Part Three

Audiences and Ideology
Narratee, Narrative Audience, and Second-Person Narration: How I—and You?—Read Lorrie Moore’s “How”

This chapter is the most technical one in the book, focusing on clarifying the concepts of audience I have been using. More particularly, the essay uses the complex addresses of second-person narrative (Lorrie Moore’s “How” is my example) as the framework within which to examine the relation between rhetorical theory’s concept of narrative audience and narratology’s concept of narratee. I argue that the two concepts are not competing but complementary, and I suggest a way of redefining narrative audience to reflect this complementarity. The multiplication of distinctions in this essay does raise the broader practical question of when the terministic screen of rhetorical analysis may become too thick, may, that is, become less of a visual aid and more of an obstruction. Do we always need to distinguish among narrative audience, narratee, ideal narrative audience, authorial audience, and flesh-and-blood audience, when we are focusing on questions of address? No, because in many narratives the differences are nonexistent or negligible. At the same time, however, an awareness of the different roles and of the different kinds of relations between them does provide an important means of explaining the complexity of some narrative discourse, especially in second-person narrative, which typically plays with these audience roles.
How Are You?

A voice addresses you. Not from clouds, a mountaintop, or a burning bush. From this page. It asks how you are and what you’re up to. It is a friendly voice, though not immediately recognizable. You are unsure how to react. You have an impulse to shout out that you’re fine, you’re reading, you’d be grateful not to be disturbed. But you also don’t want to be rude, so you just say, “OK” and “Studying second-person narration.” The voice wants to know if you’ve read Lorrie Moore’s *Self-Help*. Oh yes, you say—in fact, you’ve just begun reading an essay about it. The voice asks what the essay’s about and if it’s any good. You can’t tell yet; so far the critic seems more interested in showing off his cleverness than in saying anything about Moore’s book. If he doesn’t quit, you’ll quit reading. OK, says the voice, fair enough; I’ll go mute, if you promise to stick around. In fact, to erase the sound of my voice, let’s listen to Lorrie Moore’s at the beginning of her short story “How”:

Begin by meeting him in a class, a bar, at a rummage sale. Maybe he teaches sixth grade. Manages a hardware store. Foreman at a carton factory. He will be a good dancer. He will have perfectly cut hair. He will laugh at your jokes.

A week, a month, a year. Feel discovered, comforted, needed, loved, and start sometimes, somehow, to feel bored. When sad or confused, walk uptown to the movies. Buy popcorn. These things come and go. A week, a month, a year. (55)

Who Are You?

Perhaps this question would be better phrased as “Who are the YOUs?” to indicate that it refers to the second-person addressees in the two texts of the previous section (i.e., the text of this chapter and Moore’s text) rather than to you who are now reading the words of this sentence. The rephrasing does sharpen the question, but, as we shall soon see, trying to answer it will call the logic that motivates the sharpening into doubt. The rephrased question depends on a clear and stable distinction between an intrinsic, textual “you”—a narratee—
protagonist—and an extrinsic, extratextual “you”—a flesh-and-blood reader. Both texts, however, undermine the clarity and stability of the distinction. In the first text, the you addressed by the voice “from this page” is both textual and extratextual; it refers not only to the narratee-protagonist but also to you the actual reader. The you who is unsure how to react may or may not be both narratee and actual reader—at that moment, the discourse is blurring the boundaries between them. At the end of the paragraph, the you addressed by the voice is again textual and extratextual, and the shift to homodiegetic narration (from “the voice” to “I”) foregrounds that dual address.

Moreover, this play with the location (textual and/or extratextual) of the addressee is only part of the text’s story of reading. When we read, “You are unsure how to react,” and recognize that the you who is narratee-protagonist need not coincide with you the actual reader, another audience position becomes prominent: the observer role familiar to us in reading homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narration, the position from which we watch characters think, move, talk, act. In fact, what happens as we read “You are unsure how to react” is frequently an important dimension of reading second-person narration: When the second-person address to a narratee-protagonist both overlaps with and differentiates itself from an address to actual readers, those readers will simultaneously occupy the positions of addressee and observer. Furthermore, the fuller the characterization of the you, the more aware actual readers will be of their differences from that you, and thus the more fully they will move into the observer role—and the less likely that this role will overlap with the addressee position. In other words, the greater the characterization of the you, the more like a standard protagonist the you becomes, and, consequently, the more actual readers can employ their standard strategies for reading narrative. However, as recent commentators on second-person narration have consistently observed, most writers who employ this technique take advantage of the opportunity to move readers between the positions of observer and addressee and, indeed, to blur the boundaries between these positions (Fludernik, Kacandes, McHale, Richardson). In short, it’s not easy to say who you are.

