

Építész a kőfejtőben Architect in the Quarry



Tanulmányok
Dávidházi Péter
hatvanadik születésnapjára

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(Szókratész kőbe faragja a három gráciát) című metszete alapján készült.
A metszet Johann Joachim Winckelmann *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der
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1755-ös kiadásában jelent meg először.

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ZOLTÁN ABÁDI-NAGY

*Narratorial Consciousness
as an Intersection of Culture and Narrative*

*(Case Study: Toni Morrison's Jazz)*¹

ANCHORING – NOT ANY LITERARY NARRATIVE BUT MY OWN
CRITICAL VESSEL

Although the postmodern view rejects the levels-analysis used by classical narratology and by some of post-classical narrative theory,² the hierarchical approach is often still helpful, as it is in the context of my research project that I describe as the culturalization of narrative.³ It serves as a good starting point, for example, when trying to locate the narrator. S/he may or may not be part of the story, but it is definitely the narrator, who makes the story available as text for the receiver. In fictional narrative especially, there is no narrative without narration. Thus narration takes place at a level other than the story, and its agent dwells in the narrative realm that Mieke Bal's three-layer distinction labels the level of *the (narrative) text*.

¹ This paper also appeared in HJEAS, 14/1, 9–31.

² I will discuss Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992. London: Picador, 1993.) in terms of postmodern narratology elsewhere.

³ For a detailed definition of "the culturalization of narrative" cf. the *Filológiai Közlöny* and *EJES* items the next note below.

As far as my *broader aim* – the culturalization of narrative, i.e., probing the culture-narrative interface in literary narrative⁴ – is concerned, *narratorial consciousness*, whose culturalization-related theoretical and case-study examination is the *specific aim* of the present essay, is the source of a vast influx of culture into narrative. But, one could object, it takes place in ways so evident that one wonders if a systematic scholarly investigation of the issue is warranted at all. Narratorial agency, and thus narratorial consciousness cannot be discounted even in cases where, in lack of textual indications of a narrator, we have to rely on the implied author as narrator.⁵ Nor is it absent in the case of a nonhuman presenter: “narration, narrative presentation, entails an agent even when the agent bears no signs of human personality.”⁶ And a narratorial mind is not simply present in a narrative text, but the text *is* the content of that mind since what the text contains is the product of a narrator’s or an implied author’s consciousness. A stream of culture enters narrative through narrator-transmitted knowledge and information, inclusive of the narratorial transmission of the story: and, him/herself a cultural product, the narrator cannot relay anything but culture to the reader. All of this is so obvious that I do not need to prove it in a study.

Yet, the narrator–culture relation is a much more complex narrative phenomenon. It could be a justifiable research objective, no question,

⁴ In relation to what can be traced of this intersection on the fabula, story, and text levels; i.e., to what extent and in what ways the fabula and the story are shaped by culture. Cf. ABÁDI-NAGY, Zoltán. “A szépirodalmi narratíva kulturizációja I.” *Filológiai Közlöny* 48.1-2(2002): 46-56; “A szépirodalmi narratíva kulturizációja II.” *Filológiai Közlöny* 49. 1-4 (2003): 55-69.; “Fabula and Culture: Case Study of Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*,” *European Journal of English Studies* 8.1 (2004): 13-25.; “From Fabula to Story: Cultural Potential and Narrative Technique.” *Universitate și Cultura*. Ed. Nicolae Bocșan et al. Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2006, 307-316.

⁵ Although some argue, as Monika Fludernik does, that in such cases there is no narrator, and the sender dealing with the receiver is the actual author him/herself. FLUDERNIK, Monika, “Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology.” *Journal of Literary Semantics: An International Review* 25.2 (1996), 97-141.

