



NARRATIVE
TOLOGY

INTRODUCTION TO THE
THEORY OF NARRATIVE

FOURTH EDITION

Mieke Bal

NARRATOLOGY

Introduction to the Theory of Narrative

Fourth Edition

Since its first publication in English in 1985, Mieke Bal's *Narratology* has become the international classic introduction to the theory of narrative texts. *Narratology* is a systematic account of narrative techniques and methods, and their transmission and reception, in which Bal distills years of study of the ways in which we understand literary works.

In this fourth edition, Bal updates the book to include a greater focus on literary narratives while also sharpening and tightening her language to make it the most readable and student-friendly edition to date. With changes prompted by ten years of feedback from scholars and teachers, *Narratology* remains the most important contribution to the study of the way narratives work, are formed, and are received.

MIEKE BAL is a cultural theorist, video artist, and Professor Emeritus in Literary Theory at the University of Amsterdam. Her website is at www.miekebal.org.

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MIEKE BAL

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Introduction to the Theory of Narrative

Fourth Edition

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Preface to the First Edition

This introduction to narratology aims at presenting a systematic account of a theory of narrative for use in the study of literary and other narrative texts. It does not provide a survey of the major different trends in the field of narrative theory. There are other books available that provide such a survey. The choice for a systematic, hence limited, approach has been made for the sake of understanding, of the possibility of exchange of opinions, and of emancipation from intimidation. The choices I have made in this book were born from the conviction that a systematic account of one theory, which proceeds from definition, showing at every step its own structure and the necessity of its own phases, is easier for beginners in the field to understand than a plural survey of many different theories, involving names, terms, and, especially, heterogeneous arguments. For the same reason, names of predecessors have been reduced to the absolute minimum and, wherever possible, accounted for in special paragraphs at the ends of the chapters. The theory presented as a whole is also better accessible in the sense that whoever uses it will understand it the same way. This agreement of users has the advantage of a greater intersubjectivity. Teaching it becomes easier, learning it more feasible, because the risk of misunderstanding is reduced. Finally, the use of a method of analysis that every participant in a discussion can master helps students overcome the feeling of intimidation that a brilliant but unexpectedly structured interpretation by a teacher often entails. It is that feeling – the feeling that the teacher, while conveying the desire to master literature, may at the same time, by the very brilliance of his or her performance, intimidate – that brought me to the development of the present account. Once I was able to use a theory, I noticed a progression in the quality of my interpretations as well as in my capacity to teach.

These remarks lead to an instrumental view of theory, indeed of this particular type of theory, provided the “instrumental” refers to the practice of learning and teaching, not to the relation between the text and the theory alone. Conceived as a set of tools, as a means to express and specify one’s interpretative reactions to a text, the theory presented here holds no claim to certainty. It is not from a positivistic desire for absolute, empirical knowledge that this theory and its instrumental character should be considered to have been generated. It is, quite the opposite, conceived as it is because interpretation, although not absolutely arbitrary since it does, or should, interact with a text, is in practice unlimited and free. Hence, I find, the need for a discourse that makes each interpretation expressible, accessible, communicable. Second, the tools proposed can be put to varied uses. I have myself used this theory for both aesthetic and political criticism, and found soon enough that these cannot, or should not, be separated. Hence, the need of more theory, beyond narratology: a theory that accounts for the functions and positions of texts of different backgrounds, genres, and historical periods. If the need for that broader kind of theory makes itself felt more acutely, narratology will have served its purpose just fine. One need not adhere to structuralism as a philosophy in order to be able to use the concepts and views presented in this book. Neither does one need to feel that adherence to, for example, a deconstructionist, Marxist, or feminist view of literature hinders the use of this book. I happen to use it myself for feminist criticism, and feel that it helps to make that approach the more convincing, because of the features a systematic account entails. The scope of narratology, in my view an indispensable tool, is a limited one.

The examples given are various. They come from different linguistic communities, including Dutch, my native language. Many Dutch examples have been replaced by others from more accessible literatures. A few, however, have been kept; they are provided with a short bibliographical note at the end of the book. Examples are drawn from different levels of aesthetic elaboration; not only from well-known literary novels but also from works of children’s fiction and journalism; there are even fictitious examples. The latter form a kind of series.

The date of appearance of this book qualifies its place in the discussion of literary studies. It comes late, if one considers it a result of structuralism. Coming after the vogue of anti- or post-structuralist theoretical works, it aims at an integration of different types of theories, at showing the necessity of a rational critical discourse within whatever

view of literature one may hold, and at pursuing steadily the study of narrative as a genre, which stretches far beyond literature in the narrow, aesthetic sense.

Soon after its appearance in Dutch, Christine van Boheemen found it useful in her teaching of English and American literature. She undertook the heavy task of adapting examples to an international audience, and of translating it into English without any guarantee of publication. If it appears today in its present form, it is due to her generous and competent efforts, for which I want to express my deep gratitude. I also thank Jonathan Culler, who believed in the enterprise from the start and encouraged me to pursue it, even when facing difficulties of sorts which I would rather spare the reader. The same holds for Henry Schogt and Paul Perron, loyal supporters in Toronto.

Nobody but myself is responsible for misunderstandings the theory presented here may provoke. Feedback of any kind will always be most welcome; it will help to increase the usefulness of the book for the audience it aims at: those who, beginners or not, share my interest in narrative as a mode of cultural self-expression.

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Preface to the Second Edition

Here is a sequel to the preface. Ten years later, the book was still enough in demand to warrant reprinting it. But I was less and less comfortable with it, and so I proposed to revise it. There were three problems with reprinting it as was. First of all, I was more and more uneasy about the tone of it, the references to “being sure” and all those remnants of the positivistic discourse of my training that inhere in structuralist thought. I also changed my opinion, or perhaps my mood, regarding the somewhat arid presentation of concepts with examples only relating to the concept being presented. This became so conspicuous as I became a bit looser in my own critical practice. Even more decisively, my recent work has been less oriented towards literary narrative than to narrative in such diverse domains as anthropology, visual art, and the critique of scholarship. And then, of course, there was the problem of all the newer work on narratology I had not known when I first wrote it.

These three problems had me wavering between rejecting it altogether and revising it; between slight and thorough revising. I have moved on to other things since I wrote this book. Yet, the demand for the book did make it obvious that it is an instrument functioning in the public domain that I cannot simply take away. Negotiating my way through all this, I have, I hope, solved two out of the three problems mentioned. I have changed the tone wherever I could, trying to emphasize more the role of narratology as a heuristic tool, not an objective grid providing certainty. To this alleviation there is one exception. I have decided to keep the somewhat illusory abbreviations, such as en = external narrator. These abbreviations were never meant to suggest greater certainty, only to suggest a mode of quick notation. Although I find them a bit off-putting myself, users have assured me that they are helpful. But readers

are, obviously, welcome to ignore them. Regarding the second problem, I have added examples of a very different kind from those in the earlier editions. In addition to ad hoc examples of just one concept at the time, I have inserted short samples of how I have myself “used” these concepts in works of criticism not given over to technical demonstration. These examples stand out as later additions and, whenever they are a bit longer, they are graphically marked off from the main text. Together, they form a range of works that show simultaneously how narratology can intervene in other disciplines as much as in literature, and what my own intellectual itinerary has been since I first published this book.

