympathy, the conjunction can range from dissonance to harmony between the narrating and the figural voices, even within a single work" (1978: 68–69).
- <sup>3</sup> *Nota bene*, discussing specific narrators (from Mann's and Hamsun's works) who employ psycho- or self-narration, Cohn speaks at times of their irony.
- <sup>4</sup> Stanzel at the same time notes that the terms might have no application to narratives other than literary (cf. "Consonance and dissonance as corollaries of free indirect style in a predominantly figural narrative situation thus stand revealed as features of presentation specific to the narrative genre in literature", 1992: 121).
- <sup>5</sup> We exclude from our discussion the issue of authorial consonance/dissonance because, though we find the concept of the implied author useful, we realize that it remains controversial, and though O'Neill seems right in postulating authorial focalisation in all narrative texts, in practice this focalisation is most elusive.
- <sup>6</sup> Admittedly, Stanzel does not speak of 'stance' (attitude), but of 'relationship'.
- <sup>7</sup> This importance is also noted by Bal (2009: 28).
- <sup>8</sup> Most interactive might be homodiegetic simultaneous narrator – a character interacting with other characters (in the case of homodiegetic retrospective narration, there is no interaction between the narrating self and characters so the situation is analogical to that of heterodiegetic narration).
- <sup>9</sup> In the quoted passage and elsewhere in the article (e.g., 2003: 278) Margolin suggests that some narrators might not be individualized. This is puzzling, given that any act of story-telling of some length reveals some information about the story-teller (the category of fully covert narrators is empty). Cf. also Margolin's definition of narrator: "The *narrator* is understood as an individual reporting, and often commenting, with a particular slant, cognitive and emotive, on individuals, states, actions and events in one or more domains" (2003: 273).
- <sup>10</sup> We understand focalization as mediation of the narrative through an agent's mind (and thus experience), basically along Rimmon-Kenan conceptualization (1999: 71–85). But we also take advantage of O'Neill's theory of compound narration, which claims that all narrative is focalized through the implied author and the narrator and, additionally, at times through one or more characters. The reader is however usually aware only of the most embedded focalizer (1994: 83–106).
- <sup>11</sup> For example, in Dorothy Canfield's "Sex Education" Aunt Minnie tells the same story based on an adventure from her youth three times. Each time she tells the story, she changes its meaning. Apparently, as a young girl she was sexually attracted to her cousin but for years suppressed her awareness of this attraction. Thus, when telling the story first and second time and presenting herself as an innocent victim of her cousin's assault, she falsifies her actual experience.
- <sup>12</sup> In the creative process, some authors might actually start with the narratorial experience and then move on to narration, but in our article, we discuss texts (and the reader's response) and in texts it does not seem possible to differentiate between the narrator's experience before it has been verbalised and afterwards, unless the narrator explicitly describes the difference.
- <sup>13</sup> Simultaneously, one might note that the relative significance of the narrator's focalizing

- or narrating functions in the context of consonance/dissonance depends on the kind of narration. In simultaneous homodiegetic narratives, focalization is foregrounded (it matters more how the narrator-character experiences other characters), whereas in the case of the narrator-fabulator and in heterodiegetic (or homodiegetic retrospective) narratives featuring a relatively covert narrator this is narration. This is so because a narrator-fabulator creates characters, thus implying their fictionality, while a covert narrator is to the reader almost imperceptible and so is her focalization.
- <sup>14</sup> We replace Rimmon-Kenan's term 'cognitive' with 'interpretive' to avoid the erroneous implication that emotions do not perform cognitive functions. And we replace 'ideological' with 'evaluative' to clarify the difference between this facet and the interpretive facet.
- <sup>15</sup> Cf. "there is considerable variation in the manner of narrating this consciousness [a fictional consciousness in psychological novels]. These variations range between two principal types [...]" (Cohn 1978: 26).
- <sup>16</sup> We define the reliable narrator after Rimmon-Kenan as the narrator "whose rendering of the story and commentary on it the reader is supposed to take as authoritative account of the fictional truth" (1999: 100).
- <sup>17</sup> Especially at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-person narrative the reader, as Fludernik notes, may feel to be directly involved; this 'identificational effect' gradually fades away as the fictional character becomes concretised (2002: 169–170).
- <sup>18</sup> Beliefs and intentions seem most relevant within the theory-of-mind theory of mindreading, which says that on the basis of one's observation of other people's behaviour and one's folk psychology, one reconstructs the beliefs and intentions of other people to predict their next action (cf. Zunshine 2006: 3–44).

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