The same difficulty is present in the opening section of Moore’s story. Because Moore begins by narrating an event in which the actual
reader is not directly involved—girl meets boy—the observer role is initially more prominent. But in the second paragraph, where the gender of the you is not specified and the general trajectory of the you's experience is widely recognizable, the actual reader is likely to feel the pull of the addressee role. In fact, by showing the movement from observer to addressee rather than from addressee to observer, the passage illustrates how second-person narration almost always retains the potential to pull the actual reader back into the addressee role. Again, with Moore's text, the question "who are you?" does not have a clear and simple answer.

Although it is not easy to say who you are, watching you read can be highly instructive. In the rest of this essay, I would like to pursue that instruction by attending to the way in which the dynamics of second-person narration invite a reexamination of concepts of audience from two distinct but related traditions of narrative study: narratology's "narratee" and rhetorical theory's "narrative audience." My contention will be that each tradition has something to teach the other and that both concepts are necessary to understand the complexities of reading second-person narration. I shall then illustrate the usefulness of the two concepts in a rhetorical analysis of Moore's "How."

**Narratee and Narrative Audience**

Perhaps the most striking thing about the widely circulating concepts of narratee and narrative audience is that no one has carefully considered their relationship to each other. Are the concepts synonyms and the terms interchangeable? Does one concept subsume the other? If so, which is the more encompassing? Alternatively, are the two terms complementary, overlapping, or incompatible? What does their relationship tell us about the similarities and differences of structuralist narratology and the rhetorical theory of narrative? Second-person narration will help us answer these questions, but it will be helpful first to review the essays in which these two concepts were first formalized, Gerald Prince's "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee" (1973) and Peter J. Rabinowitz's "Truth in Fiction: A Re-examination of Audiences" (1977).
Prince’s purpose is to call attention to a previously neglected link in the chain of narrative communication and to demonstrate that “narratees deserve to be studied” (8). He argues, in effect, that the logic of differentiating between authors, implied authors, and narrators applies as well to readers (or receivers), implied readers (or addressees), and narratees (or enunciators). The author addresses actual readers (receivers); the implied author the implied reader (addressee); and the narrator the narratee (enunciator). Prince shows that a narrator’s discourse frequently reveals evidence of the narratee’s identity, even in narratives where there is no explicit address to the narratee. In characteristic structuralist fashion, Prince seeks to find the underlying commonality of diverse narratees and, as a result, proposes the idea of a “zero degree” narratee, an enunciator with minimal positive traits: knowing the narrator’s language, being able to infer presuppositions and consequences as they are reflected in that language, having an excellent memory. Different narratives will then assign further traits to their different narratees. In “The Narratee Revisited” (1985), however, Prince acknowledges that the approach through the zero degree violates Ockham’s razor because, in effect, it describes virtually all narratees as deviations from a nonexistent standard. He therefore proposes to “specify all and only classes of signs particularizing any narratee, all and only signs of the ‘you’ in narrative discourse” (300).

More generally, Prince’s structuralist narratology assumes that the narrative text is an object with a communicative purpose. In “Introduction,” he attempts to locate the presence and delineate the functions of the narratee within that object. These functions, tellingly, are all instrumental, all part of the narratee’s possible role in the communication: the narratee “constitutes a relay between the narrator and the reader, he helps establish the narrative framework, he serves to characterize the narrator, he emphasizes certain themes, he contributes to the development of the plot, he becomes the spokesman for the moral of the work” (23).

Rabinowitz, as his title suggests, frames his discussion of audiences as part of a larger inquiry into “truth in fiction,” specifically an inquiry into how certain “facts” of a fictional narrative may be true at one level of reading but not at another. Indeed, my phrase “level of reading” turns out to be a synonym for “kind of audience.” Rabinowitz posits
four: (1) the actual or flesh-and-blood audience—you and me in both our idiosyncratic particularity and our socially constructed identities; (2) the authorial audience—the hypothetical ideal audience for whom the author designs the work, a design that includes assumptions about what that audience knows and believes; (3) the narrative audience—the “imaginary audience for which the narrator is writing” (127), an audience upon whom the narrator projects a set of beliefs and a body of knowledge; and (4) the ideal narrative audience—the audience “for which the narrator wishes he were writing” (134), the audience that accepts every statement of the narrator as true and reliable.