In trying to address the third problem, that of other work on narratology that has been published since 1985, I have been less happy. Narrative is more important than ever, not only in literary studies but also in history, where the awareness of narrative construction has grown tremendously; in cultural studies, where cultural memory, documented in mostly narrative form, is a popular subject of study; in film studies, which has itself bloomed over the past 10 years, with its inevitably narrative subject matter. But it seems that with the growth of the study of narrative, interest in what makes narratives “be” or “come across” as narrative has only declined. Partly, narratology is to blame for this discrepancy, with its positivistic claims, formalist limitations, and inaccessible, idiosyncratic jargon. It is my hope that more modest claims, together with a more accessible presentation and more insight into the way narratology can be used in conjunction with other concerns and theories, may arouse renewed interest in its possibilities.

But, whereas narratology has continued to be elaborated and discussed, little of the work I found was geared towards the beginning narratologist in the way I wanted this book to be. Most work on narrative texts is not based on narratological analysis, and those that are invariably fall back on Genette’s classical theory, which I had integrated into this book in so far as it was helpful, and criticized in so far as it was not. The exception is the work based on Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, which offers a different view on narrative. I have integrated this view as best I could without sacrificing consistency. I have continued to pay little attention to reception-oriented theory. This is not a statement on its importance but simply a matter of economy. Within the self-imposed limitations of this book, reception is not an issue of narratology per se, except where communicative figures such as narrator and focalizer can be assumed to have their symmetrical counterparts, their addressees.

Instead, it must be understood that the entire theory presented here is a readerly device, a heuristic tool, that provides focus to the expectations with which readers process narrative. In order to emphasize this I have reversed the order in which I presented the three layers – fabula, story, text – in the earlier edition. It is by way of the text that the reader has access to the story, of which the fabula is, so to speak, a memorial trace that remains with the reader after completion of the reading. Other new work has simply been added to the “Remarks and Sources” at the end of each chapter.

1997

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Preface to the Third Edition

The changes in this third edition compared to the second are numerous. These consist mainly of small clarifications, new examples, and sharper formulations based on teaching experience, reviews of the earlier editions, and helpful comments by colleagues and students. In order to further increase readability, any formulations that now seemed redundant to me have been excised. Concepts that seemed easily to come across as arid, such as the formal categories of the analysis of time, have been presented with more nuance. Relations among the more detailed examples have been established, with the result that throughout the book, extensive analyses emerge without the length required for detailed case studies.

Systematic changes were inspired by three considerations: length, relevance, and updating. For this edition, it became first of all desirable to limit the increasing length of this book, so that it could remain available for students. To that effect, and to vary and update examples, I have decided to replace some of the long case studies I had added to the second by shorter ones. I also eliminated longer analyses of paintings. Although I remain convinced that this theoretical framework can be productive for such analyses, I am more sceptical than I was in 1997 about the interest among art historians to make more than casual use of it. For clarity's sake I limit the examples to discourse, literary or not, and film. But the inclusion of film comes not only from a desire to acknowledge the relevance of narratology for this increasingly important field. I have also, since the second edition, been engaged in making films, and thus encountered the narratological issues from within that medium, so to speak. The experience has been extremely useful, both to realize and to relativize, or rather, specify the importance of narratological issues for the construction – as much as for viewing – of visual narratives.

There was yet another, quite practical reason for the changes in examples. I also wished to integrate a few more literary case studies. These are meant to increase the visibility of the practical usefulness of the concepts offered, and the way they do, indeed, foreground literary considerations. At the suggestion of many I have also offered reflections on the relationship between fiction and reality, in order to enhance the relevance of narratological analysis in contemporary culture.

The concern for relevance also led to a few more drastic changes. While many sections have been modified internally, in Part One I added a section on "Description Contested" and in Part Two one on "Nuances of Anachrony," while some restructuring resulted in a new section, "Why Characters Resist Us." Both serve the purpose of integrating new debates, of foregrounding the relevance of the concepts presented, and of making more general discussions on texts visible. In the discussion of character I have offered a more detailed account on how characters emerge, both in the story and in the fabula. These additions have allowed me to introduce modernist texts, notoriously difficult to analyze narratologically. At the end of the three parts I have attempted to pull together the concepts and issues presented in each, sometimes through an extensive example. Especially Part Two ends on an analysis of a textual fragment in view of its "cinematic" quality.

In trying to address the ongoing need for updating – in other words, the need to take into account other work on narratology that has been published since 1985 – I have limited myself. Theoretical consistency is always at risk of becoming dogmatic. Yet, both theoretically and didactically, consistency is indispensable. With every new publication that I considered, I carefully weighed these two opposing considerations. Narrative is more important than ever, not only in literary studies but also in history, where the awareness of narrative construction has grown tremendously; in cultural analysis, where cultural memory, documented in mostly narrative form, is a popular subject of study; in film studies, which has itself bloomed over the past 20 years, with its inevitably narrative subject matter. But it seems that with the growth of the study of narrative, interest in what makes narratives "be" or "come across" as narrative, and to what effect, has only declined. Partly, narratology is to blame for this discrepancy, with its positivistic claims, formalist limitations, and inaccessible, idiosyncratic jargon. It is my hope that more modest claims, together with a more accessible presentation and more insight into the way narratology can be used in conjunction with other concerns and theories, may arouse renewed interest in its possibilities.

But, whereas narratology has continued to be elaborated and discussed, little of the work I found was geared towards the beginning narratologist in the way I wanted this book to be. Most work on narrative texts is not based on narratological analysis, and those that are tend to fall back on Genette's classical theory, which I had integrated into this book in so far as it was helpful, and criticized in so far as it was not. I have continued to pay little attention to reception-oriented theory, but not to reception. Within the self-imposed limitations of this book, reception is not an issue of narratology per se, except where communicative figures such as narrator and focalizer can be assumed to have their symmetrical counterparts, their addressees. Finally, much new work in narratology comes from cognitive approaches. Although I am a bit sceptical regarding the general claims of this approach, I have integrated what I found helpful and added relevant references to other publications.

Instead of developing a reception theory of narrative, it must be understood that the entire theory presented here is a readerly device, a heuristic tool, that provides focus to the expectations with which readers process narrative. In order to emphasize this I had already reversed the order in which I presented the three layers – fabula, story, text – in the first edition. It is by way of the text that the reader has access to the story, of which the fabula is, so to speak, a memorial trace that remains with the reader after completion of the reading.

Other new work that did not require inclusion has been added to the "Remarks and Sources" at the end of each chapter, with short notices concerning their particular contribution and sometimes the reasons why I have not integrated their views. I thank many readers who have offered comments on the second edition, especially Vincent Meelberg and Peter Verstraten.

2008

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Preface to the Fourth Edition

During the time this book has been used, students have developed an increasing awareness of the cultural embeddedness of narrative. I would like to offer, as a preface, some thoughts about the relation of narratology to what has been called “cultural studies” but what I prefer to call “cultural analysis.”

