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Dynamics : Rejoinders to Scholars*

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## *Debating and Extending "Covert Progression" and Dual Dynamics: Rejoinders to Scholars*

*Dan Shen*

Let me begin by thanking John V. Knapp for inviting me to write the target essay and thanking John and Dr. Maxwell Hoover for inviting other scholars

to respond to it. I'm also very grateful to the sixteen scholars from nine different countries who have accepted the invitation, some of whom are old and new friends and some I've never met.<sup>1</sup> Their insightful comments, mild or severe challenges, and important extensions have all helped to clarify the picture of the "covert progression" and "dual narrative dynamics."



I would like to start with the response from JOHN PIER, who, with his extensive knowledge, well positions my approach in relation to other approaches. John offers a very fine discussion of the features of my rhetorical narratology and its connection with James Phelan's, and an insightful comparison of our rhetorical approach with two nonrhetorical approaches, the latter functioning to set off the characteristics of the rhetorical investigation of the single and dual narrative progression. This paves the way for his discussion of the relation between my rhetorical narratology and Umberto Eco's theory of interpretation. Eco's theory sets store by the contrast between a "naïve" reader's first linear "semantic" reading and the subsequent "critical" or "meta" reading in relation to the Model Reader. Given the duck/rabbit figure, the first-time reader thinks he's reading about a rabbit only to discover it's not a rabbit, but something else, and he's not sure what. Then the Meta Reader's rereading, which forms a reinterpretation (a "metanarrative") of the first-reader's misreading (a "narrative"), would yield the interpretation that both figures are represented and that the larger message is a meta-one about perception. In John's view, "metanarrative seems to point to a space, implicit in dual narrative dynamics, that calls for further investigation" (Pier, "Rhetorical" 33). In order to have a metanarrative (a subsequent interpretation of an earlier interpretation), we must have a naïve reader's first reading. This can only take place in the interpretation of the plot. Concerning this narrative movement, in the first reading, one may merely pay attention to the surface story facts, and it is only in the subsequent readings that one tries to get at the deeper meanings. Even if during a subsequent reading one explains how he is duped by the surface meaning in the first reading (thus, we'll have a "metanarrative" pitted against a "narrative," both readings being "inscribed within the textual strategy"), this does not seem to amount to an "extension" of interpretation. As for the covert progression, its very discovery/existence requires reading the text critically, and the naïve reader's

superficial reading cannot come into play. We need to bear in mind that the covert progression is another narrative movement hidden behind the plot development; when it comes into view, it's already the result of effective critical readings, hence leaving no room for the contrast between a naïve first reading and a subsequent "metanarrative." That is to say, I'm hard put to extend the interpretation of the dual dynamics with Eco's theory, and this difficulty points to the fundamental difference between reading the plot as a single narrative movement (Eco's subsequent "meta" reading is one that goes "back through the plot step by step") and reading the dual dynamics as two separate parallel narrative movements. But I do appreciate John's clear exposition of the essential similarity and difference between the rhetorical and the semiotic approaches.



The second response to which I'd like to reply comes from JAMES PHELAN, who offers an admirable summary of the gist of my theory of dual dynamics. His excellent summary is more or less expected since, as pointed out by John Pier, my "dual" progression is very much an extension of his theory of "single" progression. Jim also raises a series of important questions, which offer a golden opportunity for me to clarify the picture. Jim's first question is whether we have dual or single authorial agents. In my articles "What Is the Implied Author?" (*Style*, 45.1 [Spring 2011]: 80–98) and "Implied Author, Authorial Audience, and Context" (*Narrative*, 21.2 [Summer, 2013]: 140–58), I've made clear that the "implied author" is no other than the person in the process of writing this particular narrative, and the "real author" is the person in daily life, outside the writing process.<sup>2</sup> That is to say, for any single-authored narrative, in terms of the encoding process, we only have one implied author/"agent." And this is what I've put down in the target essay: "in a narrative with dual dynamics, the implied author [*the single agent*] tends to [*only when* the two narrative movements are contrastive or opposed to each other] adopt two contrastive or even opposed stances in creating the two parallel narrative movements. Consequently, instead of inviting readers to infer one image of the implied author (shortened as IA), the text invites readers to infer two contrastive or even opposed images (such as antiracist versus racist) [of that single writer/agent] from the two narrative movements" (Shen, "Covert" 22). It should be clear that my answer to Jim's question "But isn't there an agent

who constructs the two tracks of movement, and an audience who recognizes that agent and their dual-track communications?" (Phelan, "Theorizing" 38) can only be "Yes" since the issue of there being "two agents" in a single-authored narrative is beyond my consideration. The reason for my setting store by the different authorial stances and different authorial reading positions in a narrative constructed by one implied author and read by one reader such as James Phelan or Dan Shen is that this is a previously neglected area. Because of the neglect, previous critics have put Bierce's "A Horseman in the Sky" on a par with his "The Affair at Coulter's Notch," treating the two narratives as having the same authorial stance, but actually, they share the same authorial stance only in terms of being anti-war, but in terms of a soldier's performing his duty, the authorial stances in the two narratives are drastically different, a difference perceivable only when we open our eyes to contrastive authorial stances and contrastive authorial reading positions in a narrative with such dual dynamics.

Another question by Jim is: Why not "[reserve] 'overt/covert' for cases of double-coding and using some other distinction such as 'primary/secondary' or 'dominant/subordinate' for cases of juxtaposition?" (Phelan, "Theorizing" 39). Well, in "A Horseman in the Sky," the two narrative movements are equally substantial, but previous critics have only paid attention to the plot development, neglecting the other no less substantial narrative movement because it is "covert" in the Aristotelian tradition focusing on the plot. As spelled out by H. Porter Abbott, "readers miss [the 'covert progression'] not because it's hidden but largely because their interpretive equipment won't allow them to see what is right there in plain sight" ("Review" 560). As pointed out by Jim, in Kafka's "The Judgment" and Mansfield's "Revelations," the most significant triggers for the covert progression either take up a significant portion of the textual space or are "right there in plain sight," but previous critics have still either overlooked them or have only tried to fit them in the plot development. Significantly, the "covertness" is primarily related to authorial design in light of the Aristotelian focus on the overt plot. As mentioned in the target essay, previous critics have only paid attention to the plot development in Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart"; Mansfield's "The Fly" and "Revelations"; and Kafka's "The Judgment," and because of that focus, they have overlooked the "second" and "third" narrative movements that are hidden/"covert" in the Aristotelian tradition.

The fact that these narrative movements behind the plot have eluded critical attention for at least one-hundred years testifies to their being "covert."

Moreover, because of the linear nature of verbal narrative (one word after another), one narrative movement is expected to be more easily noticeable. And so even in the future when the creation of dual narrative dynamics becomes a commonly practiced and well-known narrative strategy, most probably one narrative movement would be more covert than the other—the author may have to present one narrative movement as the more overt that is readily perceivable during the first reading and the other more dependent on the reader's inference during later readings. To see the issue from a different angle, in a large portion of the narratives I've analyzed, words often simultaneously generate two contrastive kinds of thematic significance, and because of the limitation of human perception, we can only first perceive the more obvious kind, and then infer the more covert kind in later readings.

In terms of Jim's insightful distinction between the dual dynamics in narratives like those just mentioned and narratives with "rhetorical passing," my discussion of dual dynamics plays slightly different roles. In terms of rhetorical passing, which has been discussed or touched upon by Peter Rabinowitz and Susan Lanser, my argument of dual dynamics only serves to direct *more* attention to it, so that we can discover such subtle rhetorical passing as in Mansfield's "Psychology." As for the other category to which most of the narratives discussed in the target essay pertain, my argument functions to direct attention to a previously *neglected* phenomenon. No matter which category is involved, we invariably have in such works a "covert" narrative movement behind the "overt" plot development, and the primary function of my theory of dual dynamics is always to direct attention to the covert behind the overt and their relation.<sup>3</sup>

Another question concerns "Parallelism or Synthesis." Jim asks, "why not conclude that the singular IA crafts the two movements to interact so that they ultimately produce a single, albeit complex, progression?" (Phelan, "Theorizing" 39). For the former part of the question, I've already made clear that it is "the singular IA [who] crafts the two movements." In a narrative with only the plot development, the implied author has only designed one narrative movement, possibly with "different branches or layers" (Shen, "Covert" 1) which would "interact" to "produce a single, albeit complex, progression." By contrast, in a narrative with "dual dynamics," the implied author has designed two separate, parallel progressions, each with its distinctive thematic orientation, no matter whether in a complementary or subversive relation.