Rabinowitz emphasizes that readers take up places in the four audiences simultaneously and that this simultaneity is largely responsible for readers’ complex relations to truth in fiction. When we enter the authorial and narrative audiences of, say, *Jane Eyre*, we find that there is no significant difference between the narrative audience and the ideal narrative audience and that there is some significant overlap in what the authorial audience and the narrative audience take to be true. Both of the latter two audiences, for example, operate with the same world maps; both attach the same social significance to a marriage between a master and a governess; both have some faith in the power of romantic love. But the audiences’ beliefs also significantly diverge. Most obviously—and importantly—in the authorial audience we know that Jane is a fictional character narrating fictional events, whereas in the narrative audience, we assume that a historical personage is recounting her autobiography. Furthermore, it is arguable that each audience has a different view of the narrative’s supernatural events, for example, Jane’s hearing Rochester call her name, despite being miles away from him. In the authorial audience, we recognize that this event is possible only in fiction. In the narrative audience, we accept the event as Jane does—wonderful and strange, but true. Indeed, the very fact that Jane does not try to convince skeptics in her audience is evidence that she assumes her audience will accept its truth.

Since the publication of “Truth in Fiction,” rhetorical theorists have not found much practical use for the concept of “ideal narrative audience.” In the afterword to the second edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1983), Wayne C. Booth adopts Rabinowitz’s model minus the
ideal narrative audience. Rabinowitz himself drops the category from his discussion of audiences in *Before Reading* (1987). In *Reading People, Reading Plots* (1989), I claim that “although the ideal narrative audience is a logical category of analysis, it has insufficient analytical payoff for me to want to invoke it” (141). Studying second-person narration and trying to understand the relation between the concepts of narratee and narrative audience has made me rethink that conclusion.

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. In the case of, say, an author who employs an unreliable narrator, one important readerly activity is the rejection of the narrator’s assumptions, knowledge, or values. (Many other activities will follow from this rejection, but those activities will vary from one narrative to the next.) In explaining the relation between narrative strategy and readerly activity, the rhetorical critic focuses on how an actual reader can recognize the signs of unreliability and infer the author’s different assumptions, knowledge, or values. The key to the rhetorical transaction, then, is the gap between the narrator’s assumptions about her audience and the author’s assumptions about hers. In explaining the transaction, the rhetorical critic focuses on the way in which an actual reader can recognize that gap and the way in which that recognition is itself a part of the authorial audience’s understanding of the narrative. In this way, the activity of the narrative audience is subsumed by the activity of the authorial, and differentiating between the narrative audience and the ideal narrative audience has seemed less important than attending to this subsumption. For example, in “Haircut,” answering the question of whether Whitey’s customer is Whitey’s narratee or ideal narrative audience seems less important than recognizing that Whitey assumes he is an ideal audience and that Lardner assumes readers will recognize Whitey’s moral obtuseness. By focusing on the difference between what Whitey expects his audience (ideally) to believe and what Lardner expects his audience to do with Whitey’s expectations, the rhetorical critic erases the distinction between the narrative and the ideal narrative audiences. And, as this example of “Haircut” suggests, erasing the
distinction means that all narrative audiences are ideal narrative audiences. So while the term *ideal narrative audience* has dropped out of use, the concept has not; it is more accurate to say that, in practice, Rabinowitz's third and fourth audiences have been conflated into the single category of narrative audience. As I turn to look more closely at the relation between this concept and Prince's concept of the narratee, I will suggest why I think it is useful to separate the two audiences once again.

Having seen all this about narratee and narrative audience, what can we conclude about the relationship between them? Rabinowitz, who naturally wants to distinguish his concept from Prince's, offers two answers in "Truth in Fiction." First, the "*narrataire* . . . is someone perceived by the reader as 'out there,' a separate person who often serves as a mediator between narrator and reader. The 'narrative audience,' in contrast, is a role which the text forces the reader to take on. I think that my analysis, centering on an activity on the part of the reader, more successfully explains *why* certain texts evoke certain responses" (127n). Second, the default position of "narrative audience" is not zero degree; instead, it is much closer to "actual audience." Rabinowitz puts it this way: the "narrative audience is much like ourselves, with our beliefs, prejudices, our hopes, fears, and expectations, and our knowledge of society and literature—unless there is some evidence (textual or historical) to the contrary" (128–29n).

