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Abstract

The essay argues for a rhetorical view of narrative communication as an author's deployment of particular resources in order to generate certain responses in readers, and then examines the nature and possible functions of voice as a resource. It defines voice as the synthesis of style (diction and syntax), tone (a speaker's attitude toward an utterance) and values (ideological and ethical), and then turns to analyzing the role of voice—and more particularly, the role of tone—in narrative communication. With George V Higgins's *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* as Exhibit A, the essay examines the functions of voice and tone in fictional dialogue, and with Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* as Exhibit B, it examines their role in nonfictional narration. The essay concludes with a call for further analyses of voice and tone, even as it cautions that their roles may be more or less important as we move from one narrative to another.

Keywords

Didion, Higgins, narrative as rhetoric, style, synesthesia, tone, voice

Listen (once again) to some well-known lines from well-known narratives.

Sane people did what their neighbors did so that if any lunatics were at large one might know and avoid them.

George Eliot (1956 [1872]: 7) *Middlemarch*

Life changes fast.

Life changes in the instant.

You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends.

The question of self-pity.

Joan Didion (2005: 3) *The Year of Magical Thinking*

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Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say.

William Faulkner (1990 [1929]: 180) *The Sound and the Fury*

And it is this which frightens me:

Who knows but that on the lower frequencies I speak for you?

Ralph Ellison (1995 [1952]: 581) *Invisible Man*

“Oh, Jake, we could have had such a damned good time together.”

“Isn’t it pretty to think so?”

Ernest Hemingway (1926: 251) *The Sun Also Rises*

Part of what makes these lines so effective, the conventional wisdom goes, is that they emanate from distinctive voices. But what exactly does *voice* mean in such a statement? And what role does *tone*, the attitude the speaker takes toward the subject matter of the utterance, play in the construction of a distinctive voice and in the effectiveness of lines such as these?¹ Narrative theory has offered various productive ideas about the concept of voice. In particular, Genette (1980) defines voice as the answer to the question “who speaks?” and he discusses many of the consequences that follow from one answer or another. Bakhtin (1981) links voice to ideology as he identifies the novel as the genre built on heteroglossia, the mixing of various sociolects and the ideological values associated with each. Lanser (1992) builds on Genette’s work by adding the insights of feminist theory’s political analysis of voice: speakers with some identity markers have easier access to the floor than others, and, among those who get to speak, some are granted more authority than others. Despite this impressive work, narrative theory has not yet developed a full account of how voice functions in narrative in part because it has not, as Hite (2010) notes, given much attention to the concept of tone, which is an integral part of voice. In this essay, I want to take a few steps toward a fuller account of voice by expanding on a proposal I have made before (Phelan, 1996a, 1996b, 2005, 2010)—that voice is the synthesis of style, tone, and values in any utterance—and by emphasizing the role of tone in the communicative functions of voice. More specifically, I propose that by attending to matters of tone in print narrative, we can recognize that voice need not be simply a metaphor but rather can be the name for a learnable synesthesia, that is, a capacity for seeing words on a page and hearing sounds in one’s ear—an experience I hope you had when you read the passages at the beginning of the article. I shall argue further that in many cases the communicative effects authors seek depend substantially on their ability to convey—and their audience’s ability to hear—tone.² And our ability to hear tone typically depends on our attending to a combination of stylistic and contextual features of an utterance such as occasion, subject matter, character of the speaker, prior relationship of speaker, and audience. My first step is to situate an account of tone within a broader approach to narrative communication, one rooted in a conception of narrative as rhetoric, that is, a multilayered, purposeful communication from an author to an audience.

In some recent work (Phelan, 2011b, 2012a),³ I have argued that we need to overhaul narrative theory’s standard communication model, the one first proposed by Chatman in

Real Author → [Implied Author → Narrator → Narratee → Implied Reader] → Real Reader

Figure 1. Chatman's (1978) Narrative Communication Model.