In Mansfield's "The Fly," although the plot development and the covert progression harmoniously complement each other, the plot development is highly symbolic, concerned with big issues such as war, death, victimization,

existence, memory, and so on, and the covert progression is nonsymbolic, only conveying ethical irony against the vanity and self-importance of the boss as an individual. The two parallel narrative movements remain from the beginning to the ending of the narrative as two separate narrative movements, each functioning on its own. But since they are in the same one authorial design of the narrative, they would together contribute to the total significance of the work. As regards Bierce's "A Horseman in the Sky," the plot development and the covert progression move along two incompatible thematic trajectories, which cannot be synthesized into a "single progression" but which do join forces or "complement" each other in contributing to the total thematic significance, albeit *always* in a mutually contradicting and counterpointing relation, and *always* portraying contrastive images of the protagonists. If we turn to the subversive category, the covert progression, when coming to light, would overturn the plot development as a false appearance, and in the authorial design of such a narrative, the dual dynamics need to remain as two parallel narrative movements for the subversion to function (more or less implicitly) from the beginning to the ending of the narrative.

Jim's last question is: Are covert progressions "authorially designed or readerly constructed"? He has singled out Chopin's "Désirée's Baby" for a test. The issue is whether the racist covert progression I've revealed is designed by Chopin in the encoding process or constructed by myself during the reading process. Jim rightly points out that the (truly Black) slave owner Armand is "immersed in racist ideology" (Phelan, 40) but in this narrative all white slave owners are *invariably and completely free* from the influence of that "racist ideology" although they are *in the same racial situations*. Désirée's foster father, the white slave owner of another plantation, does not hesitate to adopt Désirée with the obscure origin, and when she is mistaken for being colored, her foster parents not only offer her their home but also claim her to be their own daughter. By contrast, the Black Armand spurns both his wife and his son for their Black blood. In the overt plot, we see Armand's racial discrimination as being representative of that of white slave owners in general. In the covert progression, however, we discern the continued contrast between Armand and all the white characters, the latter being totally free of racial discrimination. If we examine Chopin's textual choices carefully, we'll discover that the covert progression conveys this picture: If Armand

were a little bit like the kind and nondiscriminating white characters or if he himself had a little less of the satanic spirit, Désirée and her baby would have survived (see my detailed analysis in my book *Style and Rhetoric* 70–84).

Jim finds recalcitrance to the racist covert progression in two aspects. First, Chopin depicts “Black characters who are not discriminatory toward other Black people,” including Armand’s Black mother’s adoration of her Black son (Phelan, “Theorizing” 41). Well, as we all know, “racial discrimination” means discriminatory behavior of one race toward members of *another* race. So, it is natural that we find no racial discrimination between the Black mother and her own Black son, nor among other Black characters because they belong to the *same* race (Armand discriminates against the “colored” Désirée only because he believes himself to be white). It is true that Chopin depicts the yellow nurse’s change in attitude toward Désirée and her baby when she discovers that the baby is colored. But this is a change from being respectful toward superior white masters to having no respect for persons she believes are of her own inferior race. In the covert progression, we see the contrast between the colored nurse’s change in attitude and the white slave owners’ constant feelings toward Désirée in the same racial situation. This unbelievable picture of white slave owners’ being invariably and completely free of racial discrimination is indisputably designed by Chopin for the purpose of implicitly mystifying Southern slavery. Another recalcitrance that Jim sees to the racist covert progression concerns “Armand’s behavior toward the slaves after he falls in love with Désirée: he treats them much the way his father did” (Phelan, “Theorizing” 41). Well, the covert progression indicates that being in love with and close to the white blood enables the Black Armand to change temporarily for the better. When Armand is estranged from his white wife (now mistaken for a mulatto)—his having loosened the tie with the white blood, he again treats his Black slaves cruelly, which forms a contrast with his white father’s *constant* benevolence toward his Black slaves.

It is worth noting that Kate Chopin was a racist in daily life, and that the historical Chopin formed a sharp contrast with the historical Harriet Beecher Stowe (see Shen, *Style and Rhetoric* 84–85). If *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* provides a more or less realistic picture of the cruelty of the white master toward the slaves, “Désirée’s Baby” presents a picture contrary to Chopin’s life experiences. While Chopin’s father-in-law was a very harsh master, Désirée’s is described as very benevolent toward his slaves. While Louisiana’s racial



caste system forbade interracial marriage by law, in “*Désirée’s Baby*” the white master bearing “the oldest and proudest” name in Louisiana marries a Black woman (though in Paris). Significantly, “*Désirée’s Baby*” was written at a time (November 1892) when the South’s racial system had long been officially abolished and the defense of that system could only be made implicitly. Not surprisingly, the narrative has an antiracist overt plot, but behind it, there exists a racist undercurrent unobtrusively mythologizing the Southern racial system.<sup>4</sup>



Now I move on to KELLY A. MARSH, whose response focuses on the efficacy of my model of dual narrative dynamics for approaching texts that critique not only privileged women protagonists openly but also the patriarchal system implicitly. She draws a helpful distinction between two kinds of feminist texts. In one kind, the criticism of patriarchy is clearly in evidence, but in the other, the systemic or societal critique is obscured. While I’ve explained the obscurity—in terms of a “division of labor”—that the societal critique is only implicitly carried out in a covert progression behind the personal critique in the overt plot, Kelly illuminates how authors have kept the societal critique implicit by “construct[ing] a particular relation between negative ethical judgments and empathetic affective responses that effectively keeps the critique of patriarchy in the background” (Marsh 42–43). I find Kelly’s account convincing and enlightening, which points up the necessity of having the model of dual dynamics in analyzing such texts. Without breaking free of the Aristotelian tradition focusing on the plot development and without consciously searching for the possible existence of a covert progression, critics are hard put to find the societal critique behind the overt plot that “consistently thwart[s] the authorial audience’s empathy for a protagonist who draws our strongly negative ethical judgment” (Marsh 43). Kelly’s discussion well shows that in texts like Mansfield’s “*Revelations*” and Clare Boothe’s play *The Women* (1936), it is not sufficient just to have Patrick Colm Hogan’s model of “causal complexity” (see below) since “[j]udgment without empathy discourages readers from seeking the systemic causes of the protagonist’s suffering” (Marsh 43), and that is why the social causes and the systemic critique have very much eluded previous critical attention. When we see the text in terms of “dual narrative dynamics” rather than just “causal complexity,” our eyes will be open not only to the hidden social causes but

also to how the same textual choices *simultaneously* generate two contrastive kinds of thematic significance respectively targeting criticism at the female protagonists and the patriarchal society (see my illustrative analysis in the target essay and Shen, *Style and Rhetoric* 102–09).



As for PATRICK COLM HOGAN's very kind and thought-provoking response, I need first of all clarify my basic position. He takes it that I try to "overthrow and render obsolete the entire history of narrative theory since Aristotle," but this is not what I intend to do. As I have expressed again and again in the target essay, what I try to do is merely "extending attention from single progression to dual progression" (Shen, "Covert" 2), that is, looking behind the plot development for the "covert progression" and exploring the interaction between them in those narratives that contain such "dual dynamics."

Patrick comes up with the helpful notion of "causal complexity," which well applies to Mansfield's "Revelations" as it is a matter of unearthing the social causes underlying the female protagonist's behaviour. However, it is not fortuitous that, over the past century, the social causes in question have eluded critical attention. It points to the fact that in such a narrative, causal complexity may only be recognizable by paying attention to what I call "dual dynamics"—as well explained by Kelly Marsh. What is more, even if critics can find the social causes concerned, without going beyond the Aristotelian tradition, they won't be able to see how the same textual choices simultaneously generate contrastive or even opposite meanings along two separate trajectories of signification, let alone perceiving their simultaneously contradictory and complementary relation from the beginning to the ending of the text.

As regards Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," I find Patrick's interpretation impressive, but it only deepens and broadens our understanding of the plot development in terms of the murderer's shame (for a discussion of the related issue of the murderer's guilt, see Shen, *Style and Rhetoric* 36–39). Patrick's account does not even touch on the two covert progressions of "overall dramatic irony" in the form of self-condemnation and self-conviction, respectively. This is not surprising since the two undercurrents have nothing to do with "causal complexity." The undercurrent of "self-condemnation" rests

with Poe's making the murderer the only dissembling villain throughout the narrative and finally making him condemn dissemblance as a villainous act. The covert progression of self-conviction depends on the interaction between the murderer's continuous insistence on his being *sane* or *not mad* and the "insanity debate" in that historical context.<sup>5</sup> Precisely because Patrick's admirable discussion of "The Tell-Tale Heart" only helps with the understanding of the plot development, *without touching on the two covert progressions*, it illustrates the need of going beyond the Aristotelian tradition to look for covert narrative movements paralleling the plot development.