These answers initially do more to sharpen the differences between the rhetorical approach and the structuralist one than to distinguish narratee from narrative audience. The key difference in the approaches is encapsulated by Rabinowitz's claims that his model "center[s] on an activity on the part of the reader" and that the narrative audience is "a role the text forces the reader to take on" (127n). *Activity, force, and experience* are key terms for the rhetorical theorists. Prince's model, by contrast, sees the text as a message and wants to identify the structural properties of that message. *Component, relay, and framework* are key terms for him and other narratologists. The rhetorical and the narratological approaches are not entirely incompatible—a text that exerts a force upon its reader is a communicative object of a certain kind. But the approaches are not exactly the same suit traveling under two different designer labels, and it is not surprising that they
view the narrator's audience differently. As Rabinowitz says, Prince's narratee remains "out there," distinct from the actual reader; a narrative audience, by contrast, occupies some part of the actual reader's consciousness and, given the default position, the actual reader also gives traits to the narrative audience.

Confronting this difference, we might be tempted to decide that each concept is adequate within its own theoretical framework—that is, that the concepts overlap but are ultimately neither interchangeable nor in conflict. Consequently, such a response might go, when we want to do structuralist analysis, we should talk about narratees, and when we want to do rhetorical analysis, we should talk about narrative audiences. I would yield to this temptation if it were not for my reading of second-person narration. Second-person narration shows that the two concepts are ultimately complementary—and that both structuralist narratology and rhetorical theory need to recognize that complementarity. It shows further, as I mentioned above, that there are good reasons for reintroducing the distinction between the narrative and ideal narrative audiences.

Let us return to the basic definitions: a narratee is "someone whom the narrator addresses" (Prince, "Introduction," 7). A narrative audience is "the imaginary audience for which the narrator is writing" (Rabinowitz, "Truth," 127). An ideal narrative audience is "the audience for which the narrator wishes he were writing" (Rabinowitz, "Truth," 134). Let us also return to the beginning of Moore's story:

Begin by meeting him in a class, a bar, at a rummage sale. Maybe he teaches sixth grade. Manages a hardware store. Foreman at a carton factory. He will be a good dancer. He will have perfectly cut hair. He will laugh at your jokes.

A week, a month, a year. Feel discovered, comforted, needed, loved, and start sometimes, somehow, to feel bored. When sad or confused, walk uptown to the movies. Buy popcorn. These things come and go. A week, a month, a year. (55)

Is it adequate to say, as structuralist narratology would, that the unnamed you addressed by the narrator is the narratee and the protagonist, that the narrative's implied reader is different from this narratee, someone who infers from the narrator's address a larger cultural story
about female-male relationships? Although this account gets at a good part of the communicative structure of the text, it is not fully adequate. It leaves out the way that the second-person address exerts pressure on the actual reader—even the male reader, as in the second paragraph—"to take on the role" of the narratee-protagonist as "you" experience(s) the ups and downs (especially the downs) of the relationship. In other words, continuing to assume that the narratee is a distinct character who is "out there" will mean not just that we prefer the structuralist to the rhetorical framework; it also will mean that the structuralist analysis will neglect a significant aspect of how the text attempts to communicate.

Perhaps, then, the rhetorical approach will be more adequate. It would say that in Moore's text the unnamed you addressed by the narrator is the narrative audience and the protagonist and that the authorial audience needs to infer the larger story about female-male relationships that Moore is telling.6 This approach does enable us to account better for the effects that follow from "taking on the role" of the "you," but again the account is unsatisfactory according to its own criteria of explanatory adequacy. Equating the narrative audience with "you" leaves out the way in which we take on an observer role within the fiction, the way in which we recognize our difference from "you" and regard her as a person "out there" being addressed by the narrator. This observer role is different from the role we adopt as implied readers (or members of the authorial audience) because in the observer role we believe in the reality of the events. Some of "what happens to us" when we read "How" depends on our dual perspective inside the fiction, on the way that we step into and out of the enunciative position, while we remain in the observer position and discover what the narrator assumes about our knowledge and beliefs in the enunciative role. Furthermore, moving into the enunciative role means that we move into the ideal narrative audience—the narrator tells us what we believe, think, feel, do—while in the observer role we evaluate our position in the ideal narrative audience.

