ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN RHETORIC AND STYLISTICS

Style and Rhetoric of Short Narrative Fiction

Covert Progressions Behind Overt Plots

Dan Shen
with a Foreword by J. Hillis Miller

ROUTLEDGE

Style and Rhetoric of Short Narrative Fiction

Covert Progressions Behind Overt Plots

Dan Shen
with a Foreword by J. Hillis Miller

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

First published 2014
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Shen, Dan, 1958–
Style and rhetoric of short narrative fiction covert progressions behind overt plots / by Dan Shen ; with a foreword by J. Hillis Miller.
pages cm. — (Routledge Studies in Rhetoric and Stylistics ; 7)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Plots (Drama, novel, etc.) 2. Fiction—Technique. 3. Fiction—Authorship. 4. Narration (Rhetoric) I. Title.
PN3378.S38 2014
808.3—dc23
2013025571

ISBN: 978-0-415-63548-6 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-203-09312-2 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

Printed and bound in the United States of America by Publishers Graphics, LLC on sustainably sourced paper.

Style and Rhetoric of Short Narrative Fiction

In many fictional narratives, the progression of the plot exists in tension with a very different and powerful dynamic that runs, at a hidden and deeper level, throughout the text. In this book, Dan Shen systematically investigates how stylistic analysis is indispensable for uncovering this covert progression through rhetorical narrative criticism. The book brings to light the covert progressions in works by the American writers Edgar Allan Poe, Stephen Crane, and Kate Chopin, and the British writer Katherine Mansfield. The analysis shows that to miss the covert progression is to get only a partial or false picture of the thematics, the characters, and the aesthetic values of the narrative.

> "This important contribution to the stylistics of short fiction and poetics of narrative both enriches the theory of the short story and provides new interpretations of a range of major British and American stories. It is very relevant both for the teaching of short fiction and for the theory of narrative."
>
> Jonathan Culler, Class of 1916 Professor,
> Cornell University

> "Dan Shen persuasively expands the scope of the rhetorical theory of narrative by showing that careful attention to easily overlooked patterns of meaning (what she calls "covert progressions") in fiction naturally lead to matters that previous rhetorical theorists have not done justice to, especially the interrelationships among style, ethics, and biography."
>
> James Phelan, Distinguished University Professor,
> Ohio State University

> "A distinguished senior scholar makes a major contribution, combining in a rare way the perspectives of narrative theory, stylistics, and rhetoric to provide challenging new interpretations of major short fiction from nearly a century of English-language writing, ranging from Poe to Katherine Mansfield."
>
> Jonathan Arac, Andrew W. Mellon Professor,
> University of Pittsburgh

Dan Shen is Changjiang Professor of English Language and Literature at Peking University, China. She is on the advisory or editorial boards of the American journals *Style* and *Narrative*, the British *Language and Literature*, and the European *JLS: Journal of Literary Semantics*, as well as being a consultant editor of *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*.

Routledge Studies in Rhetoric and Stylistics

Edited by Michael Burke

1 **Literary Reading, Cognition and Emotion**
An Exploration of the Oceanic Mind
Michael Burke

2 **Language, Ideology and Identity in Serial Killer Narratives**
Christiana Gregoriou

3 **Beyond Cognitive Metaphor Theory**
Perspectives on Literary Metaphor
Monika Fludernik

4 **The Pragmatics of Literary Testimony**
Authenticity Effects in German Social Autobiographies
Chantelle Warner

5 **Analyzing Digital Fiction**
Edited by Alice Bell, Astrid Ensslin, and Hans Kristian Rustad

6 **Ulysses and the Poetics of Cognition**
Patrick Colm Hogan

7 **Style and Rhetoric of Short Narrative Fiction**
Covert Progressions Behind Overt Plots
Dan Shen

For my husband Xing, the star of my life

Foreword

It is a great pleasure and honor for me to write a Foreword for this distinguished book. Dan Shen is Director of the Center for European and American Literatures and Changjiang Professor of English Language and Literature at Peking University in Beijing. She has an international reputation as a narratologist and a stylistician. She serves on many Western editorial or advisory boards including those of the American journals *Style* and *Narrative,* the British *Language and Literature* and the European *JLS: Journal of Literary Semantics;* and she is also a consultant editor of *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory.* Dan Shen has a distinctive, original, theoretical approach and a gift for perceptive close reading. Apart from her publication of numerous books and essays in China, she has published many essays in important journals in North America and Europe. She is in addition, as it happens, one of my oldest friends in China. I have watched with admiration the impressive development of her work and of her worldwide influence since I first met her in China some years ago.