In effect, in most of the narratives I have discussed, the dual dynamics don't simply yield a more inclusive understanding of causality. Rather, these narratives set up different kinds of relations between the overt plot and the covert progression. In other words and more specifically, Patrick's "causal complexity" is not applicable to Chopin's "Désirée's Baby" (where we have two story-worlds with opposed racial stances), Mansfield's "Psychology" (a man and a woman's mutual love in the plot *versus* the woman's unrequited love for the man in the covert progression) and "The Fly" (a symbolic plot *versus* a nonsymbolic covert progression), and Bierce's "A Horseman in the Sky" (a plot bitterly attacking the cruelty and inhumanity of war *versus* a covert progression positively conveying the paramount importance of carrying out one's duty). As regards these narratives where Patrick's "causal complexity" does not apply, if we do not go beyond the Aristotelian tradition and extend attention to the "dual dynamics," we'll undoubtedly be left with a partial or distorted picture of the story-worlds, themes, and emotions in Patrick's formulation.



Now I proceed to DANIEL CANDEL BORMANN, whose response starts with an anecdote that helps drive home the essence of "covert progression" and "dual dynamics." Before he attended my one-hour keynote lecture at the fifth ENN conference, he only paid attention to the plot development, but after hearing my lecture, Daniel "[broke] free of the bondage" of the long critical tradition since Aristotle and opened his eyes to a covert progression. In his brilliant essay entitled "Covert Progression in Comics: A Reading of Frank Miller's 300," he first "reads the overt plot," and "then analyzes the covert progression," another narrative movement not only "mimicking the overt plot, but also reinterpreting it" (abstract).

However, in his response to my target essay, Daniel casts doubt on whether the undercurrent he revealed in 300 is indeed a covert progression. Interestingly, what caused his doubt is an observation I made elsewhere that the covert progression “often contains various textual details that appear peripheral or irrelevant to the themes of the plot” (*Style and Rhetoric* 3). There, I used the term “often” to qualify the observation, and the predicate verb is “contain”—the same covert progression *can also* “contain” events that are important to the plot development (see below). In my present target essay, I’ve also taken precautions to qualify my argument. Only after analyzing the covert progression in Mansfield’s “The Fly,” I came up with Thesis Seven: “a covert progression *may* [or may not] reside *to a significant extent* in textual choices which appear peripheral or digressive to the plot development” (12, italics added). In his response, Daniel has overlooked not only the qualifications, but also the essential difference between my term “contain” (apart from what is involved, *other* things *can also* be contained) and his own substitute for my term, “consist of” (*only* able to contain what is involved), and so he describes covert progression in my eyes as *invariably* “consisting of ‘textual details that appear peripheral or irrelevant to the themes of the plot’” (“And What” 54). It is this misunderstanding that has made him worry about whether the undercurrent he discerned in 300 can qualify as a covert progression since it shares the same basic sequence of events with the plot development.

To put things in perspective, let’s leave aside stylistic details and focus on the sequence of events. As regards the small number of narratives discussed in the target essay, we already need to distinguish four different kinds of relation between covert progression and plot development in this aspect. First, the two parallel narrative movements share the same sequence of events, such as in Kate Chopin’s “Désirée’s Baby” and Bierce’s “A Horseman in the Sky,” where the same story facts are made by the implied author to convey simultaneously two contrastive or opposed kinds of meaning. Second, the covert and overt progressions are based on what only seems to be the same sequence of events, such as in Mansfield’s “Psychology,” where what appear to be the male protagonist’s mental activities in the plot development turn out to be the female protagonist’s mental activities as projected onto the man in the covert progression. Third, the two narrative movements are to a great extent based on the same sequence of events, but the covert progression also rests with some fictional facts that appear digressive to

the plot, such as in Katherine Mansfield's "Revelations" and Franz Kafka's "The Judgment." Fourth, the covert progression resides to a great extent in fictional facts that appear peripheral or digressive to the plot development, such as in Mansfield's "The Fly" and the undercurrent concerning self-condemnation in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart."

Miller's 300 pertains to the first kind of relation, where the same sequence of events forms the basis of *both* the plot development and the covert progression. Partly attributable to the bondage of the Aristotelian tradition, Daniel identifies plot development with the sequence of events. With this identification, since the covert progression in 300 shares the same event sequence with the plot, Daniel regards the covert progression as happening "in plot" or as a narrative movement "where plot becomes crucial" ("And What" 54). But in my view, the covert progression, though dependent on the same sequence of events as the plot, has its own separate movement. It's for this reason that Daniel can characterize the covert progression as "reinterpreting" the plot.

In his essay published in *Poetics Today*, Daniel well captures, in my eyes, the independence of covert progression from the plot: "Covert progression can substitute, run parallel to, or offer an alternative to the overt plot" (Candel, "Covert" 706).<sup>6</sup> The two independent narrative movements may or may not have the "suspense-curiosity-surprise" pattern (a standard pattern in traditional plots of resolution, but unseen in modern plots of revelation, such as in Mansfield's "Revelations" and "The Fly"). In a narrative with such a pattern, if "from the beginning," the text is "open to two options" (Daniel's words), in the Aristotelian tradition we would opt for one option and suppress the other or see a disruptive/subversive force in the middle of the plot development (as Daniel did before attending my lecture), but if we break free of the bondage of the tradition and open our eyes to a covert progression, we would at once accept both options and explore two contrastive narrative movements throughout the text (as Daniel did after the lecture).

Daniel rightly points out that "the complexity of 300 cannot be gauged adequately if not through its covert progression" ("Covert" 706). His insightful exploration of the covert progression behind the plot in 300 has enabled us to see a much fuller and more balanced picture of this narrative. I greatly appreciate Daniel's successful extension of the investigation of covert progression to the graphic novel, and I much look forward to his revealing more covert progressions in narratives of this genre in the days to come.



Now I come to the response from JAN ALBER, who, while acknowledging that my investigations of covert progression “undoubtedly shed new light” on the texts concerned, has raised a series of provocative questions, which offer a good opportunity for me to clarify various issues. The first issue concerns whether, in terms of the relationship between plot development and covert progression, we should give up the dichotomous distinction between complementation and subversion in favor of a scale by adding “the category of gradual or partial transformation” (Alber, “Binary” 60). Significantly, the plot development and the covert progression are two separate narrative movements, and one never “transforms” the other, but they can contradict or contrast with each other in different degrees. Jan has singled out Kafka’s “The Judgement” and Mansfield’s “Revelations” to illustrate “shades of gray between complementation and subversion.” To Jan, the relationship between the dual dynamics in the former “is more expressive of supplementation than” that in the latter, “where the covert progression clearly challenges the meaning of the overt plot development.” What Jan has overlooked is that, like “The Judgment” where the father–son conflict in the plot is a result of social pressure as conveyed by the covert progression, in “Revelations,” Monica’s failings in the plot are likewise a result of social injustice as represented by the covert progression. In both narratives, the covert progression (where the father, son, and Monica are all victims of society, inviting readers’ sympathy) complements the plot development, similarly forming an “extension” (revealing the social causes) of what the plot depicts (see the dialogue between Patrick Hogan and me).

The second related issue is about whether it is justifiable to classify Mansfield’s “Revelations” into the category of complementation while classifying Chopin’s “*Désirée’s Baby*” into the category of subversion. To Jan, the covert progression in the former is “just like the covert progression” in the latter in terms of subversion. There is, in effect, a fundamental difference between the two narratives that has eluded Jan: In “*Désirée’s Baby*,” the anti-racist plot development is only a false appearance, which is overthrown as soon as the racist covert progression comes into sight, while the covert progression in “Revelations” is essentially an “extension” of the plot development. The other prose narrative, Mansfield’s “Psychology” that I’ve put into

the “subversion” category, shares the same essential feature with “*Désirée’s Baby*” (also Chopin’s “*La Belle Zoraïde*”)—the revelation of the covert progression overturns the plot development as a false appearance (a deceptive cloak or a functional foil). Jan finds inconsistency between my dichotomous distinction and my claim “The covert progression and the plot development contrast and interact with each other in diversified ways” (Shen, “Covert” 6). Indeed, the claim suggests a scale rather than a dichotomy, but the scale only exists within the broad “complementation” category, where we have a gradation from “harmonious” complementation like in Poe’s “*The Tell-Tale Heart*” to highly contrastive complementation. I think I should have classified Miller’s 300, the graphic novel Daniel Candel Bormann analyzed, into the category of complementation since its plot development is far from a false appearance. In the broad category of complementation (where the plot development always has a substantial role to play), Miller’s 300 would stand at the most contrastive pole and Mansfield’s “*Revelations*” at a less contrastive point. With this clarification, it should have become clear that both my dichotomy and my claim are tenable and necessary.

