

the broad assumptions that have sustained the concept in critical practice. I do not think of the concept as a purely narratological matter, but one that has large consequences for our understanding of fiction. Indeed, the narrator's promotion from representational accident to structural essence has occurred specifically in response to the qualities of fiction, not narrative per se; and the concept has only been put to the most cursory use outside the fictional context because the narrator, thus understood, functions primarily to establish a representational frame within which the narrative discourse may be read as report rather than invention.² In other words, it defines the extent to which we can set aside our knowledge that the narrative in hand is indeed fictional. By conceiving of a fictional narrative as issuing from a fictional narrator, the reader has canceled out its fictionality, negotiated a mode of complicity with representation, and found a rationale for suspension of disbelief. I want to suggest, though, that certain dubious critical tendencies are perpetuated by this model of fiction. First, critical interpretation tends, in point of detail, to be confined within the narrative's representational frame, rather than attending to its rhetorical import—with the common result that criticism indulges too far in collaboration with the fiction's own rhetoric of representation. Second, the representational frame induces a kind of critical double vision that separates this intrafictional perspective from a larger sense of the fiction as a literary work (characterized by its style, technique, themes, symbolism, etc.). The effect of this dichotomy is that such literary considerations become the belated response to a naive primary reading experience. As the basis for reading fiction, a willing suspension of disbelief will not do: Disbelief is essential to reading a work of fiction *as fictional*, and only by doing so can we apprehend the effects it achieves by means of fiction's own particular literary resources, including the involvement to which the phrase "suspension of disbelief" testifies. One of the consequences of rejecting the concept of the narrator is that the representational frame, as an impassable barrier between the creative and (putatively) informative aspects

(1978). Seymour Chaitman (1990). Notable dissenters, on linguistic grounds, have been Käte Hamburger (1973 [1957]), Ann Banfield (1980), and S.-Y. Kuroda (1976). My own objections to the narrator are based upon representational rather than linguistic criteria; hence, I shall be arguing that certain "narrators" are outside representation, not that certain narratives function outside communication.

2. Some narrators, of course, flaunt their inventiveness, for example, in Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*. In such a case, the representational frame endowed with an aura of fictional reality is coextensive with the personality and environment of the narrator himself. It is worth noting that if fictionality does indeed imply a narrator, such novels would require a second-order narrator to sanitize the inventiveness of the first. Critics have generally refrained from such follies.