Story and Discourse back in 1978 and tweaked in various ways by different theorists over the past 30-plus years. That model lays out narrative communication as a transmission from an actual author to an actual audience through a sequence of intermediaries. Figure 1 shows Chatman's (1978: 151) chart, with the brackets designating entities located within the narrative text.

I contend that this model describes only a special case of narrative communication, one occurring along only one of several channels that print narrative provides. The model does not account for communication along at least three other channels that bypass the narrator–narratee channel at the heart of Chatman's model: (1) communication via paratexts such as titles, dedications, prefaces, and epigraphs (what Genette, 1997, calls peritexts); (2) communication via such structural matters as the juxtaposition of scenes; and (3) communication via character–character dialogue. Furthermore, since it identifies only one channel, the model is also unable to capture the ways in which an author can create a synergy between or among different channels and construct communications that are greater than the sum of their parts.

Consider, for example, how Faulkner (1990 [1929]: 3) uses the synergy between dialogue and narration on the first page of *The Sound and the Fury*:

... we stopped and I looked through the fence while Luster was hunting in the grass. "Here, caddie." He hit. They went away across the pasture. I held to the fence and watched them going away. "Listen at you, now." Luster said. "Aint you something, thirty three years old, going on that way. After I done went all the way to town to buy you that cake. Hush up that moaning."

Faulkner uses the narration through Benjy's restricted consciousness to report external events, and he uses Luster's dialogue to give some crucial exposition about Benjy's age and to report that Benjy has begun to moan. But neither the narration nor the dialogue identifies the trigger for the moaning in the golfer's call of "caddie" which makes Benjy think of his absent sister, Caddy. Instead, Faulkner uses the synergy among the golfer's call, Luster's dialogue, and the narration to communicate that trigger to us—even if we need to read further before we're sure about that communication and its significance.

Since we need a model that can account for multiple channels of communication and for the possible synergy among them, we cannot satisfactorily revise Chatman's model simply by adding new entities to it. In fact, we can no longer adequately represent the dynamics of narrative communication with a single, two-dimensional model. The best we can do in two dimensions is sketch a chart of possibilities, one that identifies the multiple agents and the various textual phenomena that authors can draw on in different combinations to accomplish different communicative purposes. This chart needs to identify and to privilege the two constants in the communication, the somebody who tells and the somebody who listens: the author—or if you prefer, as I do, the implied author⁴—and

Table 1. Chart of the constants (implied author, actual audience) and the variables (resources) in narrative communication (IRA).

IMPLIED AUTHOR: (Outside the text; in history; occasion of writing)	RESOURCES: Occasion (of narration) Paratexts (peritexts) Narrator(s)/narration Character(s) as teller(s) and listener(s) Voice (who speaks with what combination of style, tone, values) Structure/gaps Narratee/narrative audience Authorial audience And ...	ACTUAL AUDIENCE: (Rhetorical readers; in history; occasion of reading)
---------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------

that segment of the actual audience with an interest in following an implied author's lead, what I call rhetorical readers. This chart should also identify the various resources that the implied author has at his or her disposal. Table 1 is my version of that chart, the shorthand for which is IRA, for implied author, resources, and actual audience.

In constructing this chart (Table 1), I've made numerous decisions that are worthy of comment—for example, putting both (some) tellers and (some) audiences in the resources column—but for the purposes of this essay, I will just say something about “rhetorical readers” and then focus on what the chart says about voice and tone. The phrase “rhetorical readers” refers to those members of the actual audience who seek to discern the authorial design behind a narrative's various ways of communicating, and in that way, the phrase emphasizes the link between the chart and a rhetorical approach to narrative. I recognize that not all actual readers seek such a design, and I think that's a good thing. Both reading and literary criticism are enriched when we encourage multiple ways of engaging with narrative. My concern is to make space for rhetorical reading as one kind of productive engagement.