Style and Rhetoric in Short Narrative Fiction: Covert Progressions Behind Overt Plots is the happy culmination so far of Dan Shen's scholarly work. It embodies the accumulated wisdom of years of thinking, teaching, and writing in the field of narratology, stylistics, and rhetorical studies. This book combines admirably two distinguished scholarly accomplishments. It develops with impressive rigor and exigency a powerful new theory of narrative progression. It then shows in detailed readings of six short fictions in English how this theory may be used to illuminate the way meaning is generated by the words on the pages of these stories. Her exemplary six stories include three by Americans: one by Edgar Allan Poe, one by Stephen Crane, and one by Kate Chopin. The second part of the book then reads three stories by the New Zealand-born British writer, Katherine Mansfield. Since these stories are often taught in undergraduate courses in literature, Dan Shen's book will be of great use to teachers of such courses.

This book is in the tradition of Neo-Aristotelian rhetorical narrative study, but significantly expands its scope by directing attention to the importance of stylistic analysis and the necessity for considering the context of creation, both having been consciously precluded by Neo-Aristotelian rhetorical critics in general. In the brilliant introductory essay to the book and in the

readings themselves, Dan Shen puts in question such exclusions. She sees no reason not to take into account in a rhetorical reading of a given story the author's life and social circumstances. An example is the brilliant and learned discussion of the "insanity debate" in American history in connection with her reading of Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart." As regards her forceful argument for including in a rhetorical reading the stylistic analysis of verbal complexities, it is particularly well backed up by her admirable reading of Crane's "An Episode of War" and Mansfield's "The Fly," which convincingly demonstrates how stylistic analysis can make significant contributions to the interpretation of narrative texts. In addition, Dan Shen argues for the necessity in narrative criticism of making intertextual comparison between a given story and other related works, whether by the same author or by different authors. This point is especially well illustrated by her analysis of Mansfield's "Revelations" and Chopin's "Désirée's Baby."

Most brilliantly and of crucial importance in her theorizing and in her readings, however, is Dan Shen's recognition in various narratives of an often ironic discrepancy between the overt plot and what she calls a "covert progression" hidden behind the open one, as well illustrated by the six narratives analyzed in the book. The great Victorian poet and classicist Gerard Manley Hopkins, writing about the recurrent figures of speech in lyric sections of Greek tragedy, called a deeper level of meaning in a lyric passage an "underthought" hidden beneath the "overthought." What Hopkins says seems prophetically to anticipate Dan Shen's insights. "In any lyric passage of the tragic poets," Hopkins wrote in a letter of 1883, ". . . there are—usually; I will not say always, it is not likely—two strains of thought running together and like counterpointed; the overthought that which everybody, editors, see . . . and which might for instance be abridged or paraphrased . . . the other, the underthought, conveyed chiefly in the choice of metaphors etc used and often only half realized by the poet himself. . . . The underthought is commonly an echo or shadow of the overthought, something like canons and repetitions in music, treated in a different manner." The difference of course between Greek tragedies and Dan Shen's short fictions, as she observes, is that the "covert progression" in prose narratives is expressed not so much in metaphors as in many details of story-telling, and it is an undercurrent that runs throughout the text, rather than a local deeper meaning as the poetic "underthought." Hopkins, moreover, does not allow for the outright dissonance or contradiction that Dan Shen persuasively identifies in the relation between overt and covert progressions in some of her stories.

The "covert progression" in prose fiction is often ironic in nature. This type of irony, as Dan Shen convincingly argues and shows, differs from previously noticed types of irony in that it not only is pervasive, characterizing the text throughout, but also often constitutes an additional ironic layer behind the irony of the plot development, either complementing or subverting the latter.

Recognizing and demonstrating the presence of covert progressions in narrative fictions is the strikingly original and groundbreaking focus of *Style and*

Rhetoric of Short Narrative Fiction. Starting from Aristotle, many narrative critics, for all their theoretical sophistication, tend to assume that a novel or short story has a single textual movement—the plot development (of course often with various forms of branching or narrative embedding). They have focused on the plot and have made diversified efforts to uncover its deeper levels of meaning. The "covert progression" is a different kind of deeper-level meaning, a hidden textual movement running parallel, or as an alternative, to the plot. But of course not every fictional narrative has a covert progression. Indeed, many do not, but in those narratives that have a covert progression, it is not to be missed since, as Dan Shen's analysis shows, our understanding of the ethical import and aesthetic value of the text or of the author's rhetorical purposes can be severely affected if we overlook the covert progression.

