With Wayne Booth’s *Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) laying the foundation, contemporary rhetorical narrative theory has picked up great momentum and has become one of the most influential approaches to narrative. Drawing on structuralist narratology, especially Genette’s *Narrative Discourse*, enriched by Rabinowitz’s concept of audience roles, and broadening the scope to encompass the socio-historical context, recent rhetorical narrative theory, as represented by James Phelan’s *Narrative as Rhetoric*, has gained a notable balance, or even reached a synergy, among the author, the text, the reader, and the socio-historical context, avoiding the one-sidedness of the text-oriented classical narratology, the reader-oriented reader response criticism, the author-oriented traditional criticism, and the context-oriented cultural studies. 1999 saw the publication of Michael Kearns’ *Rhetorical Narratology*, which forms an important step in the development of rhetorical narrative theory, and which is unique in taking speech act theory as the theoretical ground. Context plays a “dominant” or “primary” role in the model established by Kearns, who believes that “by consistently granting to context the determination of what will count as a narrative text and the basic expectations governing how an audience will process such a text,” one can approach narratives more “systematically” (2). Moreover, in Kearns’s view, speech-act theory, by providing “the basis for [his] strong-contextualist position”, enables him to achieve “a truly ‘rhetorical’ narratology”
The present paper investigates what speech-act theory "does" in Kearns' rhetorical narratology, what the "strong-contextualist position" involves, whether it enables Kearns to arrive at a more systematic and "truly 'rhetorical' narratology".

"Strong" versus "Weak" Contextualist Position

In asserting the strong-contextualist position, Kearns says, "I insist that the right context can cause almost any text to be taken as narrative and that there are no textual elements that guarantee such a reception" (2). Kearns explains his motives as follows: "I advocate this version partly to stimulate further empirical research: a study might demonstrate that a certain density or variety of 'narrative' features in a text can guarantee that it will be received as a narrative. But until such research is conducted, I will remain on the side of speech-act theorists, for whom context holds the power. I also advocate the strong version because I believe that authorial reading—the belief, shared by audience and author, that a narrative text exists to move the audience in some way—governs the interaction between narrative texts and their audiences." (3) As far as the first motive is concerned, the uncertainty about the true fact makes one wonder whether it is justifiable to adopt such a strong position at present. One thing, however, is beyond doubt: the alternatives Kearns offers are two absolute positions: either "extra-textual features" (3) or textual features determine what will count as narrative. But as will be shown below, "what will count as a narrative text" is often determined by a joint function of both extra-textual and intra-textual features. As regards the second motive, Kearns's concept of authorial reading is inherited, and is essentially not different, from that of Rabinowitz and Phelan, among others. Since those rhetorical theorists do not share the strong-contextualist position with Kearns, it is difficult to perceive any real connection between the concept of authorial reading and "the strong version" of the contextualist position held by Kearns alone.
Kearns cites “an excellent example” from Petrey: “[t]he constitution is suspended” in a newspaper article compared to the same sentence in a government decree (Petrey 12) to illustrate the point that the same string of words can have entirely different effects in different contexts (Kearns 11). In one context, the words are performative, in the other, constative. But what we find in Petrey is a much more balanced position than that held by Kearns. Petrey concludes that “[t]he same words with the same meaning—the same locutions—have different conventional powers, and one of the most important principles of speech-act theory is that such difference of powers is at least as important in analyzing language as lexical and semantic identity. …Locutionary form is complete and whole within the linguistic utterance; illocutionary force is a combination of language and social practice.” (12–13; my boldface) While Petrey pays attention both to language and social practice, Kearns only sees the power of context in determining the force of “any utterance” (11). Now, given a sentence “The constitution was enacted in 1980,” no matter whether it appears in a newspaper article or in a government decree, there will be no difference in its illocutionary force, since it is not performative in either case. Indeed, the performative power of “The constitution is [hereby] suspended” in the government decree rests to a great extent on the linguistic structure itself. Another thing worth noting is that both Perey and Kearns take for granted the generic identity of “a newspaper article” and “a government decree” and treat “a newspaper article” or “a government decree” in itself as the very “context.” It follows that one can take “a novel”, “a biography” or “a narrative text” as the very “context”, and proceed to investigate what forces sentences within this context will have, as determined both by linguistic properties and generic conventions of reading.

That the interpretation of a text is very much governed by generic conventions is an indisputable assumption shared by speech-act theorists and literary theorists. In Structuralist Poetics, Jonathan Culler devotes much
attention to how generic conventions influence readers' interpretations (113ff., esp. 161–62). While some speech-act theorists as represented by Pratt (1977) have carried out extensive investigations on how generic conventions operate in the literary interpretive process, structuralists are very much limited to the investigation of textual structures, without paying attention to the process of reading (just as grammarians are understandably only concerned with the structure of sentences). But there is little doubt that structuralists do not deny the importance of generic conventions in the process of interpretation, and that all existing rhetorical narrative theorists take for granted the functioning of generic conventions (but, of course, Kearns is perhaps the first narratologist to apply pragmatic tools, especially the principles of relevance and the cooperative principle, to the analysis of the functioning of generic conventions in the interpretive process).