Why separate voice as a distinct resource, and why define voice as the answer to the question: Who speaks with what combination of style, tone, and values? It makes sense to separate voice as a distinct resource because it plays a crucial role in so many of the options implied authors have chosen. Ever since Plato, commentators on narrative have recognized the importance of being able to identify who speaks (author, narrator, character, some blend of these agents) because that answer has consequences for perspective, authority, ethics, ideology, and much more. Rhetorical theory shares this view, and a brief consideration of a range of cases will go a long way toward explaining why. The cases are fictional narratives such as Eliot's (1956 [1872]) *Middlemarch* that make extensive use of a reliable, occasionally ironic, noncharacter narrator; nonfictional narratives such as Didion's (2005) *The Year of Magical Thinking* in which an author constructs a narrator who tells about the author's own experiences; narratives such as Ellison's (1995 [1952]) *Invisible Man* or Faulkner's (1990 [1929]) *The Sound and the Fury* that make extensive use of character narrators with varying reliability; and passages from any

narrative when the author shifts to character–character dialogue. From the perspective of rhetorical theory, the salient commonalities among these cases is that they all involve simultaneous communication from at least two tellers (author and narrator; author and character) to at least two audiences (narratee and actual audience; character spoken to and actual audience), and that in all cases the relationships among the implied author’s voice and the voices of the narrator(s) or character(s) play a major role in the narrative communication. The salient differences stem from the variety of relationships among those voices.

With reliable noncharacter narration in fiction, the implied author typically uses the narrator as her surrogate within the storyworld, investing the narrator’s commentary with her full authority. Consequently, we often equate the narrator’s voice with the implied author’s voice, as we do, for example, when we refer to Eliot’s (1956 [1872]) irony in *Middlemarch* and cite such examples as “Sane people did what their neighbors did.” In nonfiction lifewriting, such as Didion’s memoir, the default arrangement is for the implied author to construct the narrator as not just a surrogate but as herself, since the two figures exist in the same ontological world. But the implied author’s ability to break away from the default and show the narrator to be unreliable highlights the value of retaining the analytical distinction between the implied author and the narrator, with the implied author the agent who chooses to construct the narrator in one way (restricted to her perspective at the time of the action perhaps) rather than another (free to move between her perspective at the time of the action and her perspective at the time of the telling). Thus, we can say it is the implied Didion who chooses to open the memoir by quoting the brief document (“*Life changes fast ...*”) she has saved on her hard drive recording her initial responses to the death of her husband, John Gregory Dunne. The implied author who makes that choice is analytically distinct from the speaker who several months previously created that document.

With reliable character narration of the kind we get in the last sentence of *Invisible Man* (“And it is this which frightens me ...”), the implied author draws on the experiences of the character to give the reliable narration a force that it would not otherwise have. If Ellison had the *Invisible Man* ask his rhetorical question at the end of the Prologue rather than at the end of the Epilogue, its force would be significantly mitigated. With unreliable character narration of the kind we get in the early parts of *Invisible Man* or in Jason Compson’s “Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say,” the implied author designs a single text to fulfill the different communicative purposes of the two tellers (implied author and character narrator) addressing two audiences (narratee and authorial audience). And that double communication relies on our ability to hear the differences between the character narrator’s overt voice and the implied author’s covert one. In constructing Jason’s opening sentence, for example, Faulkner invites us to recognize the disparity between what Jason communicates to the narratee—I am a straight shooter who tells it like it is—and what Faulkner communicates to his rhetorical readers: Jason is a self-satisfied, sexist lout who thinks he’s smarter than everyone else. In this way, Faulkner uses Jason’s voice simultaneously to convey and to judge negatively key aspects of Jason’s character.