Narrative is everywhere, but it isn't always important. The present return to narratology is most welcome for those interested in analysing narrative texts. Why this return is occurring, why now, is not so clear. A first reason may simply be the omnipresence of narrative in culture, which logically calls for a method to deal with it. Like semiotics, narratology applies to virtually every cultural object. Not everything is narrative; but practically everything in culture has a narrative aspect to it, or at least can be perceived, interpreted, as narrative. In addition to the obvious predominance of narrative genres in literature, a random handful of places where narrative occurs includes lawsuits, visual images, philosophical discourse, television, argumentation, teaching, and history writing.

The omnipresence of narrative makes a case for the importance of narratology only if narrative is crucial in those cultural artefacts we qualify as wholly or partly narrative. But there lies the problem, as well as the reason why narratology has traditionally been confined – more or less – to the category of storytelling, mostly literary, mostly novelistic. The point of narratology is not to demonstrate the narrative nature of an object, however. Usually we don't doubt, don't wonder, about the status of a text, and watching a film we may or may not be carried away, but it hardly seems important to ask whether what we are seeing is in fact a narrative. On the other hand, if so much of culture is narrative – or,

if not, at least has an aspect of narrative – doesn't any invocation of narratology initiate a circular argument that begs the question of specificity? This is why traditionally, narratology has been used to differentiate types of narrative, narrative situations, modes of storytelling. But establishing categories is not continuous with analysis.

Delimitation, classification, typology, are all very nice as remedies for chaos-anxiety, but what insights do these yield? As I have argued at length in my reply to Genette, the pervasive taxonomical bend of narratology is epistemologically flawed; it entails skipping a step or two (1991). Between a general conception of narrative and an actual narrative text – or object – lies more than a classification. Classifying texts as a *method* of analysis is a circular way of reasoning. There is no direct logical connection between classifying and understanding texts. And understanding – if taken in a broad sense that encompasses cognitive as well as affective acts, precisely, integrated – is the point.

Narratology is not an instrument, at least, not for the ready-made production of knowledge. Although it is common to talk about concepts as tools for analysis, understanding is not an operation that can be instrumentally performed. Culture encompasses many different productions and organizations of utterances in language, images, sounds, gestures. These cannot stand on their own. Included in culture is theoretical reflection, narratological and otherwise. This reflection is itself part of the substance of culture; indeed, narrative artefacts are full of it, too. Taking an instrumentalist position counters this view of culture. It feeds the illusion, typical of Enlightenment thought, that the subject can stand outside of what it criticizes, analyses, understands. More down to earth, it tends to present concepts as descriptions of things, mostly elements like words, characters, speaking styles. As a result of the descriptive bias, such concepts, which lack analytical thrust, are unsystematically related.

Instead, narrative is a cultural attitude; hence, narratology is a perspective on culture. What I propose we are best off with in the age of cultural analysis is a conception of narratology that implicates text and reading, subject and object, production and analysis, in the act of understanding. In other words, I advocate and offer a narrative theory that enables the differentiation of the place of narrative in any cultural expression without privileging any medium, mode, or use; that differentiates its relative importance and the *effect* of the narrative (segments) on the remainder of the object as well as on the reader, listener, viewer. A theory, in other words, that defines and describes narrativity,

not narrative; not a genre or object but a cultural mode of expression. With such a perspective, cultural artefacts, events, or domains can be analysed closely. Cultural analysis should not be taken literally – or analytically – as meaning the taking apart of culture. Rather, cultural analysts interpret the ways in which cultures take things, people, and themselves apart. Narratology is of great relevance for such a reorientation of, simultaneously, close reading and cultural studies within cultural analysis.

However, such a theory offers, as much as a perspective on culture, a caution against a number of fallacies and risks. It cautions against the reification of modes as things. It cautions against a lack of differentiation that makes the theory redundant as well as helpless to promote specific understanding. It cautions against the illusion of objectivity, both in storytelling as witnessing and in analysis as the scientific discovery of the truth. Narratology also cautions against a confusion of understanding and axiology, against a sense of value inherent in narrative: either as intrinsically true, hence, good, or as intrinsically false, fictional, manipulative, hence, bad.

The point is, instead, to ask meaningful questions. Owing to the many responses the earlier editions of this book have triggered, I have often been compelled to argue why I needed to make such a fuss about focalization. To ask, *not* primarily where the words come from and who speaks them, but what, in the game of make-believe, is being proposed for us to believe or see before us, hate, love, admire, argue against, shudder before, or stand in awe of. As will become clear, in the third chapter I have maintained the structuralist model of analysis but reversed its generalizing claims. These decisions are my way of asking meaningful questions.

To make it more easily available to low-budget readers, the book has been trimmed of all examples from film and visual art. This seemed a necessary step, regrettable as it may be for some, including myself. Discussions with other scholars, similarly, seemed out of place in an introductory book. Where necessary I have included a reduced version of these in the sections Remarks and Sources at the end of each of the three chapters.

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NARRATOLOGY

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Introduction

I begin with a series of working definitions. My purpose in doing this is to empower the student of narrative, who can fall back on such definitions, test them against analyses and interpretations, and check their consistency. They are meant not to hold the truth of their object but rather to make it accessible and discussable.

Narratology as a field of study is the ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events – of cultural artefacts that tell a story. Such theory helps us understand, analyse, and evaluate narratives. A theory is a systematic set of generalized statements about a particular segment of reality. That segment of reality, the corpus, about which narratology attempts to provide insight consists of narrative texts of all kinds, made for a variety of purposes and serving many different functions.

If characteristics of narrative texts can be defined, these characteristics can serve as the point of departure for the next phase: a description of the way in which each narrative text is constructed. Then we have a description of a *narrative system*. On the basis of this description, we can examine the variations that are possible when the narrative system is concretized into narrative texts. This last step presupposes that an infinite number of narrative texts can be described using the finite number of concepts contained within the narrative system.

Readers of this book are offered an instrument with which they can describe and, hence, interpret narrative texts. This does not imply that the theory is some kind of machine into which one inserts a text at one end and expects an adequate description to roll out at the other. The concepts that are presented here must be regarded as intellectual tools for interpretation. These tools are useful in that they enable their users

4 Narratology

to formulate an interpretive description in such a way that it is accessible to themselves as well as to others. Furthermore, discovering the characteristics of a text can also be facilitated by insight into the abstract narrative system. But above all, the concepts help increase understanding by encouraging readers to articulate what they understand, or think they understand, when reading or otherwise processing a narrative artefact.

The textual description achieved with the help of this theory can by no means be regarded as the only adequate description possible. Someone else may use the same concepts differently, emphasize other aspects of the text, and, consequently, produce a different description. This variation is inevitable and felicitous, because reading is a fundamentally subjective activity. The point is, if the description of a text is understood as a proposal that can be presented to others, the fact that the description is formulated within the framework of a systematic theory facilitates discussion of the proposed description. This is a democratic use of a theory. This democratic nature of the joint activities of analysis, description, and interpretation I call *intersubjectivity*.

Of what does this corpus of narrative texts consist? At first glance, the answer seems obvious: novels, novellas, short stories, fairy tales, newspaper articles, and more. But, intentionally or not, we are establishing boundaries – boundaries with which not everyone would agree. Some people, for example, argue that comic strips belong to the corpus of narrative texts, but others disagree. The underlying difference may be that, for the proponents, the fictional nature of the narrative is the standard; for the antagonists, the conception of literature inheres in the idea of narrative texts. Neither of these underlying ideas pertain to narrative, however. If these people hope to reach agreement, they will wish to explain how they have arrived at their decisions. And once they try, more differences will come up. For example, those who consider comic strips to be narrative texts interpret the concept *text* broadly. In their view, a text does not have to be a linguistic text. In comic strips, another, non-linguistic, sign system is employed – namely, the visual image. Others, sharing a more restricted interpretation of what constitutes a text, reserve this term for texts presented solely in language.