The originality of Kearns' theory lies in going one step further to claim that context alone determines whether a text is narrative or not. This position is, in my view, problematic and digressive. For one thing, Kearns's unique "strong-contextualist" position is contradictory with the "weak-contextualist" position held in general and also adopted by himself. If "the right context can cause almost any text to be taken as narrative", the distinction between narrative and non-narrative would in itself become meaningless since we will be left with only one category of texts. And if context can make "any text" or all texts just one category, all generic distinctions will become irrelevant, and the investigation of texts according to generic conventions will be out of place. As touched on above, the investigation of speech-act theorists is based on the distinction between different genres of discourse (e.g. a newspaper article vs. a government decree; a traditional novel vs. a new novel) or different situational contexts (e.g. a courtroom trial vs. a televising report). They take for granted the generic identity of a text, and proceed to investigate the generic conventions operating in the interpretive process. While Kearns claims that "[t]hroughout this book I
will advocate the strong version of this position” (3) and asserts the “strong” position from time to time, he is much more frequently committed to the “weak” position, as reflected in the statement “While rhetorical narratology, like its structuralist forebear, is not limited to literary narratives, that particular use of language allows me to further develop the concepts of relevance, display, and marking.” (22, my boldface) Talking about the author’s artistic and purposeful “flouting” of conversational maxims, Kearns says, “Such flouting is found in many avant-garde novels of the twentieth century, in which the author apparently tries to stay one step ahead of the reader’s process of interpreting implicatures.” (23, my boldface) Kearns often takes for granted a text’s generic identity (an avant-garde novel, a traditional novel, a daily account of an event, etc.) and proceeds to investigate the specific generic conventions involved in the reading process. He does not seem to be aware that his “strong” position is in conflict with this “weak” position, and adopts both at the same time.

Even when Kearns is expounding the strong position, internal contradictions may occur. Let’s compare the following two statements by Kearns: (a) “the label ‘Romance’ on the shelf where a book is found, principally determine how the utterance is going to be taken, what illocutionary force it will have” (11) (b) “someone might pick up a biography that had been mistakenly shelved as fiction” (14, my boldface).

Case (a) is marked by the strong-contextualist position, according to which a text’s own generic identity is irrelevant, for its identity is only what it is “taken as” by the reader as determined by context (ix). Case (b), however, does acknowledge the text’s own generic identity (a biography). And when “a biography” is shelved as “fiction”, this placing is regarded as a mistake. Case (b) is brought in when Kearns comments on Searle’s view that the speaker is not committed to the truth of her assertions in “display” texts. Kearns says, “Yet the speaker’s (author’s) lack of commit-
ment to the ‘truth’ of such assertions seems beside the point. Instead of this method of defining display text by the negative (not intended as truth), it makes more sense to describe it as a use of language, determined by context more than by the attitude taken by the speaker. This attitude is relevant but will not always be known, and other aspects of the situational context may cause a text to be received differently than it was intended (for example, someone might pick up a biography that had been mistakenly shelved as fiction).” (14, my boldface) This downplaying or denying of the role of authorial intention is in contradiction with Kearns’s acknowledgement of such a role in other parts of his book. In fact, “authorial reading” constitutes the first of what he calls “ur-conventions”, an important aspect in his theoretical model. Following Rabinowitz, Kearns says “Tor-ead authorially is to seek for authorial intention, not, however, intention as ‘individual psychology’ but as ‘social convention’; it is to accept ‘the author’s invitation to read a particular socially constituted way that is shared by the author and his or her readers’” (Before Reading 22).” (52, my boldface) Kearns goes even further than Rabinowitz in acknowledging the author’s individual psychology: “but I admit—as I’m sure Rabinowitz would too—that many people do read exactly this way [by inferring authorial intention as individual psychology]. Thus, here, authorial reading is a respected critical practice.” (52) To acknowledge the role of authorial intention (whether as “social convention” or as “individual psychology”) is precisely to acknowledge the generic identity of the text itself. An author pioneering the new novel would be operating on the basis of the assumptions of fictional discourse, purposefully deviating from traditional novelistic conventions. When the conventions of the new novel as a genre have been established, an author writing a text of this genre would operate on this basis as well. And readers will accept “the author’s invitation” to interpret the text as a new novel (rather than any other type of text) and to bring to bear on it the relevant conventions. While Kearns
subscribes to “authorial reading” (the seeking for authorial intention) and to the view that “[t]he rhetorical narratologist starts with the premise that the narrative is from the outset an act of communication between author and reader” (Richter 94, quoted from Kearns 7), he discounts or denies the role of authorial intention when asserting the strong-contextualist position. So if “a biography” (as primarily determined by authorial intention) is shelved as fiction, this context-determined identity is all that counts. One wonders in this way, how can “authorial reading” proceed, and how can the communication between the author and the reader take place?

The above quotation from page 14 of Kearns’s book points to a confusion of authorial intention and context. When Kearns claims that a display text is “determined by context more than by the attitude taken by the speaker”, he draws a clear line between authorial intention (which determines the text’s own identity) and the context (which may impose a mistaken identity on the text). But when he says “other aspects of the situational context…”, the modifier “other” indicates that Kearns is taking authorial intention as one aspect of the situational context. In fact, when Kearns argues that textual features do not have a role to play in determining “display”, “fictionality”, or “narrativity”, he frequently takes authorial intention as the context or as part of the context, as can be seen from the following statement: “[t]his single feature is not sufficient to cause an audience to take an entire text as fictional, whereas a contextualizing marker will do so, for instance, the word ‘romance’ in the title, an author’s disclaimer of resemblance to persons living or dead, or the placement of the physical text on a shelf labeled ‘Novels’. Such a marker establishes the situational context within which the text’s purpose will be understood.” (35, my boldface) Here the confusion is threefold. First, the title of the text, which is a textual feature inside the text, is taken as “the situational context.” Secondly, a label on a shelf is taken to be determining the text’s own purpose. But if a biography is placed on a shelf labeled “Novels”,

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how can “the text’s purpose” be understood if the mistake is not discovered? And if the mistake is discovered, what does that label have to do with “the text’s purpose”? Just two pages later, Kearns states, “When I use an ‘unspeakable’ verb form in a letter the point of which is not to narrate, but is to display, and if I believe that I’ve communicated that point, then I don’t worry that my addressee is going to attach the wrong purpose to my verbal act.” (37, my boldface) Apparently, what counts here is the text’s own generic identity (a letter) and the author’s intention which, in contrast with an extratexual feature such as a label on a shelf, determines the purpose of the verbal act.