Character–character dialogue such as Hemingway (1926) provides at the end of *The Sun Also Rises* is an even more complex art of indirection, since it entails additional speakers with different purposes (implied author and at least two characters), and since the implied author must simultaneously both differentiate characters' voices from each other and motivate each character's speech within its mimetic context and within that of his or her own communicative purpose. Furthermore, sometimes that mimetic context means that the characters themselves will seek to disguise their purposes or otherwise attempt to deceive their interlocutors. The skillful implied author is able simultaneously to signal the relationship between his covert voice and those of the characters and use the consequences of that signaling in the service of his or her broader communication to the rhetorical readers. Hemingway uses the concluding dialogue between Brett Ashley and Jake Barnes to convey the distance between them. Brett's "Oh, Jake, we could have had such a damned good time together" is her articulation of the lie they have been telling themselves for many years, while Jake's "Isn't it pretty to think so?" indicates both that he now recognizes the lie and that he wants Brett to know that he does. Furthermore, Hemingway uses all those aspects of Jake's communication to communicate to his audience both Jake's new insight and Jake's rueful acceptance of what that insight means for his understanding of his past and of a now very different future with Brett.

I can explain my rationale for defining voice as the synthesis of style, tone, and values by again turning to an illustrative case. Please listen to the first sentence of Quentin's section of *The Sound and the Fury* and attend to its differences from Jason's "Once a bitch, always a bitch": "When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch" (1990 [1929]: 76). Faulkner gives Quentin's utterance a noticeably different diction and syntax (style), a noticeably different attitude toward his subject matter and audience (tone), and a noticeably different set of values. These elements of the utterance also establish the noticeable difference in the relationship between the implied Faulkner's covert voice and that of the two character narrators. While Faulkner's voice endorses neither character narrator's utterance, Faulkner's voice immediately and strongly undercuts Jason's while it only raises a question about Quentin's idea of being in and out of time.

Defining voice as the synthesis of style, tone, and values allows us to recognize that authors can modulate voice by shifting only one or two of the three elements. For example, an author can mark a shift in voice even as he makes no significant shift in style. In *A Farewell to Arms* (as I have argued in Phelan, 1996b), Hemingway (1929) gives Frederic Henry the same paratactic style at the end of the first chapter and at the end of the last, yet he marks a shift in voice by shifting the tone and values of his statements. Chapter 1 ends, "But it [the cholera epidemic] was checked and, in the end, only seven thousand died of it in the army" (1929: 4). The final sentence of the narrative is "After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain" (1929: 332). The tone of the sentence at the end of Chapter 1 is the matter-of-fact attitude characterizing a bureaucratic report, complete with a willful denial, and through this tone Hemingway signals that Frederic (as both character and narrator) has adopted the values of the official army party line that minimizes the effects of the cholera and that ignores its consequences for civilians. By contrast the tone of the novel's final sentence is that of deliberate and difficult resolve as Frederic adopts the values of one who, despite the deaths of his infant son and of his lover Catherine Barkley, will try to carry on.

As all these brief analyses indicate, if we attend to all three components of voice and give tone its due, then we will be better equipped to SEE words on the page and HEAR the sounds of a human voice and better equipped to recognize the textures and nuances of narrative communications. I recognize that the extensive tradition of stylistic analysis has already contributed greatly to this project. My claim is that conceiving of voice as the synthesis of style, tone, and values and paying more attention to tone can add another dimension to our analytical understanding of these textures and nuances. I turn now to a fuller illustration of my proposals by means of two case studies: a scene in George V Higgins's (2010 [1970]) dialogue novel *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* and two passages of narration in Didion's (2005) *The Year of Magical Thinking*.

Higgins (2010 [1970]) uses 30 scenes of dialogue to tell the story of how Eddie Coyle, a small-time criminal in Boston in the late 1960s, ends up getting assassinated by his so-called friends in the mob. As the novel opens, Eddie has been convicted of transporting stolen liquor across state lines but has not yet been sentenced. Eddie is willing to inform on others in exchange for being allowed to avoid jail time. The scene I will analyze depicts Eddie's first meeting with Dave Foley, an agent for the US Treasury, identified in the excerpt only as "the driver" of the car in which Eddie talks. Listen:

[Coyle:] ". . . you hear things from time to time, you know. People're careless."