Dan Shen has a conspicuously sharp analytical mind. Her mind is much given to making distinctions and refinements in her theoretical formulations and in the details of her readings. She distinguishes, for example, between covert progressions that reinforce the overt action and those that contradict the apparent meaning of the story. An example of the latter is Kate Chopin's "Désirée's Baby." This story appears to be anti-racist, but it covertly reinforces racial stereotypes. A close reading not only of narratological complexities but also of subtle verbal complexities is necessary to uncover the covert progression. Shen Dan succeeds brilliantly in doing this.

A concern with the ethical implications of narrative fictions has been an important part of narrative studies ever since Wayne Booth's work and before. Dan Shen continues this tradition, but her recognition of covert progressions that work in sometimes dissonant counterpoint to overt progressions leads her to see and to show in detail that the ethical implications of a story like Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" or Mansfield's "The Fly" may be quite different from the evident one or from the one previous critics have identified.

Dan Shen's brilliant reading of Poe's story is characteristic of her interpretations of the six exemplary short stories she chooses. Her reading of "The Tell-Tale Heart" exhibits impressive mastery as well as sharp criticism of previous scholarship on the story. Dan Shen needs to clear the ground, so to speak, to make way for her strikingly original reading of "The Tell-Tale Heart." She also deploys thorough knowledge of relevant biographical and cultural contexts (such as the history of the "insanity debate" mentioned above). Bringing all these powerful tools of interpretation together, including an original analysis of the poetry/prose distinction in Poe's essays, Dan Shen shows in detail that "The Tell-Tale Heart" deploys "dramatic irony with a significant ethical dimension." While the plot development is marked by irony at the unreliability of the narrator, the "covert progression" of this story is one of the narrator's "unconscious self-condemnation" and "unconscious self-conviction." "Poe," says Dan Shen, "seems to make the protagonist's unconscious self-condemnation and unconscious self-conviction reinforce each other in order to convey the implicit moral in a highly dramatic and ironic manner."

Another superb reading by Dan Shen is the chapter on Katherine Mansfield's "The Fly." After a succinct summary of the wide range of previous readings by other critics, Dan Shen turns to her own close rhetorical reading of textual detail in "The Fly." Her reading shows convincingly that the overt plot progression, the story of the protagonist's grief over his son's death in World War I and his wanton killing of the fly on his desk by dropping ink on it until it stops struggling to survive, is supplemented by a more covert textual movement ironically revealing the boss's vanity and self-importance. Dan Shen shows that in "The Fly" the covert progression supplements the overt plot progression and its meaning. Since none of the strikingly diverse previous published readings has noticed this covert progression, Dan Shen's brilliantly convincing new reading solves what has been a crux in the interpretation of a classic short fiction. As Dan Shen says in her concluding recapitulation, "Numerous existing interpretations of 'The Fly' have shed much light on the narrative from various angles and have greatly helped reveal the rich thematic significance and complicated dynamics of the plot development. But no matter how cogent, ingenious, thorough, and deep-going the analysis is, the picture that emerges is bound to be a partial one unless we perceive at the same time the ironic covert progression behind the symbolic plot development. The two progressions—the plot centering on war, death, grief, time, existence, victimization/being victimized etc. and the covert progression concentrating on the boss's vanity and self-importance—constitute two interacting dimensions of the whole textual dynamics. They complement each other in characterizing the boss and in generating thematic or ethical significance of the narrative." Dan Shen's chapter on Mansfield's "The Fly" is a spectacular confirmation of the heuristic power of her new theory of double textual dynamics in short fictions. Her theoretical presuppositions really do work admirably as a way of producing convincing and sharable readings.

I have singled out Dan Shen's readings of Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" and of Mansfield's "The Fly," somewhat arbitrarily, as exemplary of her procedures in all of her readings and of their uniform high quality. I leave it to the reader to find this out for herself or himself in the other readings. I have immensely enjoyed reading this superb book. I have learned much from it. It has led me, for example, to think about the way Dan Shen's assumptions and procedures work splendidly as a way of accounting for the narrative and ethical complexities of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*. Other readers will think of other texts that would be illuminated by Dan Shen's insights.