⁶ See Seymour Chatman qtd. in BORTOLOUSSI, Marisa, and Peter DIXON, *Psychonarratology: Foundations for the Empirical Study of Literary Response*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 62.

to examine what narratorial mindset, with what kind of cultural determination produces and rules the text, and, more specifically, how that cultural given shapes the narrative text. What is most conspicuous in this regard in the case of a book like Morrison's *Jazz* is that the narrator is an African-American and a woman – although even such apparent evidences should not be stated too lightheartedly. To document who (or what) exactly a narrator is, can be an embarrassing assignment in some cases, especially with a narrator like Morrison's – a totally foregrounded, highly self-conscious yet deceptively elusive narrative agent, both omnipresent and never-to-be pinned down.

Whereas the African-Americanness and the womanhood of this narrative agent will obviously determine the nature of what the narrator of *Jazz* will present to us, and also the ways she will do it, there is a similarly self-evident (sub)cultural regime in control in this fictional world. It is both an overarching support, shall we say: scaffolding, for the edifice of the book as a whole and a cultural coefficient every nook and corner of the storyworld of *Jazz* is penetrated by and imbued with. It is jazz music. No wonder, then, that jazz rates the most privileged position or placement in the book: it is the title of the novel. Discursing on what he calls the “rules of position” inside “rules of notice,” Peter J. Rabinowitz points to how “titles concentrate the process of reading,” and they “not only guide our reading process by telling us where to concentrate; they also provide a core around which to organize an interpretation.”⁷ Jazz music is indeed in control to the extent that it is theme and device, story, and the Maker of the story, because it is the determining substance and thus the Maker of the narrator's mind. This cultural determinant, with all the concentrating power indicated by its privileged position as a title, is the great narratological “story” of the third narrative level, the narrative text (or the first, if the three hierarchical levels – narrative text, story, and fabula – are viewed from the perspective of readerly accessibility). It is on this level that jazz music makes its entrance as a controlling culturalizing factor, fulfilling what I call the three culturalizing functions in this narrative: the gener-

⁷ RABINOWITZ, Peter J., *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation*, 1987; Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1998, 60–61.

ative, the performative and the rhetorical/strategic functions. All of this is the most fascinating aspect of a most idiosyncratic (narrative) “jazz performance”: the book itself – and even the narrator herself – can be regarded as jazz itself, as has been suggested by some critics.

But the roles jazz plays in the book form a huge topic by themselves. To give a systematic treatment to the culture-narrative interface functions of jazz in *Jazz* – to jazz as both narrated culture and culture which is doing the narration, together with the narrator as jazz personified – would distort the proportions and upset the balance of the present study. So, whereas this essay would invalidate itself without taking jazz into account, at least tangentially, where necessary, I must set this topic aside, to be addressed in greater detail in another paper.

The complete take-over of the novel by jazz, as it were, is a unique narrative feature of Morrison’s text. On the other hand, this phenomenon is an extension of, and a variation on, a narrative circumstance – the text–culture connection – which is as ancient as narrative texts are. It may still be a contested point whether we can talk about culture at the fabulaic level at all, and it is generally accepted that the core logic and the fundamental interpersonal patterns of the fabula are already culturally-ideologically ingrained when the fabula becomes a story. But the text level has always been the most obvious terrain for the influx of culture in any literary narrative in any historical period – depending on the extent to which the narrator or implied author decided to open the floodgates of culture. The narrator of *Jazz* decided to open it fully – and not only for jazz, but for culture in an unmarked sense (about “marked” and “unmarked” culture).⁸

It has proved to be a worthy task in narratological parlance to explore hidden strands and covert workings of culture in the narrative text. Culture has always been an object of study as manifested or detectable in cognitive and emotive narratorial functions, voice, focalization as well as in narrative and non-narrative comments, including descriptions that are woven into the narrative text.⁹ Some regarded it as one of the five codes in literary narrative (Barthes). Others traced culture in

⁸ cf. WAGNER, Roy, *The Invention of Culture*, Rev. and exp. ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, 22.

⁹ E.g., BAL, Mieke, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd ed. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1997.

mimetic and diegetic speech representation (Gérard Genette, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan),¹⁰ in direct, indirect, or free indirect narrative discourse (all the foregoing names plus Monika Fludernik and, as in all cases, many more). Such investigations have been conducted both in general theory (narratology, then narrative theory) and in relation to individual works, *Jazz* included (most systematically by Justine Tally). All of this has always been going on, with narratological formulations of the targeted narrative features, formulations classical or postclassical.