"I know," the driver said. "Like last week I heard you were coming up for disposition in New Hampshire the fifteenth of January, and I said to myself, I wonder where Eddie's got plans to spend the Fourth of July."

"That's why I was interested in the skis," the stocky man said. "I figure as long as I got to go up there I might as well make a weekend out of it, you know? Think we'll have snow by then?"

"I think we're getting some now," the driver said.

"Because I was thinking, if we did," the stocky man said, "maybe you could join me for the weekend. You'd make out like a bandit, those clothes, the car."

"Then on Tuesday we could drive down to court together," the driver said. (Higgins, 2010 [1970]: 11–12)

Initially the dialogue here appears to be accomplishing some necessary exposition about Eddie's court hearing and showing how Eddie and Foley warm up to what turns out to be the real business of their meeting, Eddie's wanting to know whether giving Foley information about the illegal sale of machine guns will be sufficient to keep him out of jail. But the more we attend to voice and tone in this exchange the more significant and revelatory it becomes. Listen again to the dialogue about skis and snow, this time with a heightened consciousness about the implied Higgins communicating through the exchange:

"That's why I was interested in the skis," the stocky man said. "I figure as long as I got to go up there I might as well make a weekend out of it, you know? Think we'll have snow by then?"

"I think we're getting some now."

Eddie is trying to persuade Foley that he regards the sentencing hearing as no big deal, but the very effort involved in the persuasion belies his purpose. Higgins wants us to

recognize the tone of Eddie's utterance as one of false bravado. Higgins conveys that tone less through Eddie's diction and syntax than through his reliance on our ability to interpret the nonlinguistic aspects of the dialogue and its occasion: a small-time crook like Eddie is not capable of being cavalier about his sentence hearing, and, indeed, the very fact of Eddie's meeting with Foley signals that Eddie has serious concerns about that hearing. Thus, once we pick up on Eddie's tone, we can recognize that Higgins uses Eddie's voice to convey that Eddie has a great deal of underlying anxiety about the hearing. Higgins uses Foley's response to indicate that Foley sees through Eddie's bravado. Foley's tone is skeptical but his wit renders the skepticism more gentle than harsh, and his values are those of a benevolent superior: I see what you're up to and I'm going to call you on it.

Strikingly, Eddie ignores Foley's gentle skepticism and instead carries on with his imagined scenario of having a ski vacation with his good buddy on the other side of the law. Higgins uses Eddie's voice here to emphasize the interaction among his bravado, his anxiety, and his being slow on the uptake: Maybe if I pretend not to hear what Dave just said, I can carry off this charade of unconcern. In his next response, Foley abandons the effort at wit and instead goes to the main point: you don't care about skiing or whether I make out like a bandit; all you care about is whether I can help you at that hearing. In that way he continues in the role of Eddie's superior, though here he is less benevolent.

Higgins uses the play of voices in this exchange to communicate something significant about Eddie's position: he is always already one down with Foley. This position might generate some sympathy for Eddie—except that he's meeting with Foley in order to inform on someone who has trusted him. Foley comes off better in this scene—more discerning, more direct—but in subsequent scenes we learn that he is primarily interested in using Eddie for his own gain. If we become adept at hearing the voices of Higgins's characters, and especially the tones of those voices, by paying attention both to the details of their linguistic expressions and the nonlinguistic features influencing their exchanges, we come to understand the ways that Higgins so often lets his characters indict themselves and the way that those communications signal his own attitude toward them and their world. Higgins is an implied author who commands our respect not for the affection and sympathy he extends to his flawed characters but rather for his unsentimental view of their unceasing pursuit of self-interest.⁵

For my purposes Didion's (2005) *The Year of Magical Thinking* complements Higgins's novel not only because it is nonfiction but also because it has relatively little dialogue. Instead, Didion invites her audience inside her own consciousness as she details her experience of grief and mourning over the sudden death of her husband. Didion (2005: 7–8) directly comments on the relationship between this experience and her effort to write about that experience at the end of her first chapter:

I have been a writer my entire life. As a writer, even as a child, long before what I wrote began to be published, I developed a sense that meaning itself was resident in the rhythms of words and sentences and paragraphs, a technique for withholding whatever it was I thought or believed behind an increasingly impenetrable polish. The way I write is who I am, or have become, yet this is a case in which I wish I had instead of words and their

rhythms a cutting room, equipped with an Avid, a digital editing system on which I could touch a key and collapse the sequence of time, show you simultaneously all the frames of memory that come to me now, let you pick the takes, the marginally different expressions, the variant readings of the same lines. This is a case in which I need more than words to find the meaning. This is a case in which I need whatever it is I think or believe to be penetrable, if only for myself.

Didion's voice here is one of reflective candor, as she admits her need for new tools in a tone that mixes confidence over what she has done in the past with humility and a feeling of inadequacy about what she needs to do now. Furthermore, this mixed tone reinforces the relation between style and values in the passage. The style exhibits Didion's faith in "the rhythms of words and sentences and paragraphs." Indeed, the more we look at the details of the diction and syntax in the passage the more its careful craft becomes evident, but here I will focus especially on how Didion establishes those rhythms. The most salient device is her use of repetitions-with-a-difference: "this is a case in which I wish," "this is a case in which I need more," "this is a case in which I need whatever it is." But she also establishes rhythm through her arrangement of the phrases in apposition at the end of the longest sentence of the passage: "let you pick the takes, the marginally different expressions, the variant readings of the same lines." Significantly, Didion puts the mixed tone and the polished style in the service of a new set of values: where before the stylistic polish kept her own thoughts or beliefs impenetrable—and thus, we infer, kept her tone impersonal—now she needs and wants the words and sentences and paragraphs to reveal those thoughts or beliefs and, thus, to work together with a much more personal tone. Furthermore, Didion uses her distinctive synthesis of style, tone, and values to enact in her prose the thematic points of her passage. In this way, she uses the passage to guide us, as we read the rest of the memoir, to attend to the relationship between polish and penetrability in her narration.

Consider, for example, her account of her interaction at the hospital with the social worker and the doctor who pronounces John dead:

[The social worker] had with him a man he introduced as "your husband's doctor." There was a silence. "He's dead, isn't he," I heard myself say to the doctor. The doctor looked at the social worker. "It's okay," the social worker said. "She's a pretty cool customer." They took me into the curtained cubicle where John lay, alone now. They asked if I wanted a priest. I said yes. A priest appeared and said the words. I thanked him. They gave me the silver clip in which John kept his driver's license and credit cards. They gave me the cash that had been in his pocket. They gave me his watch. They gave me his cell phone. They gave me a plastic bag in which they said I would find his clothes. I thanked them. The social worker asked if he could do anything more for me. I said he could put me in a taxi. He did. I thanked him. "Do you have money for the fare," he asked. I said I did, the cool customer. When I walked into the apartment and saw John's jacket and scarf still lying on the chair where he had dropped them when we came in from seeing Quintana at Beth Israel North (the red cashmere scarf, the Patagonia windbreaker that had been the crew jacket on *Up Close & Personal*) I wondered what an uncool customer would be allowed to do. Break down? Require sedation? Scream? (Didion, 2005: 15–16)

Again the tone and style work together here to convey Didion's values. The style for most of the passage is marked by rhythm and repetition (so many sentences constructed as "they did x" and "I did y" or "they asked x" and "I said y"), and it conveys the tone of the cool customer who remains in control as she deals with the trauma of John's sudden death. Initially, these rhythms and this tone create an impenetrable surface, one that hides her emotions, and the implicit communication of value is that such control is a sign of strength. However, as the repetitions pile up and the gap between Didion's cool reporting of only external events and the traumatic event increases, the tone acquires another layer, one that ironizes that coolness. Underneath the impenetrability of the cool customer, we can detect a traumatized person whose attitude is anything but cool. Different readers no doubt will pick up this attitude at different points in the passage (for me, it becomes evident at the second "I thanked him"), but it becomes almost impossible to ignore in the double-voicing at the end of Didion's report of her interactions with the social worker: "I said I did, the cool customer." By quoting the social worker's description in her own voice, Didion indicates that she both accepts and rejects the description, and in that rejection there is a tone of resentment and even of anger. At the very end of the passage these tonal features come through even more strongly.