The third issue refers to whether “the author is totally unaware of the covert progression,” or whether “he or she is aware of it but considers it to be rather insignificant” (Alber, “Binary” 61). From my rhetorical stance, I’m more than pleased that Jan is now concerned with authorial intention, which he tends to preclude and only advocate empirical investigation of readers (see also “Rhetorical”). In the target essay, I’ve referred to the full-length discussions of all the covert progressions concerned, whose discovery is based on careful exploration of the textual patterns that point to authorial design, whether conscious or intuitive, throughout the narrative. As for significance, Jan asserts that “[c]overt progressions are clearly an important and hitherto neglected phenomenon” (59). But of course, he can say that although the general phenomenon is important, its significance for particular narratives can vary from narrative to narrative. My case for authorial judgments of significance is closely tied to finding the patterns of authorial design and the demonstration of the relations between those patterns. Why would an author design such patterns if he or she did not think they were significant? We can infer, for instance, that Chopin, Kafka, and Mansfield considered the relevant covert progressions important because they created such elaborate undercurrents

to convey the racist stance or reveal the social causes behind the plot development.

The fourth issue concerns whether in the twenty-first century “we still need to zoom in on such ‘deeper-level meanings’” (Alber, “Binary” 61). As regards professional critics, university teachers, and students of literature, my answer is “Yes.” Even in this century, literature departments in tertiary education in most, if not all, countries, are still concerned with the deeper-level meanings of literary works. I believe *Style*, like other professional journals, would not publish essays that merely “attend to the surfaces of texts rather than plumb their depths” (Best and Marcus 1–2, qtd. in Alber, “Binary” 61). However, as regards readers who read literature only for recreation or pastime, my answer is “No.” The discovery of covert progression rests with careful exploration of the text over and over again, which is surely beyond the needs and time of ordinary readers. Whether Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart” is read as a simple narrative or whether “Revelations” is treated merely as a story directing irony at female neurosis can be of no significance to nonprofessional readers. While I was writing the target essay, I had in mind professional readers like Jan, who claims to “have always been a great admirer of [my] work,” “especially” of my book from Routledge (*Style and Rhetoric of Short Narrative Fiction*) devoted to revealing covert progressions, which seems to indicate his appreciation of zooming in on deeper meanings—not surprising for a professor of literature even in this century.

The fifth issue concerns whether it is justifiable to claim that missing the covert progression will result in a partial or false picture. As regards the “Judgment,” Jan mentions the covert progression conveying “the struggle between the individual and society” (60), where both father and son are victims of social pressure, an undercurrent that contrasts with the plot development focusing on the father–son conflict, where the son is a victim of the father, or vice versa. Wouldn’t it be a partial picture if we fail to perceive “the struggle between the individual and society?” As for “*Désirée’s Baby*” Jan acknowledges that it has a racist covert progression that subverts the anti-racist plot development. Wouldn’t it be a false picture if we only perceive the anti-racist plot development? If Jan gives a positive answer to these questions, and I believe he would, then he may no longer argue that neglecting the covert progressions is only a matter of “look[ing] at the narrative from different angles” and that such neglect is “desirable” (62).



The last issue concerns the status or purpose of the fifteen theses I've presented in the target essay. Jan points out that the majority—nine theses—are explicitly concerned with “how to discover covert progressions,” including “where to find them.” Four of the remaining six theses are also concerned, though less directly, with the same purpose by explaining why the covert progression has remained unseen (theses 5 and 9), or by pointing out that a narrative may contain two covert progressions or one part of the same textual fragment may be pivotal to the overt plot and the other part to the covert progression (theses 10 and 11). Since covert progressions, in Jan's words, are “an important and hitherto neglected phenomenon” (59), it seems right and proper for me to focus on how to uncover them in proposing the theses. Jan has read my Routledge book, where I offered a systematic list of eight theses on “how to uncover the covert progression” (Shen, *Style and Rhetoric* 146–49). In the target essay, instead of presenting the thirteen theses in the same abstract systematic manner, I've presented one to four theses after the practical analysis of a narrative that illustrates and highlights the relevant theses, so that readers can gain a clearer picture of the theses.



Now I move on to H. PORTER ABBOTT's response, which offers an excellent explication of my central concern, making clear that “[r]eading for the plot has blinded us to the possibility of covert progressions that either expand or subvert the meanings that emerge from a purely plot-centered reading”; thus the perception of the covert progression “requires ‘breaking free of the shackles’ of a plot-centered critical tradition that goes back to Aristotle” (Abbott, “Thoughts” 64). However, the stylistic-centered picture of covert progressions that Porter presents is somewhat partial. The same problem occurs in Daniel Candel Bormann's response, and in my reply I've made a classification of four types of covert progressions (see above). Of the four types, the stylistic-centered ones as described by Porter only pertain to the fourth type, which contrasts with the first type where “the two parallel narrative movements share the same sequence of events.” Interestingly, Daniel's response well shows that the first type does have the primordial power to elicit curiosity, suspense, and surprise, which Porter precludes from covert progressions because his attention is limited to the fourth type. One factor underlying Porter's partial understanding is his taking stylistic triggers for discovering covert progression as main

constituents of this undercurrent. In the cases of Chopin's "Désirée's Baby," Bierce's "A Horseman in the Sky," and Miller's *300* as examples of the first type, stylistic elements only function as triggers for us to discover an undercurrent sharing the same sequence of events with the plot but moving in a contrastive or subversive thematic orientation.

Porter asks whether a covert progression, when brought to light, would no longer be covert. Well, I call it "covert" primarily because the author has created it as an undercurrent behind the overt plot. In the future, even when the creation of dual narrative dynamics becomes a well-known narrative strategy, so long as authors still design the "covert progression" as an undercurrent behind the plot, it will remain "covert" though more easily recognizable.

As for Porter's question, "Do overt plot and overt progression initiate a process of merging at a higher level?" (Abbott, "Thoughts" 65), it depends to a certain extent on how we understand the term "merge." The covert progression and the plot development are always two separate narrative movements, each standing on its own (see my reply to James Phelan), no matter whether they pertain to the broad category of "complementation" or "subversion" (see my reply to Jan Alber). In terms of the "complementation" category, when the covert and the overt are in harmony, we see increasingly how they together convey the significance of the narrative; and when they are in different degrees of conflict, we gradually see how these separate narrative movements are conveying, along contrastive parallel trajectories of signification, complicated thematic significance and complex character images through conflicting and counterpointing each other. If we understand the term "merge" as a matter of joining forces in generating the total significance of the narrative, then my answer to Porter's question would be positive.

As regards the category of subversion, the covert progression will overthrow the overt plot as a false appearance. While the "false" and the "true" narrative movements coexist in the narrative, readers may opt for one and reject the other. In terms of Chopin's "Désirée's Baby" and "La Belle Zoraïde," racist readers will only accept the racist covert progression and anti-racist readers will reject it. As for Mansfield's "Psychology," readers will see how the "false" plot development (where the man and the woman love each other) sets off the "true" covert progression (where the woman cherishes unrequited love for the man). That is to say, in the category of subversion, no matter how we understand the term "merge," the answer to Porter's question will be negative. It should be noted that, in both categories, we'll usually first see

the plot development, and only then gradually perceive the covert progression(s), and our interpretation will gradually change with the increasingly clear view of the two or three parallel narrative movements.

I much appreciate Porter's extension of my theory to longer fictional forms like novels, where he sees "a transposition of [overt and covert] progressions" in Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. I'm not a Twain expert to judge the validity of the analysis, but I do find Porter's approach impressive because it demonstrates a good understanding of dual narrative dynamics. As for Wolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, this narrative has what Chatman defines as a "plot of revelation" versus a "plot of resolution" (47–48). With his critical acumen, Porter finds that Clarissa's childhood trauma of seeing "her sister Sylvia crushed to death by a falling tree" underlies "much of what we see riding on the surface of the novel." In other words, he smartly perceives Clarissa's "skittishness, her deliberate meandering, the jerkiness of her mind" as "effects derived from a cause." Much as I admire Porter's analysis, I have to say that this is merely a deeper account of the "plot of revelation" itself, rather than of a covert progression behind the plot development.



In their very kind and friendly response, BRIAN RICHARDSON and TUNG-AN WEI have raised some important questions that I'm eager to answer. The first question concerns whether covert progressions constitute a typically modernist phenomenon. My answer is "Yes." Indeed, covert progressions, whose creation requires elaborative skills and designs, are typically found in modernist narratives. The second question is whether the undescribed contemporaneous history may serve as a covert progression. To this, my answer is negative because the undescribed movement of history is only the historical context of the plot development itself. The third question concerns whether my narrative model expects and presupposes completeness and coherence in the text. To this, my answer is both positive and negative. Unless textual elements in different parts of the text form another thematically coherent undercurrent, we will not have a covert progression. But my model does not presuppose that texts will be coherent, ambiguous, incoherent, or anything else. Instead, it sees covert progressions as narrative movements that may or may not have a resolution. In Mansfield's "The Fly," for instance, I've revealed a covert progression that does not have any

resolution (i.e., it is not “complete”), forming a contrast with the covert progression in “Psychology.”