As this simple example demonstrates, it helps to define the concepts we use and to restrict their content to singular ideas. This is not always obvious; think of very common and seemingly obvious notions such as *literature*, *text*, *narrative*, and *poem*; and *art*, *popular culture*, *context*. A disagreement about the status of comic strips would quickly be settled if

the definition of a text were first agreed on. In other words, definitions are like a language: they provide something of a dictionary, so that one person understands what another means. But the definitions proposed here are provisional, serving before all else the purpose of being explicit and transparent enough that we can know what is relevant and what is not for the discussion at hand.

Presenting a theory about narrative texts entails defining a number of central concepts. Within the scope of this introduction, then, a *text* is a finite, structured whole composed of signs. These can be linguistic units, such as words and sentences, but they can also be different signs, such as cinematic shots and sequences, or painted dots, lines, and blots. The finite ensemble of signs does not mean that the text itself is finite, for its meanings, effects, functions, and backgrounds are not. It only means that there is a first and a last word to be identified, a first and a last image of a film, a frame of a painting – even if those boundaries, as we will see, are provisional and porous.

For this book I have selected the following definitions. A *narrative text* is a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee (“tells” the reader, viewer, or listener) a story in a medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof. A *story* is the content of that text and produces a particular manifestation, inflection, and “colouring” of a *fabula*. A *fabula* is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors. These three definitions together constitute the theory this book elaborates.

These key concepts imply other ones. Take the last one, the *fabula*, for example. Its definition contains the elements “event” and “actor.” An *event* is the transition from one state to another state. *Actors* are agents that perform actions. They are not necessarily human. To *act* is defined here as to cause or to experience an event. And this series of definitions can go on.

The basis of this theory’s usefulness for analysis is the three-part division it proposes. The assertion that a narrative text is one in which a story is told implies that the text is not identical to the story, and the same holds for the relationship between story and *fabula*. Take the familiar fairy tale of Tom Thumb, about a small boy who outsmarts a dangerous ogre. Not everyone has read that story in the same text. There are different *versions*, that is, different texts in which that same story is related. Some texts are considered to be literary while others are not; some can be read aloud to children while others are too difficult or too frightening. Narrative texts differ from one another even if the related story is more or less the same. Here, “text” refers to narratives in

any medium. I use this word with an emphasis on the finite and structured nature of narratives, not the linguistic nature of text.

“Tom Thumb” can also help explain the next distinction, that between story and fabula. This distinction is based on the difference between the way in which the events are presented and the sequence of events as they occur in the imagined world of the fabula. That difference lies not only in the language used. Despite their having read different texts, readers of “Tom Thumb” would agree, I expect, as to which of the characters deserves sympathy. They applaud the clever boy, and they rejoice at the ogre’s misfortunes. In order that Tom might triumph over his enemy, readers are quite prepared to watch unabashedly as Tom exchanges crowns so that the blind ogre unwittingly eats his own children. Evidently, in all of the texts this rather cruel fabula is presented in such a way that readers are willing to sacrifice one group of children for another. When “Tom Thumb” is told in another sign system – in a cartoon film, for example – similar reactions are evoked. This phenomenon demonstrates that something happens with the fabula that is not exclusively language-based.

These definitions suggest that a three-layer distinction – text, story, fabula – is a good basis for the study of narrative texts. Such a distinction entails that it is possible to analyse the three layers separately. That does not mean that these layers *exist* independently of one another. They do not. The only material we have – that can be said to exist – is the text before us. Readers have only the book, paper and ink, or the strokes of paint on a canvas, the light in a dark (movie) theatre, the sound coming out of speakers, and they must use this material to establish the structure of the text themselves. Only the text layer, embodied in the sign system of language, visual images, or any other, is materially accessible. That a text can be divided into three layers is a theoretical supposition based on a process of reasoning, of which I have given a summary above.

Layers serve as instrumental and provisional tools to account for particular effects the text has on its readers. The theory being presented in this introduction is based on the notion of distinct layers, such distinction being necessary for a detailed analysis. It is, therefore, inevitable that what is in effect inseparable should temporarily be disjoined. This goes to show that reading and analysing are distinct activities, even if they cannot be separated either. In order to analyse, one needs to read; and reading inevitably entails interpretive moments that will inform an analysis made later. As with the three layers, the activities involved in the processing of narratives cannot be separated, but must be distinguished in theory in order for us to understand the process.

The fabula, understood as material or content that is worked into a story, has been defined as a series of events. This series is constructed according to certain rules. We call this the *logic of events*. If human behaviour is taken as the criterion for describing events, then the question of the function of the agents of action, the actors, arises. The actors can be described in relation to the events. However, two other elements in a fabula can be discerned. An event, no matter how insignificant, always takes up *time*. This time is often important for the continuation of the fabula and deserves, consequently, to be considered. If Tom Thumb had not had seven-miles boots at his disposal, he would never have been able to escape from the ogre in time. The difference between the time that Tom needs to escape from the giant's grasp and the time that the giant needs to wake up is, in this case, decisive for the happy ending of the fabula. Furthermore, events always occur *somewhere*, be it a place that actually exists (Amsterdam) or an imaginary place (C.S. Lewis's Narnia). Events, actors, time, and location together constitute the material of a fabula. I will refer to these as *elements*.

These elements are organized in a certain way into a story. Their arrangement in relation to one another is such that they can produce the effect desired, be this convincing, moving, disgusting, pleasing, or aesthetic. Several processes are involved in ordering the various elements into a story. These processes are not to be confused with the author's activity – it is both impossible and useless to generalize about the latter. I distinguish the following:

- 1 The events are arranged in a sequence that can differ from the chronological sequence.
- 2 The amount of time allotted in the story to the various elements of the fabula is determined with respect to the amount of time these elements take up in the fabula.
- 3 The actors are provided with distinct traits. Thus they are individualized and transformed into characters.
- 4 The locations where events occur are also given distinct characteristics and are thereby transformed into specific places.
- 5 Other relationships – symbolic, allusive, traditional – may exist among the various elements.
- 6 A choice is made from among the various points of view from which the elements can be presented. The resulting *focalization*, the relation between who perceives and what is perceived, colours the story with subjectivity.

The result is a specific story that is distinct from other stories. I will refer to the traits that are particular to a given story as *aspects*.

A fabula that has been ordered into a story is still not a text. A narrative text is a story that is told, conveyed to recipients, and this telling requires a medium; that is, it is converted into *signs*. An agent who relates, who utters the signs, produces these signs. This agent cannot be identified with the writer, painter, composer, or filmmaker. Rather, the writer withdraws and calls upon a fictitious spokesman, the *narrator*. But the narrator does not relate continually. Whenever direct speech occurs in the text, it is as if the narrator temporarily yields this function to one of the actors. When describing the text layer, the key question is *who* is doing the narrating.