The last declarative sentence marks a change in the style that accompanies the change in location from hospital to home. The short sentences reporting only action in the Narrative Now give way to a long sentence with multiple subordinate clauses and a layering of temporality (the moment of Didion's return without John, the moment of their both returning from seeing Quintana, the moments when *Up Close & Personal* was being filmed). At the end of the sentence, the stylistic polish gives way to personal revelation less in the explicit wondering about what an uncool response would be than in the tone of that wondering, in its more pronounced resentment and anger. Furthermore, the telling insertion of "be allowed to" in the phrase "what the uncool customer would do" indicates that the resentment and anger are directed both at the social worker who labeled her with this identity and at herself for conforming to it. In this way, the shift in tone reveals that during her time at the hospital she had felt the gap between her behavior and her underlying emotions. At the same time, the wondering about options—expressed in short phrases that contrast with both the preceding long sentence and the short ones reporting events at the hospital—indicates that her playing the part of the cool customer kept her from fully tapping into those emotions. She does not say, and perhaps does not know, which actions would be more in keeping with her feelings—though the three options also convey something of the range and extremity of those feelings.

As the memoir progresses, Didion uses other modulations in her voice, other syntheses of style, tone, and values as the key means by which she allows her thoughts, beliefs, and feelings to penetrate the polish of her prose. Those thoughts, beliefs, and feelings do not conform to received wisdom about grief (for example, that it proceeds in five stages) but instead show how deeply she is affected by John's death and how difficult it is to come to terms with his loss. The memoir works for Didion's rhetorical readers because in attending to the modulations of her voice we become deeply moved by her experiences and acquire a new, richer understanding of the nature of grief.⁶

If these analyses are persuasive, then we have good grounds for giving further attention to the learnable synesthesia of reading voice and to the role of tone in narrative

communication. At the same time, we need to be aware that different communicative situations will lead to different roles for voice and tone. Hite (2010) persuasively argues that in *Mrs Dalloway* the tonal cues are frequently ambiguous with the result that the novel “traffics in *affective* uncertainty” which in turn complicates readers’ ethical engagements with Woolf’s communication. Furthermore, some communicative situations—such as the one governing the writing and reading of this essay—have strong generic conventions that govern an author’s use of voice and tone, conventions that discourage an author from such strategies as relying on tonal variation to convey key information. In other words, attending to tone in this essay will be less productive than attending to tone in *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* and *The Year of Magical Thinking*. Thus, one additional task for future studies would be to examine the conditions under which authors make voice and tone especially salient features of their communications.

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Notes

1. Wales notes that “in ordinary usage, tone or tone of voice means a particular quality of sound associated with particular emotions or feelings” (Wales, 2011: 425). That emphasis on sound highlights the challenge of identifying tone in written texts. I propose that by conceiving of tone as attitude, a broader conception than emotions or feelings, we can better meet this challenge.
2. The qualification—many cases but not all—is important and I will return to it in my conclusion for several reasons.
3. The discussion of Chatman’s model and my alternative here rehearses arguments I make in these two essays.
4. The summer 2011 special issue of *Style* on the implied author offers an excellent sampling of the debates about the concept and its efficacy (or lack thereof).
5. For a fuller analysis of the narrative communication in *Eddie Coyle*, see Phelan, 2012b.
6. For an important qualification of this praise for Didion’s memoir see my discussion of what I call her “deficient narration” at a key point in the memoir (Phelan, 2011a). But I emphasize that I see that analysis as a qualification rather than a contradiction of what I say here, because I think the deficient narration ultimately makes Didion a more sympathetic figure.

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