The last but not least confusion is that authorial intention is treated as “the situational context.” Authorial intention is, in effect, at once extratexual and intra-textual. The real author exists outside the text but the author’s intention is embodied in the text. As quoted above, Kearns subscribes to the view that to “read authorially is to seek for authorial intention”—certainly in the text, not out of the text. Indeed, the intention of the implied author can only be inferred from the text. Seen in this light, authorial intention is surely to be distinguished from contextual features such as a label on a shelf. It is not fortuitous that here Kearns does not use the phrase “authorial intention” but “an author’s disclaimer.” In the quotation from page 14, Kearns discounts authorial intention for the simple reason that we may not know what type of text the author has intended to write. But a text usually comes to the reader with a known identity (Kearns, for instance, knows that the text concerned is “intended” to be “a biography”). Interestingly, the strong-contextualist position seems to be relevant only when cases of “mistaken identity” occur and only when such mistakes remain undiscovered. Now, if Dickens’s Oliver Twist is put on a shelf with the label “Romance”, Defoe’s Moll Flanders on a shelf with the label “Autobiography”, or Robbe-Grillet’s Dans le labyrinthe on a shelf labeled “Non-fiction”, most, if not all, readers will discover the “mistakes”
involved and return the books to the right places. If some readers are not able to discover the mistakes and go on to read Oliver Twist as romance or Moll Flanders as autobiography etc., we can certainly claim that the books are read in an infelicitous way, with wrong expectations and conventions.

Given Kearns' concern with systematicalness and consistency, it is surely unwise to bring in the “strong-contextualist” position, which, by making legitimate the mistakes as such, by discounting or denying the role of authorial intention, and by claiming that context can make “any text” just one category, contradicts with the “weak” position essentially based on the assumption that a text has its own generic identity (as primarily determined by the intention of the author who writes the text in a certain way based on the relevant conventions) and that a text is and should be interpreted according to the conventions of the specific genre to which it really (not mistakenly) belongs, a position that Kearns himself adopts for most of the time.

Kearns states, “Speech-act theory in fact provides the basis for my strong-contextualist position, hence for a truly ‘rhetorical’ narratology. This theory has been defined as nothing less than ‘an account of the conditions of intelligibility, of what it means to mean in a community, of the procedures which must be instituted before one can even be said to be understood’ (Fish 1024).” (10) Precisely because speech-act theorists lay emphasis on “conditions of intelligibility”, they pay particular attention to a text's own generic identity and the conventions of the genre to which the text really (not mistakenly) belongs. Pratt, for instance, asserts, “What I do claim is that regardless of what form the fictional utterance actually takes in a novel, the fact that the text is a novel automatically entitles the reader to bring these rules to bear on the fictional speech act.” (206, my boldface) If, say, Robbe-Grillet's Dans le labyrinthe is not interpreted as a new novel, but as a non-fictional daily narrative under the influence of an extratextual context, the book surely will not make sense. It should have be-
come clear that, with the strong position that grants the context all determining power, the analytic model cannot be truly rhetorical, since it allows texts to be interpreted with “mistaken” conventions and even go so far as to obliterate generic distinctions. Moreover, the model cannot be truly narratological, since it ignores the nature of the text itself, allowing, say, a non-narrative to be interpreted as narrative, or a biography as fiction, under the influence of context.

Despite the assertion of the strong position from time to time, Kearns is in effect committed to the weak position for most of the time and quite consistently throughout his practical analysis. Sometimes, we can infer the “weak” position from what appears to be of the “strong” position. Kearns observes, “The narrator of The Portrait of a Lady communicates in a different way than does the narrator of Emma, and both have a different kind of existence than does the third-person narrating voice of a biography. . . . As such a [strong – contextualist] theorist, I would say that Martin’s critique is not well formulated because it seems to presume that such a thing as ‘the meaning of a third-person fictional narrative’ exists, when in fact the interesting questions have to do with how a reader decides to begin with the assumption that a text is a fictional narrative and how that decision then shapes the reader’s transaction with the narrative.” (10–11). Superficially, Kearns is asserting his strong position, but actually he is adopting the weak position. For one thing, while criticizing Martin’s commitment to “the meaning of a third-person fictional narrative”, Kearns refers to “the third-person narrating voice of a biography”, which has “a different kind of existence than does the third-person narrating voice” of a fictional narrative. In drawing that distinction, Kearns is unavoidably committed to the meaning of both. Moreover, Kearns is taking for granted that The Portrait of a Lady and Emma are fictional narratives, a generic identity apparently not determined by situational context. When faced with the two texts, both Kearns and readers will automatically bring to bear on them novelistic conven-
tions. In other words, reading the two texts as fictional narratives is not really a problem both for the critic and for readers.

**Narrativity, Narrativization, and Context**

When holding the strong - contextualist position, Kearns's goes so far as to take "narrativity" itself as entirely determined by context. In Kearns's view, "narrativity, like fictionality, is a function of context" (35). While agreeing with Kearns that it is not required that "the fictional be distinguished as fictional on the basis of textual elements" (53), I think textual elements have a much more important role to play in determining narrativity. In terms of fictionality, there are certain features that are peculiarly associated with fiction, such as omniscience or any kind of third - person representation of consciousness. But unless those features are present over sufficiently long stretches of the text, fictionality can only be determined by the speaker/author's intention or by the ontological status of the text as a mode of being (see Ryan 13). In other words, a text with the same string of sentences can either be fictional or non-fictional depending on the speaker's intention and/or the text's relationship with reality. But even here, context in itself cannot determine fictionality; a real telephone directory is a real telephone directory even though a given context leads the reader to treat it as fictional (if it is treated as fictional, it is read with a mistaken identity). While fictionality is concerned with the nature of the text, narrativity is, in general, a matter of textual features or the reader's interpretation of textual features. That narrativity has much to do with textual features can be inferred from the following statement by Kearns himself: "In fact, Leitch asserts that a story's interest can depend on patterns of organization having nothing to do with its narrativity, including the 'histrionic, ironic, and digressive patterns', all of which are 'anti-narrative' (73). . . . Nevertheless, although recognizing that a story's display aspect might be reinforced by irony, digressions, and so forth, I still hold with
progression as an ur-convention: a narrative can lack these other patterns and still be taken by readers as a narrative, but it cannot lack progression." (61, my boldface) Here we can clearly see the causal relation between progression as a textual pattern and the presence of narrativity.