A text does not consist solely of narration in the specific sense. In every narrative text, one can point to passages that concern something other than events, such as an opinion about something, for example, or information by the narrator that is not directly connected with the events – perhaps a description of a face or of a location. It is thus possible to consider what is said as narrative, descriptive, or argumentative. Such an analysis helps us assess the ideological or aesthetic thrust of a narrative. There is often a noticeable difference between the narrator's style and that of the actors. As a result of this division into three parts, some topics that traditionally constitute a unified whole will be treated separately in different stages of this book. An example of this is the agent who performs the activities pertinent for each layer. This agent is called "narrator" or "speaker" in the study of the text, "character" in the study of the story, and "actor" in the study of the fabula.

Ideally, the characteristics of narrative text should be as follows:

- 1 Two types of "speakers" utter the signs that constitute a narrative text; one does not play a role in the fabula whereas the other does. The narrator who does not appear and never refers to itself, and thus is reduced to being a voice, has the same status as one who constantly interferes, comments, or identifies with an actor.
- 2 We can distinguish three layers in a narrative text: the text, the story, and the fabula. Each of these layers can be described. The difficulty of distinguishing these is also a tool for understanding how they are intertwined.
- 3 That with which the narrative text is concerned, the contents it conveys to its readers, is a series of connected events caused or experienced by actors presented in a specific manner.

Logically speaking, the reader first sees the text, not the fabula. The fabula is really the result of the mental activity of reading; it is the interpretation by the reader, influenced both by the initial encounter with the text and by the manipulations of the story. The fabula is a memory trace that remains after the reading is completed. And how writers proceed we simply cannot know. Writers work mostly alone; filmmakers are part of a team. Narrative is a cultural phenomenon, one of the many cultural processes by which we live. The conditions of possibility of those processes are what constitute the interest of narrative analysis; there lays its cultural relevance.

Together, these characteristics produce a definition: a narrative text is a text in which all three characteristics are found. These characteristics are not exclusive to narratives. The third feature also applies, for example, to films and dramatic texts. Moreover, there are texts that display all three characteristics but that nevertheless, on the basis of either tradition or intuition, people do not regard as narrative texts. This is true of many poems. *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot is one of the numerous examples. A poem such as this may be termed a narrative poem, and its narrative characteristics may be narratologically described. That this does not often occur can be attributed to the fact that the poem displays other, more salient characteristics, such as poetic ones. Hence, the characteristics do not lead to an absolute delimitation of the corpus.

This in turn implies that a narrative theory facilitates description only of the narrative aspects of a text and not all the characteristics, even of a clearly narrative text. It is, therefore, as impossible as it is undesirable to delimit a fixed corpus. This is an issue of *relevance* – the answer to the always useful question “So what?” We can demarcate a corpus of texts in which the narrative characteristics are so dominant that their description may be considered relevant. Alternatively, we can use the theory to describe segments of non-narrative texts as well as the narrative aspects of any given text, such as, for example, the poem by Eliot. Why bother with such analyses? A preliminary answer to the question of relevance is that narrative – or rather, the narrativity that makes artefacts narrative – grabs and holds the attention.

A number of descriptive concepts follow from the development of the theory of such a narrative system. These concepts make possible a description of texts *to the extent that they are narrative*. In practice, the analyst will always make choices. Intuition often brings together a striking aspect of an artefact and a relevant theoretical element. On the basis of a careful reading of the text, as well as a careful attention to

one's reader's response, one selects those elements of the theory that one thinks particularly relevant to the text. Those will be, I presume, the features that triggered one's interest in the first place. This is why this theory is compatible with reception-oriented approaches.

The textual description that results provides the basis for interpretation, from which it cannot be firmly distinguished. Interpretation is involved every step of the way. Precisely for that reason a systematic theory is helpful, not to eliminate or bracket interpretation but to make it arguable. An interpretation is a proposal. If a proposal is to be accepted, it must be well founded. If it is based on a precise description it can be discussed, even if, in practice, the intuitive interpretation preceded the analysis. The theory presented here is an instrument for making descriptions, and hence interpretations, discussable. That, not objectivity or certainty, "being right" or "proving wrong," is the point.

Such discussions are possible and relevant because interpretation is both subjective and susceptible to cultural constraints. Those constraints define each reader as a cultural being, as a participant in a continuous discussion about meaning. Endorsing that view entails an interest in framings – those constraints that make the process of interpretation of more general interest. This turns narrative analysis into an activity of *cultural analysis*, for the subjectivity in analysis is a larger cultural issue. Subjectivity, understood as the crossing, in culture, of individual and social existence, also characterizes the concepts themselves. The provisional definitions given above, and the more elaborate ones that follow, have in common a special focus on *agency*. To talk about narrators, for example, is to impute agency to a subject of narration, even if this subject is not to be identified with the narrator. I will explain that focalizers, in the story, are the agents of perception and interpretation. Actors, in the fabula, are the subjects of action. This attention paid to agency – and, hence, to subjectivity – is indeed the basic tenet of the theory presented in this book. It insists on the complex manner in which narrative communicates.

Text: Signs

1: Preliminary Remarks

As said, a narrative text is a text in which a narrative agent tells a story. In this chapter, I further explain the different aspects of this definition and their consequences for the analysis and interpretation of narrative. The first question is that of the identity and status of the narrative agent. When, in this chapter, I discuss the narrative agent, or narrator, I mean the (linguistic, visual, cinematic) subject, a function and not a person, which expresses itself in the language or images that constitute the text. This agent is not the (biographical) author of the narrative. The narrator of *Emma* is not Jane Austen. The historical person Jane Austen is not without importance for literary history, but the circumstances of her life are of no consequence to the specific discipline of narratology. In order to keep this distinction in mind, I shall here and there refer to the narrator as "it." In this chapter, I keep to the definition of "that agent which utters the (linguistic or other) signs which constitute the text."

The appeal to the author to authenticate interpretations is an argument of authority – the two words "author" and "authority" are not coincidentally linked. But to confer all interpretive power to the reader also has its problems. The reader is surely indispensable in an interactive view of narrative. But the reader is neither alone in this, nor omnipotent. The social embedding of reading, the cultural commonplaces that influence how we read, make the individualistic view that each reader does it all, untenable. The first question this definition raises is that of the status and identity of the narrative agent.

2: The Narrator

The identity of the narrator, the degree to which and the manner in which that identity is indicated in the text, and the choices that are implied lend the text its specific character. This topic is closely related to the notion of focalization. Narrator and focalization together determine the *narrative situation*. The focalizer, as this concept will be defined in chapter 2, is an aspect of the story this narrator tells. It is the represented colouring of the fabula by an agent of perception, the holder of the point of view. When we see focalization as part of narration, as is usually done, we fail to make a distinction between linguistic, visual, or auditive, hence, textual agents and the colouring, the object of their activity, which may be produced by a different agent.

The fact that narration implies focalization is related to the notion that language shapes vision and world view. Distinguishing layers leads to the conclusion that seeing, taken in the widest sense of perception and interpreting, constitutes the *object* of narrating. When the connection between these two agents is not self-evident, it becomes easier to gain insight into the complexity of the relationship between the three agents that function in the three layers – the narrator, the focalizer, the actor – and those moments in which they do or do not overlap in the shape of a single “person.”