The fourth question is “Are there partially covert progressions, or covert partial progressions?” (Richardson and Wei 69). This question indicates the powerful influence of the Aristotelian tradition centering on the plot development. Because of this influence, Brian and Wei treat covert progression as a “kind of plotting” and they wonder “whether a covert progression can be part of the plot and not just something that supplements the plot” (70). In the target essay, I’ve devoted much space to the point that a covert progression is another narrative movement paralleling the plot development throughout the narrative (see my response to Phelan in terms of the distinction between “a single, albeit complex, progression” and “double” progressions). Due to the powerful influence of the Aristotelian tradition, Brian and Wei take Henry James’s “The Figure in the Carpet,” a narrative only containing a plot development with ambiguous hidden meanings, as a narrative containing a covert progression behind the plot. And while I’ve made an essential distinction between Bierce’s “A Horseman in the Sky” (which has a covert progression) and his “The Affair at Coulter’s Notch” (which does not contain a covert progression), Brian and Wei put them on a par with each other. This points to what I’ve said in the target essay: “When our mind is confined to the plot development, we tend to become ‘numb’ to an essential difference between the two narratives” (13). Moreover, without perceiving the covert progression as another narrative movement with a contrastive or even opposite thematic orientation behind the plot, they take the covert progression as a phenomenon perceived by a “single character” in the plot development itself (Richardson and Wei 69).

In their response, Brian and Wei have also raised questions concerning “two implied authors” and the interpretation of “*Désirée’s Baby*,” to which I’ve already given detailed answers: see my reply to James Phelan.



In his thought-provoking response, HENRIK ZETTERBERG-NIELSEN, for all his kind words about my work and knowledge, finds the target essay falling short in quite a few aspects. I am grateful for the opportunity to further clarify some points. First, he claims that the target essay “never defines the proposed concept” of “covert progression” (72), so let me restate what the target essay

has spelled out: the covert progression is “a hidden dynamic paralleling, at a deeper level, the [plot development] throughout the text,” an undercurrent that “conveys contrastive or even opposite thematic significance, character images and aesthetic values” in relation to the plot, and thus it “complicates or has the potential to complicate readers’ response in various ways” (Shen, “Covert” 2). Second, Zetterberg-Nielsen finds it “misleading and unhelpful” to refer to “cognitive narratology, rhetorical narratology, unnatural narratology, and fictionality theory as one big Aristotelian narrative tradition” (72). Here let me quote from the response by H. Porter Abbott that to see the covert progression behind the plot “requires ‘breaking free of the shackles’ of a plot-centered critical tradition that goes back to Aristotle” (“Thoughts” 64). The difference between Abbott and Zetterberg-Nielsen is that Abbott sees clearly that I’m merely concerned with the object of investigation, but Zetterberg-Nielsen has mixed up the object with the different approaches to that object. No matter *how diversified in approach*, critics only investigate one narrative movement—the plot development—since Aristotle. Even cognitive narratology only pays attention to readers’ responses to that one narrative movement in mimetic narratives. Interesting, while quoting my qualifier “mimetic” in “narrative dynamics of mimetic fiction,” Zetterberg-Nielsen includes “unnatural narratology,” which is only concerned with *antimimetic* fiction (see Richardson, “Unnatural”; Shen, “Unnatural”) when referring to the “Aristotelian narrative tradition.” Because Zetterberg-Nielsen has not distinguished the object of investigation from the approaches to the object, he wonders whether my suggestion of breaking free from the Aristotelian tradition is “supposed to subvert, supplement, complement, or replace literary theory, narrative theory, or narratology respectively” (73). When attention comes back to the object of investigation rather than different critical approaches to the object, one will no longer have this question, and one will no longer wonder about whether my concern with covert progression is “a part of, and extension of said tradition, or an alternative to it” (Zetterberg-Nielsen 73)—one will readily see that my approach forms an extension of the Aristotelian tradition by directing attention to another narrative movement paralleling the plot development.

Moreover, without distinguishing the object from the approaches, Zetterberg-Nielsen sees equal or even more difference between Aristotle and Peter Brooks or James Phelan in comparison with me. But Brooks and Phelan, with their relevant books respectively entitled *Reading for the Plot* and *Reading People, Reading Plots*, are clearly in the Aristotelian tradition focusing on the plot development, which is dissimilar from my concern with

a covert progression behind/paralleling the plot. Zetterberg-Nielsen also finds my statement “Brooks’s emphasis in his book is on the forward movement of plotting and of reading” problematic because he believes that “the core of Brooks’s interest is in the back and forth movement” as “captured in his succinct expression of ‘anticipation or retrospection’” (73). But we need to be aware that, only when the movement of the plot development is “onward,” can there be “anticipation” and “retrospection,” both defined in relation to the onwardness of the plot.

Interestingly, when Zetterberg-Nielsen’s attention is paid to the object of investigation, he still fails to see covert progression as another narrative movement. Thus, the “main differentia specifica” he finds between covert progression and “similar dynamics” is that covert progression “has to run throughout the text (as opposed to a hidden clue or a sudden revelation for the attentive reader)” (Zetterberg-Nielsen 73). But I’ve emphasized in the target essay that what makes “covert progression” distinct is not only a matter of being a continuous narrative movement but also of being *another* separate narrative movement *functioning on its own behind the plot development*, rather than a covert device *within the plot development itself*.

Also interestingly, when Zetterberg-Nielsen sees the overt and covert as two narrative movements, he calls covert progression “the covert plot” and he asks “if there are (at least) two pervasive plots clearly informing the dynamics of a text, how can you tell which one is overt and which is covert?” (74). He has singled out Kafka’s “The Judgment” to prove the indistinguishability of the covert from overt. He claims that a “quick search immediately reveals scores of articles from several decades centrally concerned with the narrative’s depiction of the relation between individual and society” (Zetterberg-Nielsen 74), but he has *not* given a *single* reference of the “scores of articles.” Before publishing my essay discussing the covert progression in “The Judgment” (Shen, “Covert Progression, Language”), I carefully searched existing criticism and found the critical consensus over the past century that its plot development centers on “the conflict between father and son” (Binder 14; see also Flores; Berman; Brod 129–30). Indeed, Kafka himself has unequivocally described the narrative as “a journey around father and son” (Kafka, *Letters* 267, *Diaries* 278). I guess what Zetterberg-Nielsen has found in his “quick search” are comments on Kafka’s literary creation in general—after “The Judgment,” in Kafka’s later works such as “The Metamorphosis,” *The Trial*, and *The Castle*, the plot development itself centers on the conflict

between individual and society. That is to say, while the conflict between individual and society is only the thematic concern of the *covert* progression in “The Judgment,” it becomes the thematic concern of the *overt* plot development itself in Kafka’s later works. When this picture comes into view, the distinction between overt and covert will become “straightforward.”

Zetterberg-Nielsen has also found problematic the distinction between covert progression and covert plot. In the target essay, I’ve introduced two different concepts of “covert plot,” one proposed by Cedric Watts as a local device in the plot, and the other put forward by David H. Richter in the shape of a previously neglected continuous storyline/branch of the plot development. Zetterberg-Nielsen has mixed up these two, treating Richter’s interpretation of the neglected “storyline” as only “a local observation” (75). Zetterberg-Nielsen casts grave doubt on the validity of Richter’s interpretation. I’m not in a position to judge whose reading is more valid; suffice it to say that different readings of the relevant storyline in the plot development do not affect the distinction between “covert plot” (as a storyline of the plot development itself) and “covert progression” (as another narrative movement).

Zetterberg-Nielsen also challenges my revelation of two covert progressions in Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart.” Concerning the covert progression of self-condemnation, I’ve pointed out that the murderer’s cry at the policemen “Villains! dissemble no more!” is a matter of “his unconsciously projecting his own dissemblance unto the policemen.” Zetterberg-Nielsen seems to have misunderstood the expression “project . . . onto” in saying that I was arguing that the murderer “is not actually characterizing the policemen” and he tries to show that from the murderer’s “perspective . . . the policemen are indeed dissembling” (75). But I’ve said clearly that the murderer “accus[es] the policemen to be dissembling” villains (“Covert” 24), an accusation that constitutes his unconscious self-condemnation since he himself is the only dissembling villain throughout the narrative.

The second covert progression of “self-conviction” rests on the murderer’s insistence on his being sane and the “insanity debate” in that mid-nineteenth-century historical context, a context where only *insanity* can qualify for legal exemption and where a murderer’s insistence on his being sane amounts to unwitting self-conviction. Zetterberg-Nielsen again seems to have misunderstood my argument since he sees it as a matter of buying into the “vulgar popular belief that the accused comes to confirm his guilt, his insanity or to self-accuse independent of whether his answer affirms or denies the charge

of insanity and guilt" (76). Apparently, he has missed what I've really argued for—the dramatic irony of the murderer's claiming to be sane in committing the murder in a context where only *insanity* can qualify for legal exemption.