Nevertheless, in a project bent on tracing culture-narrative intersections, it would be counterproductive to follow in the above or any other traditional or more recently beaten tracks. Much more untraveled were the roads that the cultural connection affords before we had contextual, cognitive, and cultural narratology (roads other than those of more or less traditional thematic discussions of cultural content), developments that made “a truly integrative approach” and “a cross-disciplinary approach to stories” possible.¹¹ The social is the heart and soul of Bakhtin’s sociological poetics, and the social-cultural is foregrounded by narratological investigations prompted by his theory. The cultural code is crucial for Roland Barthes. It is important for Seymour Chatman that a story is “preprocessed by the author’s cultural codes.”¹² Bal consistently maintains that narrative is “a cultural phenomenon, partaking of cultural processes.”¹³ Ross Chambers, moving away from the relative cultural sterility of structuralist narratology (calling Chatman to task, in fact, for lack of the social, mediating role of narrative in his theory), is convinced, under the influence of cultural anthropology, that “the study of narrative as transaction must open eventually onto ideological

¹⁰ GENETTE, Gérard, *Narrative Discourse: Narrative Structures in Fiction and Film*, (1972) trans. Jane E. Lewin, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987; *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, (1983) trans. Jane E. Lewin, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988. RIMMON-KENAN, Shlomith, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, London: Methuen, 1983.

¹¹ HERMAN, David (ed) *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences*, Stanford, CA: CSLI, 2003. 11.

¹² CHATMAN 26.

¹³ BAL 1997, 9.

and cultural analysis.”¹⁴ As the study of narrative moves through phases of deconstruction and recontextualization towards cultural narratology and postmodern narratology,¹⁵ much of the culture–narrative transaction swims into the ken of contemporary narrative theory – but no attention has been paid to the culture–narrative *interface*, let alone systematically.

THE NARRATOR’S POSITION AND THE CULTURE-NARRATIVE INTERSECTION

If there are no systematic tracks to travel, no available theoretical frames to impose and terminology to deploy, it is appropriate to design ways in which we can inquire into intersections of culture and narrative in narratorial consciousness. In what follows, I wish to explore the subjects of the narrator’s position and narratorial functions in culture-narrative interface contexts.

In order to have a narrative text, we must have, again, a story and a narrator. Or, rather, in reversed order, as without a narrator there is no story. In the case of *Jazz* we are dealing with – in Gérard Genette’s generally-used terminology – a narrator whose status in relation to the narrated events is extradiegetic and heterodiegetic.¹⁶ She is extradiegetic in the sense that the narrator exists above the story, and is, herself, not narrated by any other narratorial agent in the text; and heterodiegetic

¹⁴ CHAMBERS, Ross, *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984 (Theory and History of Literature 12), 4, 9.

¹⁵ Some of the most important names for each: especially Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Jonathan Culler for deconstruction. As far as recontextualization is concerned, Susan Sniader Langer for feminist narratology; Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak for postcolonial theory; J. M. Lotman, Frederic Jameson, Michel de Certeau, Manuel Castells for cultural studies, cultural criticism, social theory; Thomas Pavel, Lubomir Doležel, Marie-Laure Ryan for possible worlds theory; Martha Nussbaum, J. Hillis Miller, Zachary Newton for narrative ethics. James Phelan and Ansgar Nünning are points of orientation for cultural narratology just as Mark Currie and Andrew Gibson for postmodern narratology.

¹⁶ GENETTE, 1987, 228 and 244–245.

in that she is not participating in the story, not a character in the events she relates.