If this analysis is correct, then structuralist narratology needs the concept of "narrative audience" to complement its concept of "narratee," and rhetorical theory needs the concept of "narratee" to complement its concept of "narrative audience." And both ap-
proaches need the further concept of "ideal narrative audience." For
the sake of clarity and consistency, I propose that we adjust the defini-
tions to reflect the complementarity. Let Prince's definition of
narratee stand: the audience addressed by the narrator (the enun-
ciatee). Let Rabinowitz's definition of narrative audience be modi-
ified: the actual audience's projection of itself into the observer role
within the fiction. In taking on that role, we will always become be-
lievers in the reality of the fictional world; consequently, much of our
emotional response to narrative derives from our participation in this
role. Furthermore, let Rabinowitz's definition of the ideal narrative
audience stand: "the audience for which the narrator wishes he were
writing" ("Truth," 134). The ideal narrative audience may or may not
coincide with the narratee, and the narrative audience may or may not
find itself in accord with the assumptions of the ideal narrative audi-
ence. In "How," as in most second-person narration, the ideal narra-
tive audience and the narratee coincide in the figure of "You," while
the narrative audience fluctuates in its relation to "You"—sometimes
coinciding (and feeling addressed), sometimes observing from some
emotional, ethical, and/or psychological distance. In Tristram Shandy,
however, Sterne orchestrates the relationships between narratee, ideal
narrative audience, and narrative audience in a different way: he has
Tristram correct the responses of particular narratees, thereby indicat-
ing the beliefs of the ideal narrative audience and offering the narrative
audience the pleasure of observing Tristram's corrections without be-
ing implicated in them.

The situation of watching traditional drama clarifies the distinc-
tions. For the mimetic illusion and the emotional force of a play to
work, we must enter the observer position of the "narrative" ("dram-
atic"?) audience and believe in the reality of, say, Othello, Iago, and
Desdemona. Indeed, the oft-discussed instances of people leaping
upon the stage to stop the action are, in these terms, examples of what
happens when we enter so deeply into the narrative audience position
that we fail to maintain our simultaneous participation in the authorial
audience. This role is clearly distinct from that of an enunciatee or
"narratee," someone addressed by a speaker. However, in a soliloquy
or aside addressed to (rather than overheard by) the audience, the roles
of observer and enunciatee, of "narrative audience" and "narratee,"
are likely to overlap. But again, the degree of overlap will depend on the relationship between the narrative audience and the ideal narrative audience. In a soliloquy addressed to the audience, the narratee and the ideal narrative audience will coincide; these roles will converge with that of the narrative audience to the extent that the observer can share in the assumptions the soliloquist makes about the audience's beliefs, knowledge, and values. The soliloquies of Shakespeare's villains, for example, create distance between the audience as narratee (or ideal narrative audience) and the audience as observer within the fiction.

In narrative, where we always have narrative audiences and narratees, one of the variables in narrative discourse will be how much the narratee and the narrative audience overlap. As I suggested earlier, what second-person narration shows is that the more fully the narratee is characterized, the greater the distance between narratee and narrative audience; similarly, the less the narratee is characterized, the greater the coincidence between the two. If we return again to the two texts with which I opened this essay, we can see that in the first the identity boundaries between narratee and narrative audience are blurred and that the blurring depends on the lack of characterization of the narratee. In Moore's text, on the other hand, the narratee is designated as female and as moving in a certain kind of social milieu, and these designations allow individual readers to differentiate themselves from her, even as they remain in the observer position.

How I—and You?—Read “How”

Before turning to a rhetorical analysis of “How,” I want to consider once again the kind of claims about reading that the rhetorical approach wants to make. By focusing on the text's designs on its reader, the rhetorical approach seems to promise an account not just of the structure and form of the text but also of the experience of reading. But in that promise also lies the problem. Recall Rabinowitz's description of the difference between narrative audience and narratee: the “narrative audience is much like ourselves, with our beliefs, prejudices, our hopes, fears, and expectations, and our knowledge of soci-
etly and literature—unless there is some evidence (textual or historical) to the contrary” (“Truth” 128–29n). In the mid-1990s, after many years of work on the difference that difference makes in reading, Rabinowitz himself would, I am confident, be among the first to ask, “Who are ‘we’?” and to point out that attention to difference suggests that the text will not necessarily exert its force on all readers in the same way.