As regards this narrative, Zetterberg-Nielsen briefly puts forward "a possible covert progression, which is constituted by the way in which Poe strategically plays on homophones throughout the text" (76). Although I'm impressed by Zetterberg-Nielsen's insightful analysis of the phonological level that has significant consequences for the understanding of the character narrator's actions, I have to point out that phonology in itself cannot constitute another narrative movement paralleling the plot development. Of the four types of covert progression (see my reply to Daniel Candel Bormann), even in the fourth type, where stylistic details play a most important role, characters and events are still indispensable. The typical example of this type is Mansfield's "The Fly," where, as I mentioned in the target essay, the boss's enfeebled friend, the boss's newly decorated office, the boss's son, the old clerk Macey, and the fly all implicitly function as a vehicle to target irony at the boss's vanity and self-importance. What Zetterberg-Nielsen has discovered is no more than a phonological aspect of the plot development itself (for a previous discussion of the function of "Evil-Eye" in the plot, see Tucker).

Finally, Zetterberg-Nielsen challenges the necessity of having dual models. Well, we need a dual model of event structure because the overt plot and the covert progression display different event structures, such as a structure of *revelation* versus a structure of *resolution* in "Psychology"; we need other dual models because the overt plot and the covert progression convey contrastive or even opposite thematic significance, character images, and aesthetic values. Zetterberg-Nielsen does not see the need to have a dual model because "**one** author can create an overt misogynistic plot and a covert feminist [progression]" (76). Since he has marked "**one**" with boldface, he seems to argue that there is only one agent. This is surely the case (see my reply to James Phelan). The point is that if one author does create a feminist covert progression behind an overt misogynistic plot, we would need to have dual models to account for them since we would be faced with two different authorial stances, character images, narrative distances, and narratorial tones, and so on in these two thematically contrastive narrative movements. If we only have a single model for each element, we'll be facing a dilemma as to which narrative movement to describe and the resultant picture is bound to be partial and lopsided.

Zetterberg-Nielsen argues that "when a person uses irony, we do not assume that this person becomes two persons, creates a dual story and



discourse, or projects two distinct character images" (77). Surely, when a person uses irony, we only need a single "model of irony." But when there is a covert progression, we may have two contrastive layers of irony. For instance, in Mansfield's "Revelations," the plot development directs irony against the female protagonist's weaknesses while the covert progression, by contrast, directs irony against patriarchal oppression, a social oppression that underlies the female protagonist's weaknesses (see the analysis in the target essay). In the covert progression, the female protagonist, who becomes a victim of patriarchy, calls for reader's sympathy and the narrative distance among author–narrator–character–reader is notably shortened. To account for such contrastive irony, we need to have "a dual model of irony," "a dual model of character images," and "a dual model of story and discourse" (the overt plot and covert progression convey the *contrastive* irony through *two different kinds* of interaction between story and discourse).



As for RICHARD WALSH's response, since he asserts that "Shen's argument rests upon the interpretative utility of the concept" of "covert progression" (78), I'll begin with the two narratives he has singled out for close examination in order to cast doubt on that utility. In terms of Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," Richard says, "The presumed anomaly on which the reading [of a covert progression] turns is the [murderer's cry at the policemen] 'Villains! Dissemble no more!'—given that we have no good reason for thinking that the policemen concerned are either villains or dissembling (Shen, ["Covert"] 15). But their supposed dissembling consists, fairly explicitly, in [the murderer's] deranged belief that they are pretending not to hear what (he thinks) he hears. There is nothing covert about this; it is a straightforward effect of unreliable narration" (Walsh 81). But what I mean by "covert progression" is far from a matter of local unreliable narration. In this narrative, starting from his seven-day preparation for the murder to his hiding the corpse, and finally to his pretending to be innocent in front of the policemen, the murderer has been unceasingly dissembling and has continuously been taking delight in his own dissemblance. Then at the end, he condemns dissemblance as a villainous act. Thus, the murderer's unreliable cry "Villains! Dissemble no more!" is a fulcrum of *the continuous undercurrent with the overall dramatic irony of self-condemnation*. My claim is that this covert undercurrent parallels the plot development.

The following statement by Richard sheds light on this interpretive disagreement: “Shen’s impulse to divide progression [. . .] plays into an atemporal notion of thematic significance. [. . .] this seems most explicit in thesis twelve, about cases in which ‘the fulcrum of the covert progression is constituted by one or a few very subtle stylistic choices’ (Shen, [“Covert”] 18), begging the question, it seems, of how the covert progression is sustained, as a progression distinct from that carried by the plot” (Walsh 79). Well, I’ve used “fulcrum” as a metaphor, referring to the crucial pillar(s) of the covert progression. In “The Tell-Tale Heart,” when the murderer’s cry is rendered by a Chinese translator into “You villains! Dissemble no more!” the covert progression conveying the overall dramatic irony of self-condemnation is immediately dissolved (Shen, “Covert” 23–24). So the cry is, and is only, the “fulcrum” (the crucial pillar) of *the continuous undercurrent progressing from the beginning to the ending of the narrative*. More generally, I agree with Richard’s point that progression implies movement through time, and in my full-length analyses of the covert progressions referred to in the target essay, I have traced all those movements throughout the narratives, but to stay within the limited space of the target essay, I had to abridge my analyses.

The other narrative Richard has singled out for close examination is Mansfield’s “Psychology,” where I’ve found a covert progression focusing on the woman’s unrequited love for the man behind the overt plot depicting the man and the woman’s mutual love. The covert progression arises from Mansfield’s creating the continuous undercurrent of a single focalization via the woman, so that what looks overtly like the man’s is ultimately hers (see Shen, “Dual Textual Dynamics”). My exploration of the covert progression through analyzing various subtle stylistic choices is prompted by a passage in which, as pointed out by Richard, the crucial question concerns whether the free indirect discourse “What devil made him say that instead of the other?” is the woman’s thought or the man’s thought. To answer this question, let’s take a look at the passage:

1. The clock struck six [. . .].
2. [. . .] There was another way for them to speak to each other, and in the new way he wanted to murmur: “Do you feel this too? Do you understand it at all?” . . .
3. Instead, to his horror, he heard himself say: “I must be off; I’m meeting Brand at six.”

4. **What devil made him say that instead of the other?** *She jumped—simply jumped out of her chair*, and he heard her crying: “You must rush, then. He’s so punctual. *Why didn’t you say so before?*”

5. “*You’ve hurt me; you’ve hurt me! We’ve failed!*” said *her secret self* while she handed him his hat and stick, *smiling gaily*. *She wouldn’t give him a moment for another word*, but ran along the passage and opened the big outer door. (Mansfield, “Psychology” 152–53; italics, boldface, and paragraph numbering added)

The woman and the man are both writers. The man pops in just for a short visit, and now he takes leave to meet his friend as scheduled. Richard acknowledges that if, as I’ve argued, “What devil made him say that instead of *the other* [the sweet words the man wants to utter to the woman]” is the woman’s thought, we would have a crucial clue for the covert progression: “because it presupposes knowledge of the unspoken ‘other’ in the man’s mind, to which the woman of course does not have access, it is also recalcitrant material indicating a covert progression in which the ‘sweet words’ he wanted to murmur *are actually imagined by her, not by him*” (Walsh 81, italics added). However, Richard argues that the free indirect discourse concerned is the man’s thought: “the idiom more plausibly his, with *its exasperation* and its *abrupt, irritable* gesture of ‘the other,’” and therefore the covert progression is a mere “construct” by myself (Walsh 81).

Early in the narrative, Mansfield has made it clear that the woman is very romantic and full of imagination and that the man is, by contrast, unimaginative and unromantic (“Psychology” 148). Leaving aside the feasibility of the unromantic man’s imagining his murmuring loving words to the woman, it is quite impossible for the man, while immersed in his imagination of such loving murmuring, to take leave *out of control* and *to his horror*. Significantly, the taking leave is *scheduled* for the man but *unexpected to the woman* who thought that the man would stay to murmur sweet words to her in a loving exchange. Starting from the fourth paragraph of the passage, we see increasingly clearly that it is to the woman’s horror to hear the man’s taking leave (“You’ve hurt me; you’ve hurt me! We’ve failed!”), a horror that she projects onto the man. Indeed, the irritated “What devil made him say this instead of the other?” is immediately followed by the woman’s irritated behavior (“She jumped—simply jumped out of her chair”) while exasperatedly bursting out “Why didn’t you say so before?” Following the irritated thought, Mansfield *only* depicts the woman’s secret exasperation and irritation. From the woman’s being badly hurt by the man’s taking leave and from her

having to suppress her feelings in front of the man, we can infer that she cherishes unrequited love for the man.