It is not often that a major breakthrough occurs in a well-established discipline like rhetorical narrative studies. *Style and Rhetoric of Short Narrative Fiction: Covert Progressions Behind Overt Plots* is definitely such a book. I commend it enthusiastically to all readers interested in narrative fiction.

—J. Hillis Miller
Deer Isle, Maine

Acknowledgments

I am grateful, first of all, to the late Emory Elliot, who, after reading some essays of mine in the summer of 2008, kindly suggested that I consider publishing a book in the West on narrative methods, aesthetics, and culture. At that time, I had published more than twenty essays in the West but had published my book-length projects only in my native China. Although this book takes up different issues from the ones Emory suggested, his encouragement and his confidence in me sustained me throughout the writing. I am also deeply grateful to Jonathan Culler for three things: suggesting that I write a book that uses stylistic analysis to offer new readings of short stories; commenting insightfully on the manuscript; and recommending the project to Michael Burke, the editor of this book series. To Michael I extend my gratitude for his keen interest in my project and for his valuable editorial support and advice.

Although I hope that this book breaks new ground in its attempt to explore *dual* narrative dynamics and *covert* progression, it is strongly influenced by the work of James Phelan, who has been leading the rhetorical investigation on narrative progression. Jim has read the drafts of almost all of my papers published in the West in narrative studies and has given me invaluable feedback. In the process of preparing this book, I have benefited immensely from his astute advice, trenchant questions, and incisive specific suggestions.

This project presents a challenge to the traditional critical focus on plot development and offers challenging new interpretations of some major short fiction. Although my basic stance is rhetorical (with an emphasis on shared reading) rather than deconstructive (with an emphasis on indeterminate reading), the project reflects the influence of my engagement with the work of J. Hillis Miller. He has given me unfailing support, advice, and encouragement since we first met in 1988. I am deeply grateful not only for his numerous helpful comments on the manuscript but also for his generously volunteering to write the Foreword.

I also owe debts of gratitude to numerous others: to Jonathan Arac for his thorough and perceptive reading of an earlier version of the Introduction and the first three chapters; to Meir Sternberg, the editor of *Poetics Today*,

for his rigorous and insightful reviews of earlier versions of Chapter 3 and Chapter 6; to three anonymous Routledge reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier version of the Introduction and Chapter 2.

Peter J. Rabinowitz, David Herman, Seymour Chatman, Porter Abbott, Monika Fludernik, Peter Messent, Paul Simpson, Michael Toolan, Ruth Page, Geoff Hall, Emma Kafalenos, Jakob Lothe, John Pier, Wolf Schmid, Donald Stone, Robyn Warhol, Brian Richardson, Susan Lanser, Alison Case, David H. Richter, and Alison Booth, among other Western colleagues and friends, have helped me clarify my thinking on various issues and have given me valuable support and encouragement.

I am also indebted to Felisa N. Salvago-Keyes, Margo Irvin, Katie Laurentiev, Renata Corbani, and the copy editor at Routledge for all their editorial support and help.

Many of my Chinese colleagues in Peking University and other universities have given me helpful comments and valuable support during the process of preparing this book. Let me mention in particular Yiqing Liu, Jie Tao, Jiaming Han, Xiaoyi Zhou, Jianhua Liu, Shusen Liu, Gengxin Su, Weixing Su, Feng Liu, Lu Liu, Fengfeng Gao, Liang Mao, Zhaoxiang Cheng, Ning Sheng, Xiangyu Liu, Yunte Huang, Shaobo Xie, Gang Zhu, Yiheng Zhao, Zhenzhao Nie, Yifan Zhao, Jianjun Liu, Wei Cheng, Zhongzai Zhang, Li Jin, Hong Jiang, Tie Li, Hailiang Ma, Xueyan Yang, Li Cao, Liya Wang, Yizhong Ning, and the late Bing Wu.

I am furthermore indebted to my undergraduate and research students at Peking University who have shared my interests in stylistics and narrative and whose stimulating discussions have helped advance my own thinking. In addition, my Ph.D. student Yanwei Hu has perused almost the entire manuscript with her sharp eyes and helped correct various slips. Thanks also go to Jing Chen, the secretary at the Center for European and American Literatures of Peking University, who has provided assistance in various ways during the process of preparing this book.