Rabinowitz’s distinction between the actual and the authorial audiences is helpful for negotiating between the force of the text and individual difference, though I do not believe it completely solves the problem. The concept of authorial audience has the advantage of positing a hypothetical reader addressed by the implied author who is able to discern a text’s intended force (just as you might be my hypothetical reader who fully understands all my points). The concept of actual reader enables Rabinowitz to acknowledge that many readers will not feel that intended force—and that those who do may have widely different responses to it. The model, then, seems as if it can stand as a heuristic for reading, a delineation of various roles available to the actual reader. As long as the model does not say that authorial reading is the best or only worthy kind of reading, it seems not entirely incompatible with the recognition of difference.

If we probe more deeply, however, the consequences of difference reemerge. If we are a diverse group of readers, then our different cultural experiences and the resulting differences in beliefs, hopes, fears, prejudices, and knowledge will lead us to hypothesize different authorial and narrative audiences as we infer these positions from the details of any given narrative. Consequently, I propose that the model be taken as a helpful heuristic in a different way. It describes the experiences of reading: an entry into a narrative audience, a recognition of a narrator’s ideal audience and narratee, an effort to step into the author’s intended audience, a relation of those positions to our actual beliefs. It does not, however, judge those experiences according to their proximity to some single standard. Instead, the model invites a sharing of experiences, especially sharing that involves discussion of the textual grounds for those experiences, so that different readers can continue to learn from each other.⁹

In “How,” the functions of the narratee and narrative audience
cannot be separated from the authorial audience’s knowledge of the story’s dialogic relation to three especially significant intertexts: (1) the common cultural narrative (especially among young to middle-aged adults of the middle and upper-middle classes) of developing an unsatisfactory relationship and trying to disentangle from it; (2) the standard narrative in self-help books (especially of the kind that end up on the *New York Times* best-seller list); and (3) the previous short stories in *Self-Help*, especially “How to Be an Other Woman.” As I noted above, “How” identifies the narratee as female, but the second-person address blurs the separation of narratee and narrative audience frequently enough for the observer of either sex to be pulled into the narrative’s subject position: you fall in love, become part of a couple, meet your partner’s family, feel uneasy about the relationship, try—unsuccessfully—to find a good time to leave, try being with someone else, have your partner need you because of illness (or weakness), feel a renewed tenderness, discover that it is not enough, slowly resolve to leave, feel very guilty, finally muster the courage to say good-bye, survive the partner’s anger but find that you are unable to escape the sadness of the whole experience.¹⁰

Even as Moore uses the second person to make the narrative audience feel the pull into the subject position, she uses the narratee to put a distinctive spin on the general narrative by switching the standard gender roles: not only is the “you” female but the male expresses stereotypical female desires: “The touchiest point will always be this: he craves a family, a neat nest of human bowls; he wants to have your children” (57). In this way, Moore is reclaiming a subject position for women in this general cultural narrative. But it is hardly a position to be envied, as the interaction with the other two intertexts reveals. Where the standard narrative in the self-help genre always leads its audiences (actual and authorial) onward and upward toward Self-Fulfillment and the Better Life (if genres had official songs, self-help’s would be “Nearer My God to Thee”), Moore’s narratee-protagonist is on a slow course to nowhere. Moore’s critique of the self-help genre combines with the very generality and even triteness of the narrative to underline the story’s satiric strain and mitigate the narrative audience’s involvement with the narratee-protagonist as a mimetic character. Strong emotions for the narratee seem less appropriate than knowing laughter
about modern relationships and self-help books. Yet the story’s relationship to “How to Be an Other Woman” and Moore’s skill with the second-person address result in the knowing laughter itself existing alongside—and in some uneasy tension with—the narrative and authorial audiences’ genuine feeling for the narratee’s situation.