Thus Morrison's most extraordinary narrator is, in structuralist terms, what Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck would term a "most classical" narrator type.¹⁷ And there is a reason why establishing what seems to be so obvious (i.e., that the extra- and heterodiegetic narrator of *Jazz* represents a type which is "probably most classical") is no sheer tautology when viewed from the cultural narratological perspective. Namely, while structuralist categories are indeed helpful in discussing this narrator, it is the culture–narrative interface inquiry that can adjust the theoretical focus and refine both the extra- and the heterodiegetic status to yes-and-no. What makes the difference in this context, and what makes it possible to theorize that difference is the cognitivist approach: the possibility to view the narrator's text as the narrator's mental activity, to regard the narrator as a thinking mind, a fictional mind. Uri Margolin argues that "an individualized narrator of a fictional narrative is as much of a fictional individual as the storyworld participants whose actions he or she reports and comments upon."¹⁸ I would go further and argue – and this time opposing Margolin's opinion – that even in cases where the "narrating voice or speech position" "remains covert" it is not at all "difficult [Margolin suggests it is difficult] to speak of [...] individuated cognitive mental functioning."¹⁹ Even in such an extreme case as Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy* (my example, not Margolin's), where "there is no textually indicated situation of enunciation" of narratorial presence,²⁰ the text focalizes a mental activity, a fictional mind (a type whose actual-lifevariant may be a familiar item in the actual reader's experiential repertoire), which is

¹⁷ HERMAN, Luc, and VERVAECK, Bart, *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*. 2001. Trans. Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005, 85. Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck view the extradiegetic-heterodiegetic type as "probably the most classical" on the general, theoretical plane of narrative analysis. Its application to *Jazz* is mine.

¹⁸ MARGOLIN, Uri, "Cognitive Science, the Thinking Mind, and Literary Narrative" = HERMAN 2003, 279.

¹⁹ MARGOLIN 2003, 278.

²⁰ MARGOLIN 2003, 278.

the reader's cue to, and does thematize the (otherwise, yes, covert) narrator's mental activity more than anything else.

After all, the narrator of *Jazz* is the most passionately participating representative of the culture into whose narrative tapestry Joe, Violet, Dorcas and other characters are woven. And I am using "culture" here too in an unmarked sense. But specifically foregrounded in the novel are: African-American culture, racist American culture, jazz as a subculture, 1920s American culture, the Harlem Renaissance ("as lived"²¹), historically accumulated narrative culture (especially African-American), and the cultural horizon of expectations concerning the job of narration. And it is at this point that we are in for a surprise. It does not take much thinking to notice a theoretical oddity, certainly novelty, a phenomenon only the culture-narrative approach can elucidate and theorize; one that takes the issue of narratorial positioning in directions that are radically new. Let me explain.

If a narrator is culture personified (herself constituted and narrated by culture in so many senses), then, somewhere in the culture-narrative interface, that narrator is at least as much intradiegetic as extra. It means that she (also) "belongs to the narrated world [of culture, in our context] and is narrated therefore by the agency above [here, again, culture]." But these are Herman and Vervaeck's words to describe what structuralist narratology means by intradiegetic narratorial position.²² And the agency above narrators like Morrison's is culture in our context; so it can be argued, by the same token, that such a narrator is at least as much homodiegetic as hetero-, or homo- and heterodiegetic at one and the same time.

Does this not mean that the intradiegetic position brings the narrator close to the characters she creates? The extraordinary judgmental nature she is endowed with, and the extraordinary self-consciousness with which she handles her own role in these cultural matters in general and as a narrator producing the narrative in particular, do elevate Morrison's narrator to the position of "*character*," as it were, in a metaphorical sense. She is definitely not one of the characters on the story level, but

²¹ Cf. ABÁDI-NAGY, "Fabula and Culture" 16; or "A szépprózai narratíva kulturálisizációja II" 58. Morrison quoted in MATUS, Jill, *Toni Morrison*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998, 128.

²² HERMAN – VERVAECK 2005, 81.

is certainly sensed by the reader to be one on the narrative text level of mimetically and diegetically presented culture.