According to Prince, "Perhaps narrativity... should be conceived not as immanent to the text but as both textually exterior and interior, all at once out of the text (it is a flexible grid that allows us to view it in certain ways, to give it a certain kind of orientation or force) and in the text (its application is encouraged or called for by various textual features)... if A is thought to have a certain kind (or degree) of narrativity, it is because it is taken to involve [features] x, y, and/or z (and because the latter are assigned a certain weight)." ("Remarks" 104, quoted from Kearns 36) Interestingly but not surprisingly, Kearns subscribes to Prince's view, which is quite balanced between the text and the reader ("both textually exterior and interior"). Notice that even when narrativity is conceived to be "out of the text" as "a flexible grid that allows us to view it in certain ways", that "allowing" and those "certain ways" are inseparable from how elements of narrativity usually function in the text. In his conclusion to Narratology, Prince says, "In the first place, the study of the interaction between text and context emphasized the fact that the surface structure of a text is not quite what defines that text as a narrative. Depending on circumstances, a simple statement like 'Mary ate the jam' can function as a narrative, and we all know the joke about the telephone book being a novel with too many characters and too little action." (163, my boldface) Now, given "two plus two equals four" or "San Francisco is a beautiful city" or "the room is big in size", I'm sure no one will claim that any of those sentences can function as narrative in a proper context. And as the phrase "the joke" indicates, a telephone book cannot really be a novel under the influence of context.

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Kearns observes, “I agree with Fludernik that the elements of narrativity are not to be found within a text but result from the context within which an audience approaches narrative, a context that includes a script (Narratology 47).” (41, my boldface) But reading through that page of Fludernik’s book, we cannot find such a conception of narrativity, which is clearly defined by Fludernik as “a function of narrative texts and centres on experientiality of an anthropomorphic nature” (Narratology 26, original italics). Fludernik draws a distinction between narrativity and narrativization. The former “is a function of narrative texts”, while the latter is “a reading strategy that naturalizes texts by recourse to narrative schemata” (34). More specifically,

narrativization applies one specific macro-frame, namely that of narrativity, to a text. When readers are confronted with potentially unreadable narratives, texts that are radically inconsistent, they cast about for ways and means of recuperating these texts as narratives motivated by the generic markers that go with the book. They therefore attempt to re-recognize what they find in the text in terms of the natural telling or experiencing or viewing parameters, or they try to recuperate the inconsistencies in terms of actions and event structures at the most minimal level. This process of narrativization, of making something a narrative by the sheer act of imposing narrativity on it, needs to be located in the dynamic reading process where such interpretive recuperations hold sway.” (34, my boldface)

Several things need to be noted here. First, whether a text is narrative or not is not determined by context but by the text’s own generic marker, hence indicating the weak-contextualist position. Secondly, “narrativization”, a concept inspired by Culler’s “naturalization” (137 – 8), only concerns narratives that are deviant from the norm. Since normal narrative texts contain narrativity, readers would try to make sense of the deviant narratives with the established macro-frame of narrativity associated with the
narrative genre (an author, while writing a narrative in a deviant manner, would also expect readers to read this way). Thirdly, readers' narrativization cannot go beyond, at least not far beyond, the limit of the text. Since the texts are radically inconsistent, readers can only try to recuperate the inconsistencies in terms of actions and event structures "at the most minimal level". If a text only consists of a pure language game or narration game without any mimetic function, readers will most probably find "the natural telling or experiencing or viewing parameters" inapplicable, and narrativity can in no way be imposed (see Shen, "Defense" 229). Fludernik mentions two examples of narrativization: Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie* (1957) has frequently been narrativized as the jealous husband's observations of his wife through the window shutters; and the "very term of 'camera-eye' technique" "betrays another such narrativization which attempts to correlate the text with a frame from recognizable experience." (46) In such cases, textual features still play a vital role. In *La Jalousie*, the text frequently suggests that the angle of vision comes from behind the window shutters (apparently, the author wrote in such a way as to invite readers to interpret the text as such). As for "camera-eye", this metaphorical term was borrowed by Norman Friedman from the narrator's opening statement in Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* (1945) "I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording; not thinking." (quoted from Friedman 1179) It is a term that is only applicable to texts whose "aim is to transmit, without apparent selection or arrangement, a 'slice of life' as it passes before the recording medium" (Friedman 1179), and not applicable to any other kind of texts.