“How to Be an Other Woman” is a companion piece to “How” because it places the female narratee in a different relationship. In that story, the narratee-protagonist desires a deeper, more reliable relationship with the man she loves but must face the frustration of always being of secondary importance to him and the pain of his ultimate rejection. Together the stories paint a very bleak picture of women’s chances for satisfying relationships. When you want him, he’s married (or otherwise committed; one twist in “How to Be an Other Woman” is that the man is separated from his wife and cheating on the woman he lives with, a twist that certainly expands the circle of hurt women). When you decide that you don’t want him, you are too kind and too weak to be able to leave. And when you finally do, you do not escape to happiness. This effect of the intertextuality invites the authorial audience to entertain multiple ways of completing Moore’s laconic title—yet these ways seem to point back to the wisdom of her choice. She leaves it at “How” because what else is there to say? Adding “It Usually Goes” or “It Hurts” or even an interrogative that cuts off the last part of the earlier title—”to Be?”—seems redundant. “‘How?’” you ask. This is “How.”

Even more than this intertextuality, Moore’s specific modulation of the narrative discourse enables her both to flaunt the triteness of her narrative and to generate genuine feeling with it. I will look once more at the opening paragraphs and then at just two more of the story’s many highly nuanced passages.

Begin by meeting him in a class, a bar, at a rummage sale. Maybe he teaches sixth grade. Manages a hardware store. Foreman at a carton factory. He will be a good dancer. He will have perfectly cut hair. He will laugh at your jokes.

A week, a month, a year. Feel discovered, comforted, needed, loved, and start sometimes, somehow, to feel bored. When sad or confused, walk uptown to the movies. Buy popcorn. These things come and go. A week, a month, a year. (55)
I have already discussed the way that this passage begins the fluctuation for the actual reader between the positions of the narratee and the narrative audience; now I would like to focus on some features of the narrative discourse that are characteristic of the whole story. First, the presentation of various alternatives, which goes along with the story’s relation to the self-help genre, establishes a separation between the narrator and the narratee; unlike the case of Jay McInerney’s *Bright Lights, Big City*, where the protagonist uses second person to narrate his own story, Moore uses an external narrator to address her narratee-protagonist. Second, although many of the sentences have the surface form of imperatives (“Begin by meeting him,” “walk uptown,” “buy popcorn”), the very fact that the story is about the desire for love also gives the sentences another effect. They are not just imperatives but also descriptions of the narratee’s willing actions. At the same time, the imperative tone and the consistency of the second-person address make it clear that the narratee and the ideal narrative audience will coincide in this story: the narratee is always doing the bidding of the narrator. Third, this dual-directed quality of the verbs is continued by the frequent but not ubiquitous use of the future tense, a technique that allows the narrator simultaneously to predict and to report the events of the story. Thus, on the one hand, the story appears to remain within the confines of a self-help book: rather than being the account of one person’s actual experience, it is a primer on how one might behave in a relationship. On the other hand, the story appears very much to be an account of one person’s experience as it unfolds. Through these techniques and effects, Moore invites us to attend both to the satiric and to the mimetic elements of the story.

The second passage I want to consider occurs just after “you” have met an actor, who can quote Coriolanus’s mother, and with whom you go to bed or from whom you run as fast as you can:

Back at home, days later, feel cranky and tired. Sit on the couch and tell him he’s stupid. That you bet he doesn’t know who Coriolanus is. That since you moved in you’ve noticed he rarely reads. He will give you a hurt, hungry-to-learn look, with his James Cagney eyes. He will try to kiss you. Turn your head. Feel suffocated. (57)

The narratee-protagonist/ideal narrative audience here remains clearly distinct from the narrative audience. The narrative audience in
the observer position recognizes how much is going on beneath the surface of the narratee's actions. Her complaints are stand-ins for her larger unhappiness. The problem is not that this man does not know Coriolanus or does not read enough; the problem is that he is not someone else. The narratee is cranky because she is not as forthright as Coriolanus, not able to say what is really on her mind. Thus, though her complaints apparently point to ways that he might change his behavior to please her, these changes will not be enough. So, his “hurt, hungry-to-learn look” is not a response that offers her any real hope. He can learn all he wants, but he will still be himself. That is what is suffocating.