But such an assertion seems to confuse categories and levels to which those categories belong (narratorial agency belonging to the level of the text, confused with story-level agency called “character”). Apparently, it also short-circuits the story- and text levels of narrative hierarchy. Yes, indeed, it does – but only when the narrator is theorized within the constraints of the hierarchical system of classical (structuralist) narratology. Convenient (even necessary) as the hierarchical (levels-analysis) method is, because it enables us to locate the narrator vis-à-vis the narrated story (in that the narrator belongs to the text level as opposed to the story level, and this clearly distinguishes text-level narratorial agency from the story-level agency of characters), I take the apparent “confusion” just noticed above to be one narrative signpost and a theoretical circumstance that indicates the way out of structuralist and towards contextual, cognitive, cultural, postmodern narratology. It also signifies the inadequacy of structuralist narratological discourse as the one and only toolbox to discuss Morrison’s *Jazz* as a narrative.

What I am proposing, then, is nothing but the metaphorical extension of narrative mimesis and diegesis. I mean to suggest that one mode culture is introduced into the narrative text is mimetic (literal): historical jazz musicians and musical pieces of jazz enter mimetic dramatizations, become part of scenes in the life of characters (some characters cherish records, the trombone blues, for example). And there is diegetic presentation when culture is presented as summed up by the narrator (the City/Harlem, for example – “I’m crazy about this City” [7]). If we theorize Morrison’s narrator herself to be culture–narrative intersection space, and what we find both obeys and resists structural narratological description, the metaphoricity of the narrator’s position as both mimetic and diegetic is metaphoricity twice over, by the way, as a result of either homogeneous or heterogeneous metaphoric transfer. What does it mean?

1. To contend that the jazz-narrator of the book (itself a metaphor of the first order) produces a text (narrated story and lived/dramatized/narrated culture included) which, in many ways, assumes characteristic features of, and is organized by, structural principles similar to those of jazz (here is a metaphor of the second

order). Such a narratological observation layers two different but homogenous levels of metaphor on top of each other. The resulting tropological phenomenon combines vertically related homogeneous metaphoricity (two homogeneous metaphors or notional transfers, one on top of the other).

2. On the other hand, whereas the narrator-as-jazz-in-action is already a metaphoric extension of jazz, to discuss the narrated culture of the narrative text level as mimetic or diegetic is itself a metaphoric leap from story-level-related narrative agency-functions to the level of the narrator's cultural text(ure). To couple the two and talk about our jazz-narrator's mimetic or diegetic processing of culture is, then, welding metaphors that are coming from two different (and also heterogeneous) directions. This too is vertical metaphoric blending if we take the positioning of the heterogeneous double metaphor in the hierarchy of narrative, but definitely horizontal if the structure of the metaphor itself is considered.

Although *Jazz* does not offer all the textual features that Marisa Bortoloussi and Peter Dixon theorize as indicators of a personal narrator,²³ we do have enough in the Morrison novel to bring this "character"-like narrator close. The narrator's racial identification, class identification, race-related political affiliation, gender, motivations, attitudes, relations to others, and her verbal behavior are arguments in this direction. Nor can we take it very far beyond this point in theory either. This narrator's voice may be not a little personal, but we cannot talk about a "personal voice" since that term has been reserved by Susan Sniader Lanser for the narrator who self-consciously tells her own (autodiegetic) history.²⁴ However, Lanser's "communal voice," defined as "narrative authority [...] invested in a definable community",²⁵ does offer the possibility of analogical conceptualization. Since the majority of the textual signs constituting our narrator are cultural, we can perceive her as a voice

²³ BORTOLOUSSI – DIXON 2003, 64-65.

²⁴ LANSER, Susan Sniader, "Toward a Feminist Poetics of Narrative Voice" = RICHTER, David H. (ed.) *Narrative/Theory*, White Plains, NY: Longman, 1996, 190.

²⁵ LANSER 1996, 192.

of culture and add “cultural voice” to Lanser’s authorial, personal, and communal.