Forms of Narration: “I” and “He” Are Both “I”

Traditionally, narratives have been called, according to the “voice” of the narrator, “first-person” or “third-person” novels, with an exceptional “second-person” experiment. To what does the distinction between first-person and third-person novels correspond? Let us first consider an example that will return in chapter 2: the beginning of the novel *Of Old People or Things that Pass* (1906) by Dutch naturalist novelist Louis Couperus (1863–1923). In it, a woman, Otilie, hears the voice of her estranged husband, Steyn:

a Steyn’s deep bass resounded in the vestibule.

In this sentence we distinguish:

- 1 An event in a (in this case fictitious) fabula: the sounding of a voice belonging to Steyn.

- 2 Someone who hears the voice resound, who is sensitive to the timbre of that voice and to the specific (hollow) resonance that sounds acquire in a vestibule.
- 3 A speaking agent that names the event and its perception.

The speaking agent does not mention itself in the process. It might just as well have done so. Then we would have read: "(I narrate:) Steyn's deep bass resounded in the vestibule." As soon as there is language, there is a speaker who utters it; as soon as those linguistic utterances constitute a narrative text, there is a narrator, a narrating subject. From a grammatical point of view, this narrating subject is always a "first person." In fact, the term "third-person narrator" is absurd: a narrator is not a "he" or "she." At best the narrator can narrate about someone else, a "he" or "she" – who might, incidentally, happen to be a narrator as well. This does not imply that the distinction between "first-person" and "third-person" narratives is itself invalid. Just compare the following sentences:

b I will be twenty-one tomorrow.

c Elizabeth will be twenty-one tomorrow.

If what I said above is valid, we may rewrite both sentences as:

(I say:) I will be twenty-one tomorrow.

(I say:) Elizabeth will be twenty-one tomorrow.

Both sentences are uttered by a speaking subject, an "I." The difference lays in the object of the utterance. In b the "I" speaks about itself. In c the "I" speaks about someone else. When in a text the narrator never refers explicitly to itself as a character, we speak of an *external* narrator. This term indicates that the narrating agent does not figure in the fabula as an actor. On the other hand, if the "I" is to be identified with a character, hence, also an actor in the fabula, we speak of a *character-bound* narrator.

This difference between an external and a character-bound narrator, a narrator that tells about others and a narrator that tells about him- or herself – such a narrator is personified – entails a difference for the narrative rhetoric of truth. A character-bound narrator usually proclaims or implies that it is recounting true facts about her- or himself. "It" pretends to be writing "her" autobiography, even if the fabula is blatantly implausible,

fantastic, absurd, metaphysical. Julio Cortázar's famous short story "Axolotl" tells us "in the first person" how the narrator changed into an *axolotl*, a kind of lizard. This form enables him to explore from the inside what it means to (not) be human. The narrative form sets up a confrontation between the limits of a sense of humanity confined to the individual and the recognition by others that defines it. The narrative rhetoric of a character-bound narrator is therefore here indicated by the addition:

(I narrate: (I state autobiographically:)) I felt a great anxiety that day.

The rhetoric of an external narrator can also be used to present a story about others as true. We may indicate this as follows:

(I narrate: (I testify:)) Elizabeth felt a great anxiety that day.

Unless otherwise indicated, there is no reason to doubt that the character did feel that anxiety. On the other hand, the rhetoric sometimes points to invention. Indications that the narrator is telling a fictive story and wants the readers to know it is producing narrations of impossible or unknowable situations; or generic indications such as "Once upon a time ...," which is often present at the beginning of a fairy tale, and subtitles such as "A Novel" or "A Winter's Tale" – these indications suggest fictionality. The *fabula* is fictitious, invented, an instance of the child's play of make-believe.

The Point of this Distinction

Let me illustrate this with three examples involving children. Compare the following passage from a children's book about a family accident in which the mother is so badly hurt that – after the quoted passage – she will die. The older daughter, who is about eight, narrates:

But this afternoon I hate it all. They don't know I dreamed about Mum, and why. What *do* they know? The same as I do? *Say* it then! I start yelling and calling names. Then I'm so ashamed that I creep away under the blankets. I hate everybody.

Arno Bohlmeijer, *Something Very Sorry*, 110

This moving story is actually a true, that is, non-fictional account, written by the father, not the girl who is the speaking "I" here. But the

narrator emphatically claims to speak the truth, which is indicated by the emphasis on problems of access – “What *do* they know?” – and by the honesty with which she gives away her shame over her obnoxious behaviour. As a consequence, the reader not only believes her but also understands her behaviour, better than she can herself.

Now, the following two passages come from an autobiographical book; yet the narrator has a different, though equally truthful rhetoric:

We were sitting in a cornfield waiting for the sun to set. Mother, Daddy, and I and our guides, a man and a woman who had given us directions from the train station.

Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Budapest Diary*, 3

In the taxi to our hotel, all I could think about was that I was in a city where even the cabdrivers spoke Hungarian. Once he found out I spoke the language and had lived in Budapest, our driver started firing questions. 19

The first of these passages is the beginning of the book; the second opens the second chapter.

The author is the same, Suleiman. The narrators are different. From the language of the first passage we can assume the narrator is a child. The name “Daddy” tells us that, as does the reference to the guides as “a man and a woman,” without proper names. The information we get about the narrator implies much more. The interpreter can speculate about the familial relationships suggested by the difference between “Mother” and “Daddy,” especially in light of the book’s intriguing subtitle, “In Search of the Motherbook.” The narrator of the second passage is an adult, or at least, someone whose knowledge of Hungarian was not obvious from the start (“Once he found out I spoke the language”). This anecdote tells us that the narrator was at first assumed to be a foreigner in Budapest.

The first passage, although not saying anything about language, suggests that the child narrator is in her own country, Hungary. As the narrator soon tells us, Hungarian was her mother tongue as a child; she lost it, and got it back as a foreign language. In fact, the book is very much focused on this particular way of being “in language.” The subtitle beautifully reflects this focus: “Motherbook” is a literal translation of the Hungarian word for a birth certificate. Given the narrator’s double status as a former native and now foreign speaker, the word has the music of the childhood in which, precisely, she is no more. The distinction between

author and narrator is crucial for reading this book: the issue the story addresses is, precisely, the way language splits the subject – a general idea in post-structuralism, and one that is particularly dramatic in the case of this subject's relation to a language acquired, lost, and (partly) regained.

Yet another example of a child narrator shows that the autobiographical claim implied in character-bound narration (CN) can have vastly different implications.

I drop the food and break into pieces she took my face away there is no one to want me to say my name ...

... I see her face which is mine. ... I have to have my face ... I follow her we are in the diamonds which are her earrings now my face is coming I have to have it I am looking for the join ... now I am her face my own face has left me ... I want to be the two of us ... I want the join.

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, 212–13

This narration of an experience is, at first sight, so strange that for that reason alone we do not doubt its veracity. The mixture of fusion with the mother and the fragmentation of the self, reminiscent of another tenet of the same psychoanalytic theory to which Suleiman's narrators related, speaks of the early infant's lack of a formed ego. This general idea is here inflected in the historical tragedy of slavery. The fragmentation and fusion that inhibit the formation of subjectivity are used to represent the difficulty of remembering a traumatic past – that of slavery, in turn represented in the most painful of its experiences, the impossibility of mother–child relationships under such conditions. The difficulty of remembering that comes with trauma is, metaphorically, embodied in the difficulty of re-remembering the body, the face.