As we all know, fictional narrative has a mimetic function. Fludernik says, "Fiction with a teller figure evokes situational real-life equivalents of telling and their characteristic constellations. If there is a personalized narrator, for example, a certain cognitive, ideological, linguistic and sometimes even spatio-temporal position may become attributed to that narrator,
and she becomes a ‘speaker’ on the model of the standard communication script. ... The persistence of this preconceived notion that somebody (hence a human agent) must be telling the story seems to derive directly from the frame conception of storytelling rather than from any necessary textual evidence." (47) It is understood that the actual producer of a narrative discourse (which narrates a story) is the real writer. The impression that the narrative discourse is a written record of a fictional narrator’s telling comes from the joint function of 1) the earlier tradition of oral story-telling; 2) the writer’s imitating story-telling with various devices, including direct addresses to the reader, such as “Do not be led astray by it. It was not written for you” (Andersoon, “The Egg”), “I don’t think, ladies, we have any right to blame her...” (Thackery, Vanity Fair, chapter 3); and 3) the related conventions of interpretation. In Fludernik’s observation, the expression “fiction with a teller figure” indicates that the mimetic illusion is taken for granted. Now, if the narrator is “personalized”, she is naturally a speaker who refers to herself explicitly as “I” and may directly address the reader. The reader’s inference of the narrator’s cognitive, ideological, linguistic and spatio-temporal position has to be based on textual features (explicit or implied). When the narrator is not personalized, there may not be any explicit textual evidence of the narrator’s existence. As I argued elsewhere, the narrating process is not accessible to the reader unless it becomes an object of narration (Shen “Narrative” 125 –126). In daily life, if a speaker says, “Mary went to the library and borrowed three books...”. For someone listening to the recording of the speech, only the words themselves are accessible. And when the words are transcribed in written form, we can only see the words on the page, with the existence of the speaker taken for granted. Precisely because speech in itself implies a speaker, we can have free direct or free indirect speech without mentioning the speaker. When faced with impersonal narration, the assumption that someone must be responsible for the narrative discourse coupled with the
assumption that fictional narrators are narrative devices has lead narratologists to assume the existence of the narrator as “he/she/it” (see for instance, Chatman, Coming 144). The point is that since a narrative discourse cannot produce itself and since the process of narrating (unless becoming an object of narration) is always inaccessible to the reader, a narrative (discourse telling a story) is in itself sufficient (implicit) evidence for the existence of its teller/addresser as a human agent or as a narrative device.

Concerning the establishment of new genres, Fludernik says, “Although narrativization can ultimately result in the establishment of new genres and new narrative modes, these do not thereby become ‘natural’; they merely become recuperable from a semantic and interpretative perspective, and they do so through readers having recourse to natural categories. However, once new texts appear on the scene in massive numbers, as has been the case with the novel of internal focalization or with second-person fiction, they may institute a new genre or a new narrative mode and have to be included as a reference model on level III.” (46) Now, if “internal focalization” or “second-person narration” had never appeared in narrative texts, there would be no relevant narrativization to be talked about. And if a technique remains one or two individual cases, the reader’s narrativization will not result in the establishment of a new genre or a new narrative mode, which depends on a certain frequency of textual occurrence.

The point I’m driving at is that authorial intention, textual features, generic conventions and interpretive strategies (assumptions, expectations, frames, scripts) all have a role to play and they are very much interrelated. Textual features are a result of the author’s writing the text in a certain way based on generic conventions and with the relevant reading strategies in view. Generic conventions are given rise to by a joint function of textual features (as produced by authors whose writing helps make a new genre or expands an existing genre) and interpretive strategies (adopted by readers
and expected by authors). And interpretive strategies are based on generic textual features (such as narrativity as a specific macro-frame) and generic conventions, functioning as a kind of communication with the author. Paying attention to any one of those aspects while denying the importance of others or ignoring the interrelatedness or even interdependence of all these aspects can easily result in one-sidedness and inconsistency.

**Context and Speech Act Theory**

Kearns believes that by grounding his model on speech-act theory, he can arrive at “a truly ‘rhetorical’ narratology” (14). As analyzed above, the strong-contextualist position belies this aim. Since he is committed for most of the time to the weak-contextualist position, let’s examine whether his drawing on speech-act theory has enabled him to reach a truly rhetorical narratology when adopting the weak position.

As touched on above, speech-act theory is concerned with the forces of verbal acts in conventional contexts, such as a classroom, a church, a court-trial, a newspaper article, etc., where the speaker and the addressee are stereotyped social roles (a priest, a judge, a teacher, a student, a reporter etc.). In Kearns’s view, “the speech-act theorists’ commitment to understanding the shared conventions by which any text is produced and received” is “essential to rhetorical narratology, which treats any narrative as a speech act produced and received within, although not wholly determined by, a rule-governed context” (10).

As if to stress the importance of such context, Kearns goes one step beyond the position of speech act theorists in the following two aspects. First, the reader’s recognition of a text as belonging to a certain generic or discourse type becomes of primary importance in Kearns’s rhetorical narratology (e.g. “but such invoking can only happen within a context in which ‘narrating’ has already been determined to be the discourse type—the way this particular text is recognized as intended to be used” (Kearns 3)).
whereas speech – act theorists and rhetorical theorists in general just take it for granted that readers would recognize a narrative as a narrative, a novel as a novel, a poem as a poem, and a biography as a biography. Kearns pays great attention to one specific type of text “narrative display text”, which is in Kearns’s view “crucial to rhetorical narratology” (15). According to Pratt, “many if not all literary works fall into the class [of display texts] whose primary point is thought-producing, representative or world-describing”, as well as “expressive” (Pratt 143; Kearns 15). Kearns comments that “[t]he description also emphasizes the rhetorical nature of display. The speaker has a purpose: to elicit a particular response in the audience. The audience recognizes the purposeful nature of the display and can either go along with or reject the purpose.” (15) Again, both speech-act theorists and rhetorical theorists take it for granted that their competent literary readers have no problem in recognizing a literary text as a display text. But this recognition is called into question and treated as a matter of vital importance in Kearns’ rhetorical narratology. Secondly, Kearns’s readers include incompetent ones. “Speech-act theory”, in Kearns’ words, “reminds us that ‘literature is a context’ like any other (Pratt, Towards a Speech Act Theory 99), with rules and conventions that both writers and readers know to be in place.” (14, my boldface) That is to say, speech-act theorists have in mind competent literary readers, so are rhetorical narrative theorists. Kearns himself, however, has in view both competent and incompetent readers, observing, “When my younger daughter narrates a playground incident, I notice (mark) her tense shifts, because my intuitive grammar has been shaped by standard written English. Her older sister does not mark the shifts—at least not yet. ... A reader who approaches Robbe-Grillet’s In the Labyrinth in a facilitating context (say, a college English course) will be able to assume the CP at a different level, recognizing for instance that the concept of ‘relevance’ is being thematized. A reader who picks up the same novel expecting to
while away the hours with a good story will feel cheated.” (24–25) Indeed, Kearns’ readers often appear to be potentially incompetent, since it becomes uncertain (thus a matter of vital importance) whether they can recognize a narrative as a narrative, a novel as a novel, or an avant-garde novel as an avant-garde novel.