Finally, as a small recognition of my great fortune to live most happily in the many years of marriage, I dedicate this book to my husband, Xing Li.

Earlier versions of various segments of the book have previously appeared in print. Although I have significantly reworked most of them to fit the general argument of the book and my current understanding, especially in terms of the shift from the concern with subtext to a rhetorical concern with covert progression, I am grateful for permission from the publishers and editors to draw on the following essays:

"Neo-Aristotelian Rhetorical Narrative Study: Need for Integrating Style, Context and Intertext," *Style* 45 (2011): 576–97. Copyright 2011 by *Style*.

"Edgar Allan Poe's Aesthetic Theory, the Insanity Debate, and the Ethically Oriented Dynamics of 'The Tell-Tale Heart,'" *Nineteenth-Century*

Literature 63 (December 2008): 321–345. Copyright 2008 by the Regents of the University of California. Published by the University of California Press.

" 'Overall-Extended Close Reading' and Subtexts of Short Stories," *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature* 91 (2010): 150–69. Copyright 2010 by Taylor & Francis Group.

"Implied Author, Overall Consideration, and Subtext of 'Desiree's Baby,' " *Poetics Today: International Journal for Theory and Analysis of Literature and Communication* 31 (2010): 285–312, used by permission of the publisher, Duke University Press.

"Subverting Surface and Doubling Irony: Subtexts of Mansfield's 'Revelations' and Others," *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature* 87 (2006): 191–209. Copyright 2006 by Taylor & Francis Group.

"Covert Progression behind Plot Development: Katherine Mansfield's 'The Fly,' " *Poetics Today: International Journal for Theory and Analysis of Literature and Communication* 34 (2013): 147–75, reprinted by permission of the publisher, Duke University Press.

—Dan Shen

Contents

Introduction

In a letter of 1883 to his friend A. W. M. Ballie, Gerard Manley Hopkins draws a distinction between "overthought" and "underthought" when discussing lyric passages of Greek tragedy. The overthought is the surface meaning that the readers and editors see, and the underthought is another story carried on beneath the surface and expressed "chiefly in the choice of metaphors etc used and often only half realized by the poet himself" (Hopkins 1995: 174; see also Frye 1990: 57–58). A similar situation can be found in many fictional prose narratives, where our surface reading, or the way the overt plot moves, exists in tension with a very different and powerful dynamic that focuses, at a hidden and deeper level, on aesthetics and ethics, among other kinds of thematic import.[1] This hidden dynamic, which complicates the audience's response in various ways, is what I call "covert progression." But of course, the covert textual progression in prose fiction differs from the poetic underthought in more than one way. While the poetic underthought is a local deeper meaning "in any lyric passage" (Hopkins 1995: 174), the covert progression is an undercurrent running throughout the prose text; while the poetic underthought rests on the suggestive meaning of figurative language, the covert progression in prose narratives characteristically relies on non-metaphorical stylistic and structural techniques; while the underthought is often only half-consciously conveyed by the poet, the covert progression usually forms a purposeful rhetorical strategy of the prose writer. Moreover, while the underthought Hopkins had in mind is a positive undercurrent of the text, the covert progression this book investigates conveys an ethical import that can either be harmful (see Chapter 3) or beneficial (see all the other Chapters). Despite all these differences, the covert progression in prose fiction and the poetic underthought have essential similarities: both are a deeper-level textual movement that is aesthetically conveyed, and both form a significant counterpoint that supplements or contradicts the surface meaning, thus complicating the audience's response in various ways.

This book selects six short stories to illustrate how stylistic analysis is indispensable for uncovering the covert progression through rhetorical criticism. Short fiction is chosen as the object of investigation chiefly out of two

considerations. First, using short stories as illustrations facilitates the revelation of a typology of different forms of covert progression. In *Understanding Fiction,* Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren only use short stories to illustrate the functioning of different elements of fiction, and, in like manner, this book uses short stories to show the different ways in which the covert progression relates to the thematic implications of the overt plot development. Second, we are hard put to carry out a comprehensive analysis of style in long fictional narratives. Stylistic analyses of novels usually only deal with certain passages, a tiny portion of the long text. Although we can assume that "any passage is a microcosm of the whole" in terms of the importance of style in a given text (Phelan 1981: 20), to uncover the covert progression we have to trace the stylistic patterning from the beginning to the end of the text. This can only be conveniently carried out in short texts. Not surprisingly, this book, as a pioneering attempt to show different forms of covert progressing, confines its analysis to short fiction.