These three examples of a CN, that is, of an "I" identifiable as a character doing the narrating, imply a rhetoric of veracity.

All Kinds of "I"s

Compare the following passages, of which only d is from a literary novel, Louis Couperus's *Of Old People*, already mentioned. This widely read novel, turned into a film and a television series, can be considered a typically Dutch variant of Naturalism: hereditary flaws persevere through three generations, guilt is connected with passion, and violence is staged in both "the Indies" (now Indonesia) and The Hague. The "old people" are more and more haunted by the murder of the old woman's husband

that they committed sixty years ago in the Indies, while the secret, after all these years, becomes more and more in danger of revelation.

Couperus (1863–1923) grew up as one of many children in a family of colonial administrators. His father was severe and demanding, and the child was bound to disappoint him. The family spent several years in the Indies. His many works include psychological novels, symbolic fairy tales, mythological novels, historical novels (often set in a decadent society), short stories, travel accounts, and journalism. His recurrent theme is the predominance of fate in human life. Fate, in Couperus's view, is an almost personified, basically obscure force, impregnated with guilt. The stereotypical opposition between the north, as cold, somber, male, and bourgeois, and south, as sensual and female, structures many of his novels. *Of Old People* is, in my view, his best novel. Now, compare the following passages:

d Steyn's deep bass resounded in the vestibule.

Come Jack, come dog, come along with your boss! Are you coming? The happy bark of the terrier resounded. Up and down on the stairs he stormed with his enthusiastic speed, as if tripping over his own paws. Oh, that voice of Steyn's! mama Otilie hissed between her teeth, and she angrily turned the pages in her book.

e I sat quietly dozing in the room. But, again, I was not allowed to remain so. Hardly had I sat there five minutes when there it was again. Steyn's deep bass resounded in the vestibule. Oh, that voice of Steyn's!

f One day a gentleman, whom I shall, for simplicity's sake, call Steyn, went for a walk with his dog, while his wife sat dozing in the room. Steyn's deep bass resounded in the vestibule. She started at his voice, because she was very sensitive to sounds. Oh, that voice of Steyn's!

g Though Steyn assured me repeatedly that he only went out to walk his dog, his wife remained convinced that he kept a mistress. Every time he went out, she was irritated. One day it happened again. Steyn's deep bass resounded in the vestibule. Oh, that voice of Steyn's!

If we compare the relationship between the narrative "I" and what is narrated in these four fragments, we can contrast d and f with e and g.

The “I,” the narrative subject in d and f, is not a character in the story it narrates, while the narrator of e and g is also a character. Looking at example a, we note that this sentence recurs unchanged in all four fragments. In each we have:

- 1 a speaking agent, which mentions the event and its perception
- 2 someone who hears the sound of that voice, and – it appears – is irritated
- 3 an event in a fabula: the sounding of Steyn’s voice

In d, as we can say now that we have full information, the voice belongs to the character Steyn; the perception, that is, the irritation, belongs to Steyn’s wife Otilie (a character-bound focalizer); and the speaking agent is an external narrator. Since we are dealing with a novel, we expect that the fabula is invented, but this is of minor importance here. Now we can interpret the sentence like this: (I narrate: (I invent: (Otilie focalizes:))) Steyn’s deep bass resounded in the vestibule. If we want to indicate briefly how the sentence works, we might also formulate it like this: [external narrator [character-bound focalizer (Otilie) Steyn]. The narrator, the focalizer, and the actor are each of a different identity: the narrator is external, the focalizer is Otilie, and the actor is Steyn.

In e we apparently have a narrator whose intention it is to relate the events of her own life in a story that will explain its eventual outcome – let us assume a divorce. We may interpret the sentence like this: (I narrate: (I state autobiographically in order to explain:)) Steyn’s deep bass resounded in the vestibule. This sentence relates the event caused by the actor Steyn, its perception by the focalizer “I,” and the narrative act by the narrator “I”; both those “I”s are called Otilie. Thus we have, here in a formula of condensation that may be useful for quick notation: CN (Ott.) [CF (Ott.)-Steyn]. Two of the three agents have the same name and the same identity.

In f the situation is different again. The word “I” appears in the text. The narrator names itself. But it is not a character in the fabula. Still, it does more than just refer to its identity as an “I.” A sentence like “because she is very sensitive to sounds” presents itself as an explanation that might even denote partiality. The sensitivity mentioned might constitute an accusation of Steyn, who takes insufficient account of it. On the other hand, it can be an accusation of Otilie, who is hypersensitive. Let me, temporarily, choose the first interpretation. Then we have,

as I will explain in the next chapter, a case of double focalization, that of the anonymous focalizer, which may be located with or in the narrative agent, and that of the character to which it is partial: an external focalizer who embeds the focalization of Otilie who focalizes Steijn; in abbreviation: EF [CF (Ott.)]-Stejn. Or, with an indication of the levels of focalization: on the first level an external focalization that embeds a character-bound focalizer on the second level, who focalizes Steijn, or EF₁ [cF₂ (Ott.)]-Stejn. The fact that the focalization cannot reside exclusively with the external narrator is apparent from the sentence that follows “Stejn’s deep bass resounded in the vestibule”: “Otilie startled at the sound of Stejn’s voice.” Supposing again that this fragment is taken from a novel, we take it as fictional. But the narrator may be in the process of explaining such situations in that novel in more general terms, hence the partiality signalled above. Thus we have: (I narrate (I invent with the intention to explain:)) Stejn’s deep bass sounded in the vestibule.

I now take into account the fact that the narrator manifests itself in its text, refers to itself as “I”; while also thinking of the fact that that “I” is not a character, not an actor as in e. This I indicate by the addition of the term “perceptible” or “non-perceptible,” by which I mean perceptible or non-perceptible as specifically mentioned by the narrating agent in the text. The shorthand for that sentence might then be: EN(np) [EF₁ [cF₂ (Ott.)]-Stejn(p)]. Thus there is a partial coincidence of two of the three agents, while there are still three different identities at play. This form occurs quite frequently in older literature, such as Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Balzac, Dickens, and also Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* (from 1605 and 1615). It often serves to state a truth claim – the best guarantee of fictionality.

In the beginning of *Don Quixote* we read: “But this does not much concern our story; enough that we do not depart by so much of an inch from the truth in the telling of it” (31). A bit later, the narrator claims to be the most truthful among his competitors by giving several versions of a fact (37). This goes so far as to turn the truth claim completely around: in chapter 5 a tale, which is disqualified as coming from the kind of literature the novel consistently ridicules, is thus framed by the EN(p):

... a tale familiar to children, not unknown to youth, and enjoyed and even believed by old men, though for all that no truer than the miracles of Mahomet. 53

This position of the witness may be less crucial to the fabula but can be key for the reader. A witness can convey compassion, irony, or other affective responses to the reader. A witness can also influence the veracity of the narrative. Hence, neither the quantitative presence nor the participation in the fabula determines the importance of a particular type of narrator.