In effect, starting from the very beginning, the imaginative and romantic woman constantly projects her feelings onto the dull and unromantic man (see Shen, “Dual Textual Dynamics”). Significantly, from the man’s taking leave in this passage to the very end of the narrative, for about one-fourth of the textual space (Mansfield, “Psychology” 153–56), Mansfield only depicts, from the woman’s focalization, what the woman thinks and does, to show how the woman finally gives up her unrequited love and accepts pure friendship as the man wishes, which drives home the covert progression, but which has still eluded previous critics whose attention is limited to the overt plot depicting the man and the woman’s mutual love—as a false appearance.

Given Richard’s assertion that “Shen’s argument rests upon the interpretative utility of the concept,” the above clarification of my analyses of the “covert progression” also functions to clarify the theoretical concept itself (my replies to other responses also shed various light on the concept). But Richard’s theoretical challenge extends to plot dynamics. Richard argues that the plot dynamics is not just a matter of represented action, but involves both story and discourse (Walsh 78). As with Richard’s point about progression implying temporal movement, I fully agree. In effect, in the target essay, apart from a dual model of event structure, I’ve proposed a dual model of authorial communication, of unreliability, of narrative distance, of focalization, “of narrative tone, among others, and on a more general scale, a dual model of story and discourse” (Shen, “Covert” 23). That is to say, I’m already concerned with the story (“instabilities”) and the discourse (“tensions”) of both *the plot development* and the covert progression (see John Pier’s response, 28–35). Richard takes it that I hold a superficial and simplistic view of the plot “as if plot development in itself cannot be the vehicle of a dynamics conveying ‘contrastive or even opposite thematic significance’” (Walsh 79). But I have asserted in the target essay that the plot development in itself “may be interpreted from diversified perspectives” (1). My full-length analysis of the covert progression in Mansfield’s “The Fly,” for instance, is preceded and followed by a discussion of the narrative’s highly symbolic plot development, which has aroused heated critical debates (Shen, *Style and Rhetoric* 125–28; 139–44).

The last challenge Richard poses concerns “typology in narrative theory” in general. It would require another essay for me to discuss this “most far-reaching” issue. Here I only want to express my wish for more tolerance toward approaches different from one’s own. In my article “The Future of Literary Theories: Exclusion, Complementarity, Pluralism” (2002), I argued for pluralism because each critical approach, with its distinctive aims, object of investigation, and principles of inquiry, has its own advantages and disadvantages. The coexistence of different approaches, which are more or less complementary to each other, would be beneficial to the academic field both in theory and in practice.



I much appreciate the response from WOLF SCHMID as an ally in the investigation of “covert progression,” but we still have some theoretical differences. First, I cannot buy into the idea that the covert progression “exists only in the reader’s co-creation of the story” (Schmid 84). Although the covert progressions that I’ve recently uncovered were created by the relevant authors at least one-hundred years ago, over the past century or so they were not perceived by generations of readers who focused on the plot development. My rhetorical view is that as soon as the authors created those undercurrents, they came into existence, waiting for readers’ discovery. Or in other words, the existence of the covert progressions rests with the author’s purposeful creation, and only their discovery depends on readers’ perception. Here we can see an advantage of the rhetorical approach: a more balanced concern with both author and reader. My attempts to find a covert progression sometimes failed not because I was imperceptive but because the relevant authors have not created a covert progression in the narratives concerned.

Second, although Wolf offers a valuable clarification of the borderline between overt plot and covert progression with the dichotomy between (nonselected) happenings and story, he is still somewhat limited by the Aristotelian tradition in associating “the story” only with the plot, and nonselected happenings only with the covert progression. If we break completely free of the Aristotelian bondage, we would see the relevant happenings as being nonselected *only* in terms of the story of the plot, but *selected for the story* of the covert progression. Conversely, various happenings selected for the story of the plot can become nonselected in relation to the story of the

covert progression. Moreover, the same story may function both in the plot and in the covert progression along two contrastive/opposite trajectories of signification (see the classification in my reply to Daniel Candel Bormann). Wolf thinks that “Aristotle could not think of ‘covert progression,’ since he had no corresponding works in front of him” (Schmid 87). On this I fully agree, but the regrettable fact is that generations of critics missed the covert progressions in the relevant works they read not because they lacked critical acumen but primarily because they were confined by the Aristotelian tradition concerned only with one narrative movement—the plot development.

I treasure Wolf’s effort to investigate the covert progression in two narratives by Anton Chekhov, where he succeeds in finding two different patterns, thus shedding fresh light on the texts. But I’m sorry to say that these two narratives actually do not contain a covert progression. This is the “covert progression” Wolf has found in Chekhov’s “The Student”: *“a budding clergyman who goes snipe hunting not only in spring when hunting the blind mating birds is unsporting, but even on Good Friday. The fast bid is a nuisance for him and, racked with hunger and frost, he draws hasty, immature conclusions from his personal physical condition to world history exploiting the thoroughly misunderstood reactions of the two women to commonplace wisdom”* (Schmid 87, italics added). The italicized words are in effect a summary of the former part of the plot development, which Wolf does not mention when introducing the plot. What we have in the remaining unmarked dozen words is Wolf’s different interpretation of the latter part of the plot development. As for Chekhov’s “Old Age,” after a more comprehensive summary of the plot development, Wolf says, “The story of the ‘dissolute divorced wife,’ which Uzelkov constructs on the basis of the report of his deceitful ‘friend,’ calls up an alternative story that does not enter his mind but might be reconstructed by the attentive reader behind the backs of the two heroes—the tragedy of a desperate, loving woman” (Schmid 86). Here we have a gap between the unreliable inference of the wife by the character Uzelkov and the more reliable inference by an attentive reader, both from “the report of the deceitful ‘friend’” *within* the plot development. Unless we break free of the Aristotelian influence, we may not be able to perceive a real covert progression as a separate narrative movement paralleling the plot development throughout the text.

As regards Mansfield’s “Revelations,” Wolf wonders why I “[do] not pay more attention to another revelation that plays a no-less-important role in

the narrative titled ‘Revelations’ (Schmid 84). In effect, I also set store by the latter revelation and its relation to the ending (see my detailed analysis in *Style and Rhetoric* 100–102, 106–7), but our interpretive results are very different. In Wolf’s view, since “the young hairdresser, who has to suppress all his existential pain in order to please the spoiled social lady, all other revelations and the conflict between selfishness and patriarchal oppression [the covert progression] are minimized to nothing.” That is to say, to Wolf, from this point onward, there remains only one meaningful narrative movement—the plot development. By contrast, I see Mansfield integrating that revelation with unfolding both plot development and covert progression. Thus, apart from perceiving everything that Wolf has perceived after this revelation, I was able to see several things that eluded Wolf, including the essential similarity and difference between the female protagonists of “Revelations” and Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll House*, the ending’s implicit indictment against patriarchal oppression behind its superficial conventionality, and, in terms of Monica’s failing to buy the flowers, the point that “this is a society where a ‘doll’ woman cannot fulfill her desires and can only accept the arrangements made by men whether wittingly or unwittingly” (*Style and Rhetoric* 106–8). Those things will come into sight only when we break free of the bondage of the Aristotelian tradition and explore a covert progression behind the plot development.

A large portion of the responses try to extend the scope of investigation of “covert progression” and “dual dynamics.” I’ve already responded to H. Porter Abbott’s extension to the novel and Wolf Schmid’s extension to Chekhov’s stories, and in what follows, I’ll discuss five responses whose primary concern is extension.



I’ll start with XIN ZHANG, who makes a significant extension to drama, an extension that has enabled her to present a fuller and more complex picture of the thematic concern of Lillian Hellman’s play *Toys in the Attic*. While I’m convinced by her argument that playtexts “sometimes provide hotbeds for a covert progression behind the overt plot” (Zhang 90), I find an interesting discrepancy between the targeted readers of the playtext and the targeted readers of the covert progression. To take *Toys in the Attic* for an example, its targeted readers are the directors and players

who, even if more or less faithfully presenting the relevant elements on the stage, may not be aware of the covert progression focusing on interracial marriage and racial crossing behind the plot development centering on “the destructive power of suppressed female desires and the fetters of the original family,” the former narrative movement very much based on elements that seem peripheral or digressive to the latter (Zhang 90, 91). When performed on the stage, the play’s audience is hard put to grasp the “dual dynamics” since attention during the one-time watching will most probably be limited to the overt plot. That is to say, the covert progression in a playtext seems to be specifically targeted at careful critics of the playtext itself. However, after professional critics like Xin Zhang discover the covert progression, the findings, if put across to the directors/players and audience in later rehearsals and shows, may promote a more expressive performance and a better understanding of the covert progression behind the plot development.