COVERT TEXTUAL PROGRESSIONS: BRIEF SKETCHES

Since the late 1970's there has been an increasing study of narrative sequence, dynamics, and progression as a reaction to the more or less static models of plot structure as offered by classical narratologists. Peter Brooks's *Reading for the Plot* (1984) is a pioneering book that puts emphasis on the forward movement of plot/plotting and of reading (see also Sternberg 1978). Drawing on psychoanalysis, Brooks treats a narrative as "a system of internal energies and tensions, compulsions, resistances, and desires" in the temporal dynamics that shapes a text in the onward reading process (1984: xiv). In rhetorical narrative criticism, James Phelan sees a narrative as a "progression" built on unstable situations both in the story and in the discourse presentation. As for the story level, where the characters and/or their situations undergo some change, "the report of that change typically proceeds through the introduction, complication, and resolution (in whole or in part)" of "instabilities" within, between or among the characters (Phelan 2007: 7). In terms of discourse presentation, there exist "tensions" in the form of a discrepancy in knowledge, judgments, values or beliefs among authors, narrators, and readers (ibid., see also Phelan, 1996: 217–18). For the past twenty years or so, Phelan has taken the leading role in investigating narrative progression with his four brilliant and influential books (1989, 1996, 2005, 2007) and numerous essays. In the field of stylistics, Michael Toolan (2009) takes a computer-assisted corpus analytic approach to narrative progression, investigating how the text's lexico-phrasal patterning guides readers' expectations and responses. The investigation contributes to a fuller understanding of how words on the page give rise to "such distinct impressionistic reader judgements as ones of suspense, surprise, secrecy or gaps, mystery, tension, obscurity, and even incoherence" as the text progresses towards the end (2009: 1). The increasing interest in the dynamics

of textual movement and reading activity has greatly enriched our understanding of narrative fiction, shedding much light on the functioning of the text and the communication among authors, narrators, and readers (see also Sternberg 1990, 1992, 2006; Richardson 2002).

As the definite article "the" in Brooks' *Reading for the Plot* indicates, narrative criticism so far has focused on one textual progression based on the instabilities in the plot or main line of action, although various attempts have been made at discovering deeper layers of meaning of this progression.[2] But in many fictional narratives, especially shorter ones, there exist two textual movements that still need to be distinguished. One is plot development, a major focus of attention since Aristotle. As we know, "plot" is a very elusive term in narrative theory, one that has received various definitions (see Cuddon 1979: 513–14; Dannenberg 2005: 435–39; Sternberg 1978: 10–14). In common terms, plot is the development of a narrative's sequence of events. In *Story and Discourse,* Seymour Chatman (1978: 45–48) distinguishes between the traditional "plot of resolution" and the modern "plot of revelation." In the former, events are causally related and progress towards the denouement, marked by a completed process of change of a certain kind (Crane 1952a). In the latter, by contrast, it is "not that events are resolved (happily or tragically), but rather that a state of affairs is revealed" (Chatman 1978: 48).

However, behind the plot development—no matter whether the events are connected by causality and resolved in the end or linked by contingency and created to display a state of affairs (often character-oriented)—there may exist a parallel textual movement that runs throughout. The latter conveys a different thematic import and often contains various textual details that appear peripheral or irrelevant to the themes of the plot. This complication of the textual dynamics gives rise to the complication of the reading activity when the covert textual movement gradually comes into view.

The present inquiry is concerned with the ethically oriented and aesthetically created kind of covert progression, which may be defined as:

> The covert textual progression is an ethical-aesthetic undercurrent running throughout the text behind the overt plot development. The relation between the ethical significance generated by the covert progression and the overt plot varies from narrative to narrative, ranging from supplementation to subversion, which complicates the audience's response in various ways.

Two things should be noted here. First, I follow Wayne C. Booth, the founder of contemporary rhetorical study of narrative fiction, in using the term "ethics" or "ethical" in a broad and flexible sense, making it carry the weight of political criticism as "a rough synonymy" for ideological criticism (1988: 12) and, moreover, treating it as covering both "good" and "bad" qualities (1988: 8).[3] An "ethical" message or choice, that is to say, can paradoxically be bad or "unethical." Second, the covert ethical progression foregrounds