NARRATORIAL FUNCTIONS IN THE CULTURE-NARRATIVE INTERSECTION

The culture–narrative intersection narratorial *functions* that the textual indicators refer to in *Jazz* are 1) the storytelling, 2) the reflective, and 3) the self-reflexive functions. The narrator does not simply 1) tell the story; the text 2) constantly reflects the narrator’s own, often highly subjective and judgmental thoughts on characters and events. She makes no secret of her prejudices against characters and their motivations (the half-deranged Violet after her husband, Joe, kills Dorcas; the possibility or impossibility of reconstructing Golden Gray’s figure and motivation at the stage when he meets Wild). But the storytelling and reflective narrator is 3) also self-conscious *as a narrator*. She shares her doubts with the reader about how to process the story (how to present absence – Wild’s, for instance). Her narratorial decisions, skills, reliability or unreliability are also subjects of self-reflection to an astonishing degree. Moreover, by making the reader her intratextual narratee, thus making the reader her companion, confidant(e) even – straddling both text-platforms, the sender’s and the receiver’s – she is both creating and interpreting the story, relaying and reading the culture, fulfilling her role as a narrator and commenting upon that role. Putting it in another way, she is a confidante-narrator, who fulfills her first function (that of the storyteller) by foregrounding the second (reflective) function, and dramatizing/thematizing the third function (the narrator’s self-conscious concern with the story, her self-reflexivity as focalizer and narrative agent). It also makes her a metanarrator: a narrative agent strongly preoccupied with her trade.

It would make no sense to catalogue the countless examples to illustrate all the points I am making in this study, or to sidetrack the discussion by parading even if less numerous but systematic examples. But we need the gesture of authentication through documentation at some point. Let it be here.

I will perform this analytical duty by joining the long line of those who quote that most intriguing opening sentence of the novel for so

many different reasons: “Sth, I know that woman” (3). I quote it to show Morrison’s genius in condensation, the rare skill that telescopes all three narratorial functions – storytelling, reflection, and self-reflexion – into a single, very short opening sentence. Besides, it is a sentence that establishes the narrator as a communal voice (and suggests her racial identity), definitely upholds her gender identity, strikes a diegetic note, and hints at the narrator’s extra- and heterodiegetic status. How?

“Sth, I know that woman” starts narrating the story, actually (storytelling narratorial function). “[T]hat woman” is one of the main characters (Violet) after all, and, to top it all, we are drawn into the story not simply *in medias res*, but after the tragic denouement (that woman’s husband, Joe, killed his secret lover, Dorcas, before the novel starts). As the narrator opens the narration with these words, it is only an assumption that the book will portray the African-American community, that *they* are the referents (her acquaintanceship); and this circumstance, in turn, will make her, most likely, one of those she “knows,” i.e., an African-American. But if she knows that woman (Violet, who shows up at Dorcas’s funeral to cut the dead girl’s face), our narrator does belong to a community, thereby establishing herself as a communal voice, no doubt. More than just the gossipy tone of the sentence, the first word, “sth” definitely identifies a woman, it is something only women say. And this very first narratorial speech act is itself doubly loaded. It is meant to catch the reader’s attention: the confidante-narrator immediately and directly claiming the reader as her narratee and fellow-journeyman (an early indication of the narratorial self-consciousness to come), drawing the reader into the storyworld, thereby inviting him/her to embark on a journey through story and culture. But “sth” is also a word of disapproval, a manifestation of the reflective/judgmental narrator. Those opening five words also launch the narrative in a diegetic mode, as opposed to the mimetic. The narrative will, in fact, keep switching between these modes, blending them in different ways, even using the device of what David Lodge calls “pseudodiegesis” (“the mimesis not of a character’s but of a discourse”).²⁶ “Sth, I know that woman” also immediately positions the narrator as

²⁶ Qtd. in TALLY, Justine, *The Story of Jazz: Toni Morrison’s Dialogic Imagination*, (FORECAST 7.) Hamburg: LIT, 2001, 92.

extradiegetic (above the storyworld) and heterodiegetic (not one of the characters), presumably. Presumably, because both of these can change as we go on (neither of them will, by the way, other than that they will be redefined in the space of the culture–narrative intersection, as indicated above).