While I’ve focused on short stories, SUSAN S. LANSER explores the dual dynamics in Assaf Gavron’s novel *The Hilltop*. With her sagacity and logical thinking, she concludes her analysis with these words: “And it’s also possible that I have been confusing ‘covert progression’ with ‘covert plot,’ or some other rubric, all along. But what I take to be Dan Shen’s approach has certainly encouraged a fuller, deeper, and bolder scrutiny of narrative dynamics than I would have undertaken otherwise” (Lanser 98). These words express quite well what I would like to say about her analysis. In the target essay, I’ve made clear that the plot development in itself “may have different branches or layers” and “may be interpreted from diversified perspectives” (1). This statement applies well to *The Hilltop*, a novel containing a complex plot development with complicated authorial stance, open at least to two contrastive kinds of reading, either focusing on its being a satirical critique of the settlement enterprise itself or on its sympathetic humanizing portrayal of settlers. What makes Sue’s analysis distinct from those of previous critics is that, while other critics only opt for one kind of reading and take that kind to be “the” correct kind, Sue finds the plot development accommodating both kinds of reading, which mitigate each other. Here the “overt” and “covert” distinction recedes since there is no real “covert progression” in this novel. Significantly,



Sue's open-minded concern with dual dynamics has enabled her not only to gain a fuller and more balanced understanding, but also to go deeper and "bolder" into the thematic significance of the plot dynamics. Sue's analysis points to an additional kind of utility of my theory of dual dynamics: directing attention to the joint functioning of two contrastive thematic trajectories of the overt plot development itself.

At the same time, I want to retain the related ideas that (1) we can distinguish between narratives with a complex plot development and those with an overt plot and a covert progression; and (2) the concept of the implied author can help us recognize a covert progression. To support the first point, I would refer to Susan Lanser's own work by juxtaposing her analysis of *The Hilltop* with her famous analysis of "Female Ingenuity" in her groundbreaking "Towards a Feminist Narratology." In the latter case, although Sue uses the terms "text" and "subtext" rather than "overt plot" and "covert progression," she brilliantly shows that the power of the newlywed woman's letter to her friend depends on the anonymous author's constructing a relationship between what's on the surface and what's underneath it. In my dialogue with James Phelan, we've discussed "rhetorical passing" (to which "Female Ingenuity" belongs) and another category of covert progression behind overt plot (which was previously neglected and to which most of the narratives discussed in the target essay pertain). No matter in which category, the covert–overt distinction is clear, as part of the authorial design.

As for the second point, I share Sue's view that many readers' interpreting *The Hilltop* merely satirically may be attributable to their knowledge of the author as an outspoken critic of the Occupation. But as distinct from Sue, here I see the advantage rather than disadvantage of adopting Booth's concept of the "implied author." Booth makes a distinction between the "real author" (the historical person in daily life) and the "implied author" (the person in the process of writing a particular text). We infer the image of the "real author" from biographical and historical materials, but we infer the image of an implied author *only from a particular text*—from all the textual choices he or she has made—*which "implies" his or her image* (see Shen, "What"). If the readers are familiar with this distinction, they would not have just taken on trust what the "real" Gavron said when interpreting *The Hilltop*, but would infer the authorial stance from the text itself. In my own reading of Kafka's "The Judgment," the concept of the implied author versus the real author has helped me to perceive the covert progression focusing on the conflict

between individual and society (based on analyzing the textual choices of this narrative), despite the fact that the “real Kafka” only claimed that the narrative is concerned with the conflict between father and son. The concept of the implied author has also facilitated my perceiving the essentially different racial stances of different Chopin narratives, created by different “implied Kate Chopins,” who are either in accordance or in contrast with the “real Kate Chopin” as a racist in daily life (see Shen, *Style and Rhetoric* 84–90).



Like Sue, JAKOB LOTHE extends the analysis of dual narrative dynamics to a novel. Although the undercurrent in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement* is not a covert progression in the strict sense, the novel does contain two parallel narrative movements, one overt and the other covert (albeit brought to light at the epilogue). Lothe’s insightful analysis well shows the payoff of exploring the significance and readerly effects of the undercurrent and its interaction with the plot development throughout the narrative proper.

Interestingly, based on *Atonement* where the “covert progression” parallels the overt plot right from the beginning, Jakob casts doubt on my view that a narrative beginning rarely accommodates a covert progression. This is my original argument: “However, we need to bear in mind that the covert progression should parallel the plot development throughout. The beginning in itself cannot accommodate such a continuous undercurrent” (Shen, “Covert” 7). I made this statement *precisely after* I’d shown that the beginning of Mansfield’s “Revelations” *contains* the opening of a feminist covert progression behind the nonfeminist plot development. What I meant is that we cannot base our judgment of the existence of a covert progression only on the beginning but have to see whether it interacts with other parts of the text to form a continuous undercurrent paralleling the overt plot from the beginning to the ending.



FENG DUAN’s response sheds light on the complex readership of dual narrative dynamics in literary fairy tales. In terms of the overt plot development, the targeted readers are typically children and child-like or general adults—already a dual audience in itself; as for the covert progression, if it exists in

this genre, it is characteristically intended for astute or sophisticated adult readers. Feng's discussion of the reception of Oscar Wilde's "The Happy Prince" in different countries directs attention to a previously neglected phenomenon: When homosexual adult readers or critics only concerned with the relation between Wilde's biography and his literary creation come to "The Happy Prince" with the belief that its most important thematic concern is gay love, or when adults read this fairy tale in a translated collection of *Gay Love Literature*, attention tends to be focused on textual elements specifically conveying gay love, to the suppression of the moralizing fairy-tale plot development. Thus, what is intended by Wilde only as a covert message may become foregrounded in the interpretive process of this type of reader. However, critics in this vein have not tracked down the homosexual undercurrent but only paid attention to some relevant textual elements. Equipped with the theory of "dual narrative dynamics," Feng herself has explored how the homosexual elements as noticed by previous critics interact with other textual elements alien to traditional fairy tales to constitute a continuous homosexual covert progression paralleling the plot development throughout the tale (Duan, "Double"). Given the different types of readers, the utility of the model of "dual dynamics" is at least twofold. For readers who are only concerned with the homosexual theme, the model functions to draw attention to the conventional fairy-tale plot development and to the fact that the homosexual message is conveyed by a continuous narrative movement paralleling the overt plot throughout. For adult readers who tend to pay attention only to the moralizing plot development, the model of dual dynamics can help to draw attention to the covert progression centering on male love.



FEDERICO PIANZOLA's response came to me as a pleasant surprise since he ventures the forward-looking suggestion that computers be taught how to discover the dual narrative dynamics. To me, it is already a great challenge for computers to learn how to interpret in depth the plot development in serious literature, and it is very much an impossible task for computers to decipher the undercurrent behind the overt plot—at least at present. Indeed, can a computer capture the dual dynamics whose interpretation depends on discovering various kinds of authorial camouflage and the same words' simultaneously generating two contrastive kinds of significance sometimes

in relation to historical contexts? Even in daily conversation, can a computer accurately decipher irony that depends less on words than on shared assumptions and values—"I know that you know that I don't literally mean what I say"? And even in terms of the overt plot, can a computer accurately read unreliability that depends not only on textual signals but also on the secret communication between the implied author and authorial audience behind the narrator's back? (see Shen, "Unreliability"). However, with the fast development of artificial intelligence, who knows what computers will or will not be up to in the future?

#### NOTES

1. I've noticed that, except for James Phelan, other friends have refrained from referring to me by my first name "Dan" (a male first name in English) to avoid confusion since I'm actually a female. But I'll still refer to these friends by their first name.

2. One may wonder if the "implied author" is just the writer in the process of writing a particular narrative that "implies" his or her image, then what is the point of having this concept? For an answer to this question, see the section "Significance of Implied Author Today" in Shen, "What Is the Implied Author?" 80–98.

3. Needless to say, a narrative contains and involves many other elements apart from the plot development, such as the means of presenting the plot, the reader's interpretation of the narrative, the communication among author, narrator, character, and reader, and so on (see my classification of various dual models in the target essay). When I claim that critical attention has focused on the plot development, I do not mean that critics do not pay attention to other elements, but only that they share the concern with the plot as the primary dynamics of a mimetic narrative (with or without a resolution—see the discussion of "plot of revelation" in the target essay). For the convenience of discussion, I sometimes use "plot development" as a sort of "synecdoche" to refer to narrative "progression," but we need to be aware that "progression" is a much broader concept than plot (see the several books by Phelan in the works cited), and the same applies to the relation between "covert progression" and "another narrative movement paralleling the plot development."

4. It should be noted that, although the historical Chopin was a racist, the implied authors of different Chopin narratives display different racial stances. Chopin only wrote two narratives about antebellum Louisiana, the other being "La Belle Zoraïde" (1894), and in both we have a racist covert progression (see Shen, "Dual Narrative"). But in some of her postwar narratives where whites and Blacks live in harmony, the stances of the implied authors toward Black people are quite positive (see Shen, *Style and Rhetoric* 85–92).

5. In his response, Patrick has only commented on the murderer's being mad in connection with his shame.

6. Candel cites Shen, *Style and Rhetoric* 23–25, "Joint Functioning," and "Dual Narrative Progression" 63.

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