All this takes on a special cast because of the second-person narration. While the clear distinction between the narratee and the narrative audience allows us to infer so much about the narratee’s behavior and situation, the “you” address also invites us to project ourselves—as narrative audience, authorial audience, and actual readers—into the narratee’s subject position. Consequently, the inferences we make as we occupy the narrative audience position lead us to a complicated vision that mingles narratee and self in the narratee’s position. We both occupy the position and know what the position is like in a way that the narratee herself does not. In this way, we feel addressed by the narrator but not fully coincident with the narratee. Different flesh-and-blood readers will then respond differently to this complicated positioning: some may empathize more fully with the narratee, some may grow impatient or indifferent or condemnatory, and others may turn away from this involvement and refocus on the story’s mockery of its own triteness and of the self-help genre. If Moore had employed a standard homodiegetic or heterodiegetic narration, she could have built the same inferences into the passage, but it is difficult to see how she could have also retained the effects resulting from this complicated mingling and separation of narratee and narrative audience.

The third passage I would like to examine more closely is the story’s last three paragraphs:

You will never see him again. Or perhaps you will be sitting in Central Park one April eating your lunch and he will trundle by on roller skates. You will greet him with a wave and a mouth full of sandwich. He will nod, but he will not stop.
There will be an endless series of tests.

A week, a month, a year. The sadness will die like an old dog. You will feel nothing but indifference. The logy whine of a cowboy harmonica, plaintive, weary, it will fade into the hills as slow Hank Williams. One of those endings. (64)

Again the narratee/ideal narrative audience and narrative audience are clearly distinct. This time, however, there is much less of a gap between the two audiences’ understandings of the events and the discourse. The first paragraph here reminds the authorial audience of the narrative’s triteness: you might see him, you might not, it happens both ways. In either case, though, it won’t make much difference. Instead, “There will be an endless series of tests.” This sentence is ironic for both narratee and narrative audience. The narrator has previously employed the same sentence in discussing the man’s illness. Here it glosses the previous paragraph and extends its meaning: whether the narratee never sees him or sees him functioning fine without her, life after the relationship will be an endless series of tests to diagnose what is now her illness, the lingering sadness of the whole experience. And the last paragraph underscores the endlessness by suggesting that even the apparent end, the death of that sadness, does not bring renewal. Stretched out over yet another of the story’s many spans of “a week, a month, a year,” the dying gives way to the emptiness of indifference, “one of those endings.” Narratee, ideal narrative audience, and narrative audience all nod their heads in understanding here. This close positioning of the complementary audiences strengthens the second person’s general invitation for the narrative, authorial, and actual audiences to project themselves into the narratee’s position. Despite the triteness of the narrative, underscored by the allusion to country music and then one last time by “One of those endings,” that position contains real pain. By keeping the narratee, the ideal narrative audience, and the narrative audience closely aligned here, Moore is able to build genuine emotion into her ending. Again, as actual readers we may choose to turn from this emotion or critique it as sentimental. But Moore’s ending can be usefully compared to Umberto Eco’s example of how to generate sincere emotion within a postmodern consciousness that is aware of language as already worn out, overloaded with
meaning from other contexts: the man who wants to tell a woman that he loves her madly but worries that romance novels have turned a direct expression of love into cliché can say, “As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly” (227). Even as Moore’s narrative flaunts its triteness and engages in the send-up of the self-help genre, it also invites its readers to respond as we do to traditional mimetic fiction.

**You, Me, and Lorrie Moore**

Having focused so much on the relations between narratee, ideal narrative audience, and narrative audience in second-person fiction, I would like to close with a comment on those between authors, actual or implied, and actual readers. Brian McHale has suggested that one of the metathemes of postmodernism that is apparent in second-person narration is love, since the mode depends on violating traditional ontological boundaries (between the fictional and the nonfictional realms) in such a way that reading and writing themselves take on an erotic charge (227). I believe that McHale’s point is sound, though I also find applying it wholesale to the reading of Self-Help runs the risk of violating the thematic spirit of Moore’s book. What I would like to propose instead is that the complexities of the reading-writing transaction in “How” and the other second-person stories add another layer to Moore’s undermining of the self-help genre. In using the second-person address to invite her actual readers to adopt multiple positionings, Moore implicitly comments on the simplistic assumptions about readers operating in the self-help books. In extending her invitations, Moore compliments her readers’ intelligence by implicitly expressing confidence that we can find our ways. When we summon the requisite intelligence and we experience the satisfactions that follow from accepting the invitations, we also turn Self-Help into mutual-help, with author and reader once again affirming the value of their activities for themselves and for each other.

In other words, the voice from this page offers you testimony about the value of rhetorical transactions. One of those conclusions.