The most teasing feature of our narrator – to return now to the novel as a whole – is the way narratorial self-reflection is dramatized. The main, culturally driven aspect of the narrator’s ambiguous relation to her own story (thus to her own function as storyteller) is that the cultural reality²⁷ she is to present is African-American existence of dispersal, gaps, absences, and discontinuities. To tell an early-twentieth century African-American story, which is also the story of the culture in which the characters’ life takes place, means to present absence, to make sense of components that resist totalization. It is assigned to the narrator to estimate the individual cognition, motivation, and actions of the story-world characters *in such a social-cultural environment*. The biggest challenge of such a narratorial task is its paradoxical nature if not downright absurdity. No wonder that such a storyteller is so concerned with how to go about her job as a narrator. Thus it is the cultural (historical) given of African-American life in a racist world that forms the *fundamental* text-level culture–narrative intersection. This overarching cultural determinant of the narrative is far more significant than the content-level issue of how many and what kinds of cultural areas and details fill the pages of the novel directly or indirectly. If culture is the main context-domain in the text–context interface, the above African-American specificity is the super realm inside the cultural domain in the culture–narrative interface of Morrison’s *Jazz*. It is in the contexts of this interface that the life of the characters as internalized culture or culture-as-medium is determined.²⁸ It is in that intersection that the “textually presented fictional world”,²⁹ or, better still, tex-

²⁷ For fictional characters reality is the fictional universe in which they exist.

²⁸ About “karakteresített” and “közegesített kultúra” (“culture as character” and “culture as medium”) cf. my other essay, “A trópus mint kulturális narrativitás” (“Trope as Narrativity”).

²⁹ As Marie-Laure Ryan’s possible-worlds / cognitive mapping theory would have it – RYAN, Marie-Laure, “Cognitive Maps and the Construction of Narrative Space.” HERMAN 2003, 237–38.

tual/fictional universe³⁰ of uncertainties and absences, emotional instability and devastation, as well as successful and doomed strategies of survival is generated (generative culturalization). Consequently, culture is performing the story in different senses: the narrator presents culture directly, in the form of descriptions, narratorial opinions and asides, and indirectly, through story and character; it is as much as to say that culture performs/produces the story, through narratorial agency; moreover culture performs/produces/*becomes* the narrator (performative function of culture in the narrative).

It is in its performative function that culture-as-jazz – to cast another cursory glance at the jazz–music connection, without going into details at this point – produces narrative poliphony, riffing, and improvisation; bluesy and fast narrative rhythms, legato and staccato narrative style. Jazz music may be only one area of culture performing the novel *Jazz*, but it is the most important one, no doubt. James Lincoln Collier's book *Inside Jazz* recounts most of the fundamental features of jazz music. I contend that Morrison's narrative exhibits all of those general traits: the rhythm "is created by the notes themselves," "the basic beat" is always clearly stated, "[t]he beat of every song is virtually locked into the melody," but the notes are usually played "between the beats" (syn-copation), "slightly ahead or behind" the beat, and the melodies tending "to slip and slide over the underlying beat, instead of being firmly locked into it."³¹ (More about this when discussing jazz in *Jazz*.)

The narrator's improvisational vacillations (should I present Golden Gray this way or that? – the speaker in the novel wonders) are, then, both the message (the undefinability of a taboo-ridden entity: Golden Gray is a white-skin Black man) and manifestations of the improvisational urge of a narrative jazz performance. Add something else to this, at least as organically related to narratorial stupefaction and something most immediately "meta" in narrative concern: the times and the lives African-Americans live, frustrate narratorial attempts, confuse or sweep aside inherited narratorial reflexes. They destabilize narratorial self-assurance, make the narrator problematize her role as a narrator and question her reliability.

³⁰ RYAN, Marie-Laure, "Possible Worlds and Accessibility Relations: A Semantic Typology of Fiction" *Poetics Today* 12.3 (1991): 553–576.

³¹ COLLIER, James Lincoln, *Inside Jazz*, New York: Four Winds, 1973, 16–19.