The concern with such basic issues apparently does not allow Kearns to go far in achieving a more rhetorical narratology, nor does the application of the tools borrowed from speech act theory. This point can actually be inferred from Kearns’s summary of Pratt’s speech-act analysis of literature: 1. A literary text exists in a context that determines how it will be received. 2. Because readers share this context, they will take the literary work as a display text whose purpose is to stimulate an imaginative, affective, and evaluative involvement. 3. Readers believe that the writer believed that this involvement is worth their time. 4. The unmarked case of a genre establishes the norm against which readers recognize variations or departures. 5. Such departures are by definition marked. 6. Such departures are also hyperprotected: readers assume that when a text violates any of the maxims supporting the CP, this violation is part of the text’s display rather than a transgression of the cooperation between the (assumed) author and reader. 7. A reader always begins a novel with the assumption that the speech situation is identical to that of real-world narrative display texts, especially that the speaker (narrator) will observe the CP and that the narrative is tellable. This is the unmarked case for the novel genre. (26) Such a basic understanding of the relation between the reader, the text and the context is shared by literary theorists and critics in general, and does not allow one to go very far in literary criticism. This “basicness” can be inferred from the following two comments by Kearns himself:

As this summary makes clear, speech – act theory always keeps in view the recipient of the act. Furthermore, it insists that according to the princi-
ple of relevance, all human communication is governed by a basic drive to establish conditions maximizing cognitive effect and minimizing processing effort. Hence, for instance, both writers and readers assume that a published text is ‘worth it’, worth the effort to read as it was to write and to publish. These fundamental points are also basic to rhetorical narratology. (26, my boldface)

But I also want to make explicit here a point I've been implying all along: the ur-conventions of narrative, and the CP without which these conventions could not exist, count as “broader cultural presuppositions.” (113)

As mentioned above, the ur-conventions constitute an important aspect of Kearns’s rhetorical narratology. But none of the four ur-conventions that Kearns is concerned with has originated from speech act theory: “authorial reading” has come primarily from Rabinowitz; “naturalization” from Lanser; “heteroglossia” from Bakhtin; and “progression” from Phelan. Here we have a discrepancy between Kearns’s claim to base his model on speech-act theory and the practice of basing the ur-conventions on other theoretical models rather than speech-act theory. Speech-act theory only figures prominently in the introductory first chapter, and its place is very much “unsurped” in the following chapters by various analytic methods (including the four ur-conventions) drawn from other sources, especially rhetorical and structuralist narrative theories. The reason is not far to seek; speech-act theory is concerned with very basic or internalized conventional assumptions and expectations (such as “both writers and readers assume that a published text is ‘worth it’”), which are not sufficient for literary interpretation. The fact that the four ur-conventions are not based on speech-act theory renders false Kearns’s assertion “the CP without which these conventions could not exist.” These conventions came into existence and have been operating without having anything to do with the “Cooperative Principle” as a theoretical model, but of course, they have to do with the rele-
vant basic assumptions the CP is concerned with and are usually taken for granted in literary theory and criticism.

Moreover, the concentration on the very basic generic conventions as the situational context detracts attention from the socio-historical context. Kearns unequivocally states, “Because I see the situational context as more significant than the cultural for determining the use of most texts, and because this is the context to which I most often refer, I will usually just use the term context to mean situational context; if I mean cultural context, I will always attach the adjective.” (17) As we know, speech-act theory is usually concerned with contemporary conventional contexts, which are, or are implicitly treated as, agendered, atemporal, and ahistorical. But fortunately, Kearns does not go far in that direction, for he is brought back by other analytic models.

More Synthetic but Not More Rhetorical

Kearns’s Rhetorical Narratology displays a comprehensive synthesis quite unprecedented in rhetorical – narratological narrative theory. The book draws on various models and methods, including the ur-conventions developed by different theorists, Barthes’ codes, Bleich’s view on gender and reading, Lanser’s view on gendering of narrating voice, Phelan’s view on character, various structuralist narratological models especially Genette’s discussion of narrative discourse, Booth’s rhetorical narrative theory, Rabinowitz’s rules for reading, Ryan’s possible world theory, among others. When introducing a theorist’s model or concept, Kearns would also discuss related views by other theorists or critics, commenting on their respective advantages and disadvantages and offering his own modifications. Thus, Rhetorical Narratology, becomes, so to speak, a “melting pot” of numerous theoretical models and concepts, extremely rich in references and comprehensive in coverage of the related fields.

This admirably open-minded incorporation and synthesis of various
theories function to redress the one-sidedness of Kearns's own theoretical model focusing on three aspects: "[c]ontext, the ur-conventions, and the positions of voice and audience" (3). The first element is marked by the strong-contextualist position, which, as analyzed above, is misleading, but which is suppressed and remedied by the weak-contextualist position of the various theories Kearns adopts. Moreover, Kearns’s incorporating Bleich’s view on gender and reading and Lanser’s view on gendering of narrating voice etc., takes him beyond the “situational context” into the social-cultural context.

As for the third element “the positions of voice and audience”, it displays a focus on the discourse, as Kearns declares: “Rhetorical narratology recognizes story elements, but because this speech-act theoretical basis foregrounds the interaction between reader and text, I give more prominence to discourse elements.” (2) But more balance is gained through Kearns’s adopting, among other things, Phelan’s model of progression, which concerns “two main kinds of instabilities: the first are those occurring within the story, instabilities between characters, created by situations, and complicated and resolved through actions. The second are those created by the discourse, instabilities-of-value, belief, opinion, knowledge, expectation-between authors and/or narrators, on the one hand, and the authorial audience on the other” (Phelan, Reading People 15, quoted in Kearns 59). Phelan calls the first type “instabilities” and the second “tensions”. While Phelan’s model displays a remarkable balance between story and discourse, there is a kind of unbalance as regards the relation of the two types to readers’ response and to the author’s attitude. The reader’s response is taken into account when discussing “tension” on the level of discourse, but no room is left for the reader’s response when it comes to “instabilities” on the level of story. In terms of the latter, Phelan is apparently trying to preserve the internal logic of character interaction that is not affected by the characters’ relation to the audience. But readers also re-
spond to "instabilities between characters". As for the author, we can, of course, infer the author's view or attitude towards the narrator from the discourse. But we can also infer the author's view or attitude towards the "instabilities between characters." To be consistent, one may define "tensions" as "conflictual relations (involving significant gaps in values, beliefs, or knowledge) between or within narrators and/or between the narrator(s) and the authorial norms of the text." Then, we can go on to describe the reading activity: the (authorial, narrative, flesh and blood) reader's response both to the instabilities on the level of story and to the tensions on the level of discourse. In effect, this point can be readily inferred from the following statement by Phelan himself: "As the essays in this book indicate, the rhetorical approach is very concerned with the relation between narrative strategies and the activities of readers — in the way that what occurs on the levels of both story and discourse influences what readers know, believe, think, judge, and feel." (Narrative as Rhetoric, my boldface)

Given Kearns's attentive reading of and extensively drawing on works by Phelan, Lanser, Chatman ("The 'Rhetoric'"), among others, one feels puzzled at his statement, "To my knowledge there is no theory that combines these two fields — that draws on narratology's tools for analyzing texts and rhetoric's tools for analyzing the interplay between texts and contexts in order better to understand how audiences experience narratives." (2) And he goes on to say, "To fill this gap I'm proposing a rhetorical narratology that is grounded in speech-act theory". Indeed, speech-act theory is treated as the only useful tool: "With rhetorical narratology", Kearns declares, "I intend to give narratology's rhetorical turn a strong push by keeping at the center of the inquiry the question, How do the elements of narrative actually work on readers? And by approaching this question by means of speech-act theory." (9, my boldface) In making such statements, Kearns has overlooked three points. First, narrative theorists like
Phelan and Lanser, have already done what he proposes: drawing on narratology’s tools for analyzing texts and rhetoric’s tools for analyzing the interplay between texts and readers in situational and cultural contexts. Secondly, speech-act theory merely offers a different kind of grammar or terminology for describing the relevant phenomena. Grice’s theory of the Cooperative Principle and conversational implicature provides a simple and powerful grammar for describing the adherence to or violation of some general rules of communication. But the fact is that literary theorists and critics have long been concerned with the preservation and violation of the norms of literary communication, concerned with the deviant (marked) cases, with the implied meaning or thematic significance (implicatures) involved in the writer’s artistic violation (flouting) of the (unmarked) norm. While literary theorists and critics have not used terms such as “tellability” and “display”, they have long been concerned with the “thought-producing, representative or world-describing” and “expressive” components of literature; and while they have not used terms like “perlocutionary effects” or “performative function”, they have long been discussing the affective powers or effects of literature. What Kearns describes, that is to say, are some familiar phenomena now formulated in the terminology of speech-act theory. The third point, which has been touched on above, is that speech-act theory is not a sufficient tool for answering the question “How do the elements of narrative actually work on readers?” The conventions speech-act theory is concerned with are very “basic” ones. Sperber and Wilson have well spelled out “the basicness” of the principle of relevance: “humans automatically aim at maximal relevance, i.e. maximal cognitive effect for minimal processing effort... The principle of relevance... is not something that people have to know, let alone learn, in order to communicate effectively; it is not something that they obey or might disobey; it is an exceptionless generalization about human communicative behaviour.” (544, quoted from Kearns 19, my boldface). Such a basic or internalized princi-
ple is usually taken for granted by rhetorical theorists and critics in their investigation of the interaction between narratives and audiences. Perhaps precisely because Kearns has taken speech-act theory as the theoretical ground, he finds it particularly necessary to draw on various models and methods from other sources.

The highly synthetic model has helped Keams to come up with very rich and fruitful analyses. As quoted above, the central question Kearns tries to answer in his practical analysis is “How do the elements of narrative actually work on readers?” In sharp contrast with the theoretical discussion that very much overlooks the importance of textual features, Keams’s practical analysis in the latter part of the book focuses on the effects of textual features on readers. This is not surprising since Keams’s model is after all rhetorical-narratological. Textual features are important to rhetoric that is concerned with the relation between texts and readers, and textual features are essential to narratology of whatever kind.

In conclusion, Kearns’s Rhetorical Narratology is characterized by an admirably open-minded incorporation of various relevant concepts, models and methods, displaying a rich theoretical synthesis and an admirable comprehensiveness. It does form an extremely worthwhile attempt to combine the tools of narratology and rhetoric, as well as speech-act theory, in investigating how audiences experience narratives, constituting an important step in the development of rhetorical-narratological narrative theory. But we cannot overlook the one-sidedness of Keams’s own strong-contextualist model. Given the fact that the greatest advantage of recent rhetorical narrative theory lies in its striking a balance among the author, the text, the reader and the context, the one-sidedness of Keams’s strong-contextualist position appears to be particularly regrettable, but it is remedied or redressed by Keams’s incorporation of various other theoretical models. Significantly, the inconsistencies involved in Keams’s rhetorical narratology provide us with a good opportunity to clarify certain fundamental issues con-
cerning the relation between the strong and the weak-contextualist position, between authorial intention and a text’s generic identity, between reader, narrativity and narrativization, and encapsulating all, between context, text and speech act theory.

Notes:
1. Some critics have used the term “narrativity” in a different sense. Leitch, following Scholes, regards narrativity as “the process whereby an audience constructs a coherent story from the fictional data (images, gestures, sentences) presented in a given discourse”, as the basic skills an audience uses in order to interpret a narrative successfully. (Leitch 34 – 35, quoted from Kearns 38) Here the term “narrativity” is employed to describe an audience’s reading ability or competence, hence to be distinguished from its usual sense.
2. Since “narrativization” is intrinsically linked with the basic features of narrative, it will not occur in non-narrative genres such as argumentation. In non-narrative genres, readers will recognize narrative elements if they appear, but will not be involved in narrativization.
3. As I mentioned elsewhere (Shen, “Narrative” 128 n. 1), the distinction between diegesis and mimesis in the third book of Plato’s Republic is concerned with oral rather than written narration, as indicated by the explicit reference to “voice” and “gesture” in the following piece of dialogue: “And this assimilation of himself to another, either by the use of voice or gesture, is the imitation of the person whose character [the poet] assumes?” ‘Of course.’ ‘Then in this case the narrative of the poet, whether Homer or another, may be said to proceed by way of imitation?’ ‘Very true.’ ” (Plato 26, my quotation marks).
4. In Kearns’s model, “voice” receives unprecedented emphasis and the term “narrating act” frequently takes the place of “narrative” or “narrative act”, even to the point of replacing story elements: “to take the text as a series of narrating acts that do not cohere into a well-formed story” (53). But earlier, Kearns said something quite different, “In order to stress this transactional relationship between narrative text and audience, I will use ‘narrating’ and ‘narration’... It is the narrating/narration that an audience experiences, although
retrospectively the audience may evaluate both the story and the discourse as part of the process of seeking a theme.” (33 emphasis mine) From these quotations we can see that the scope of “narrating” is amplified through moving in two different directions. First, the scope of narrating act is enlarged to encompass the story. But this move contradicts with places where the borderline between the two is kept clear, e.g. “the act of narrating rather than the ostensible story” (Keams 24), “novels typically focus on stories other than those having to do with the telling of stories... the narrating itself” (ibid). Secondly, a distinction is drawn between the audience’s immediate reading process and the audience’s retrospective reflections. If one is only concerned with the former, narrating/narration is all that matters, and story/discourse can simply be left out of consideration. But this is apparently not the case. The audience is in effect constantly trying to infer story facts and constantly responding to various discourse devices in the immediate reading process. That is why they can experience “instabilities” at the level of story, as well as “tensions” at the level of discourse, during the immediate reading process, and that is why there is a need to have the reading position “narrative audience” who takes the fictional world to be real during the immediate reading process. Interestingly but not surprisingly, instead of having “speaking – act theory”, we have “speech – act theory”, for the theory is concerned with what “words” do in a given context. As I argued in detail elsewhere, when reading a narrative, what readers can get access to is usually only the discourse (from which they infer the story), not the act of narrating (see Shen “Narrative”).

5 In Keams’s discussion, we find notable confusion between the authorial audience and the narrative audience; (my bold face) “In Rabinowitz’s scheme, [1] to read ‘authorially’ is to pretend to be a member of the narrative audience, that is, to take the fictional work as real... and [1] is no longer conscious of authorial intention... I find Ryan’s description more accurate because it is more general: reading in the narrative audience mode is characterized as ‘immersion’, in contrast to [2] the mode of ‘detachment’ (“Allegories” 30 –31). [2] The latter we term authorial... [2] To read authorially is to seek for authorial intention” (Keams 51 –52, my boldface). Apparently, the parts marked by [1] directly contradict with the parts marked by [2].
Indeed, how can one who is no longer conscious of authorial intention see for authorial intention? And how can the “authorial” audience in the mode of “detachment” take the fictional work as real? Now, the borderline between “authorial audience” and “narrative audience” was originally quite clear in Rabinowitz’s “Truth in Fiction” (126 – 134). The authorial audience is defined as “a specific hypothetical audience”, who, as distinct from the narrative (“imitation”) audience, is fully aware that the fictional world is not real but constructed. When Wayne Booth introduces Rabinowitz’s distinction in the afterword to the second edition of The Rhetoric of Fiction, potential confusion is created: “Peter Rabinowitz, for example, makes a compelling case for distinguishing three kinds of implied reader from the actual readers... There is, first, what Rabinowitz calls the ‘authorial audience’... Members of this audience resemble my implied or postulated reader... and the ‘narrative audience’ whom we pretend to join, the listeners inside the narrative, who, unlike the authorial audience and the breathing reader, believe that the events of the story are real” (422 – 423). Here the confusion comes from the fact that the term “implied reader” is used both in an exclusive sense (only referring to the postulated reader, the counterpart of the implied author) and an inclusive sense (including the narrative audience). In the Glossary of Phelan’s Narrative as Rhewric, the term “authorial audience” is also used not only in the exclusive sense, defined as “the hypothetical, ideal audience for whom the author constructs the text and who understands it perfectly. The authorial audience of fiction, unlike the narrative audience (defined below), operates with the tacit knowledge that the characters and events are synthetic constructs rather than real people and historical happenings. The term is synonymous with implied reader”, but also in the inclusive sense, as reflected in the definition of “narrative audience”: “the observer role within the world of the fiction, taken on by the flesh – and – blood reader in that part of his or her consciousness which treats the fictional action as real. The narrative audience position, like the narratee position, is subsumed within the authorial audience position.” (my boldface). As Phelan makes clear in Narrative as Rhewric, the “authorial audience” and “narrative audience” are two reading positions, corresponding to two different parts of the reader’s reading consciousness. To preserve the distinction
and to avoid confusion, we need to use “authorial audience” consistently in the exclusive sense, while using “the reader” or some other term in the inclusive sense. During the reading process, “the reader” can subsume the role of both the authorial and the narrative audience, as well as the role of narratee and that of flesh-and-blood reader (i.e. that part of the reading consciousness related to one’s own experiences).

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About the author:

Dan Shen, Ph. D from Edinburgh, England, now professor of English, Deputy Director of the Humanities Division and Director of Euro – American Literary Studies Center, Peking University, China. Scholarly books include Narratology and the Stylistics of Fiction.