The narrator as witness is found in many literary, cinematic, and other narratives. The narrator can thereby remain invisible, yet committed to the story it tells. It can also be used as a readerly device. Considering the narrative as told by a witness is a way of barring indifference and encouraging compassion. This, in turn, solicits questions of modesty versus voyeurism, or a resistance to an attitude of appropriation, hence, questions of an ethical nature.

However, focalization need not remain with the same agent. Technically it would even be almost impossible to maintain such continuity. A spectacular example of a novel in which narration rests from beginning to end with the EN(np), and focalization with the CF, is Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La jalousie* (1957). It is curious that precisely the consistency with which the technique is maintained has had the effect that almost all critics have termed that anonymous agent a specific character: a jealous husband. Of course, the title has also been of influence here.

Let's return to that irritating voice. In *g* the narrator is also an actor; there is reference to discussions between the actor Steyn and the agent referring to him- or herself as "I." The actor "I," which, from the point of view of identity, coincides with the narrator, is, however, not important for the action. It stands apart, observes the events, and relates the story according to its point of view. Such a narrator is a witness. The question whether the story it tells is invented can no longer be asked. The text is full of indications that the story must be considered "true." Of course, this does not mean it is factually true; it merely speaks for the implied claim of the narrator. The interpretation of this sentence is:

(I narrate: (I witness:)) Steyn's deep bass resounded in the vestibule.

Since the narrator so is clearly pretending to testify, it must also, supposedly, make clear how it got its information. In the first sentence of *g* it does so: its source, at that moment, is Steyn himself. With regard to the rest of the fragment we cannot tell. Perhaps Otilie has told the narrator this anecdote. If not, it seems self-evident to presuppose that the narrator/character-witness was present at the scene.

If this is the case, then focalization is localized with the character-bound narrator who refers to herself and is, therefore, perceptible in the text. Now Otilie has disappeared as an agent, and both narration and focalization rest with the perceptible external narrator, the anonymous witness who is yet an "I."

In these examples we have seen four different narrative situations. In d and f the narrator stood outside the fabula and in e and g it did not. In d the focalizer was a character. In f we considered a case of embedded focalization, since here we saw an infiltration of external agents into the story. In e the identification of the agents was closest: the narrator and the focalizer were both the character Otilie. In g, finally, narrator and focalizer coincided – however, unlike e, not in the identity of one of the active actors, but in the identity of a witness. With these analyses, the fundamental distinction between a narrative "I" that talks about itself and a narrative "I" that speaks of others turns out to be too general. The implication of the narrator in one or both of the other layers is an aspect to consider.

Sometimes the narrative "I" exclusively narrates, as in d; it can also perceive, as in e, f, and g; and it can also act, as in e and g. When it acts, this action may remain limited to testimony, as in g. The traditional distinction between "I"-narratives and "he"-narratives is thus inadequate not only for terminological reasons. The difference between d and f would remain inarticulate because the infiltration of the "I" into the story is neglected. In some narratives, the narrative situations analysed here – that is, the different relationships of the narrative "I" to the object of narration – are constant within each narrative text. This means that one can immediately, already on the first page, see which is the narrative situation. But the narrative situation can also change. Displacements occur especially between d and f. A narrator may remain imperceptible for a long time, but suddenly begin to refer to itself, sometimes in such a subtle manner that the reader hardly notices. Yet, a sense of presence emerges – the presence of a witness.

Second-Person Narrators?

Michel Butor's novel *La modification* (1957) is one of the rare examples of a novel consistently written "in the second person." In the beginning, that grammatical form hampers the smooth narrative reading commonly associated with the genre. But quite soon it is almost inevitable that the narrative takes over, and one can sit back and go along with

the adventures of the protagonist on his train ride between Paris and Rome, between his wife and his lover.

The narrative thrust of this novel seems to depend on the fact that the second person cannot be sustained; without much effort, the reader translates it into first-person format, which enables her to read on and process the text into a story. The “you” cannot be subsumed by the reader’s position, nor can it be construed as the addressee of apostrophe, as in lyrical poetry. The “you” is simply an “I” in disguise, a “first-person” narrator talking to himself; the novel is a “first-person” narrative with a formal twist to it that does not engage the entire narrative situation, as one would expect it should. The novel has the appearance of a so-called interior monologue, that equally artificial mode of narration “in the first person” – with a character-bound narrator – that seeks to eliminate reference to the first-person voice in favour of a silent, “pure” first-person focalizer.

There is a reason for this easing back into the traditional narrative from which the author had sought to estrange his readers. This relapse is a consequence of Butor’s failure to take seriously what the second person is: to be, to act out, the essence of language. Only when speech is addressed to a second person can language fulfil its mission to communicate. This is the nature of words called *deixis*: words that only have meaning in the context in which they are uttered, such as “I” and “you,” “yesterday,” “here” or “there.” According to French linguist Émile Benveniste, who gave currency to the importance of deixis, the essence of language lies in deixis, not reference, because what matters in language is not the world “about” which subjects communicate, but the constitution of the subjectivity required to communicate in the first place. This idea illustrates beautifully the crossing of individual and social others that makes the case for the cultural importance of narrative.

The pronouns “I” and “you,” as opposed to “she,” “he,” “they,” and the like, are empty in themselves. They do not refer outside of the situation in which they are uttered. Each utterance is performed by an “I” and addressed to a “you.” This second person is crucial, for it is that subject that confirms the “I” as a speaker. Conversely, the “you” becomes an “I” as soon as the perspective shifts. It is only as (potential) “I” that the “you” him- or herself has the subjectivity to act, hence, to confirm the subjectivity of the previous “I.”

What is lacking, in *La modification*, is the key feature of *deixis*: the reversibility, the exchange, of the first and second person. Not only is the “you” a clearly distinct, even semantically dense individual doing

certain things, but the other people in his life, hence, in the fabula, are consistently described in the third person. The “you” is cut off from the others, or cuts them off, so that, rather than mutually confirming one another’s subjectivity, the figure of this “you” lapses into monologism. The pronoun “you” becomes a reminder of the alienation, that recession of subjectivity, rather than a fulfilment of it. As a consequence, the “you” can never be identified with the reader, nor is the reader the “you”’s symmetrical counterpart, the “I.” There is simply no “you” here whose turn-taking will make the written “you” into an “I.” I contend, therefore, that Butor has based his novel on a misconception of deixis. To extend this conclusion further, second-person narrators are not only logically impossible but also not manageable for a reader. For it is the latter who is narrative’s “second person.”

3: Non-Narrative Comments

Not every sentence in a narrative text can be called “narrative” according to the definitions presented in this book. Sometimes it is worthwhile analysing the alternation between narration and non-narrative comments. Often, it is in such comments that ideological statements are made. This is not to say that the rest of the narrative is “innocent” of ideology—on the contrary. The reason for examining these alternations is precisely to measure the difference between the text’s overt ideology, as stated in such comments, and its more hidden or naturalized ideology, as embodied in the narrative representations.

The following excerpt from an old-fashioned Dutch children’s book, *Danny Goes Shopping* by L. Roggeveen, presents a fairly obvious case. It shows that the commentary of the external narrator may far exceed the function of narrating.

- 1 Danny is barely able to hear him above the music.
- 2 What is the matter? he thinks.
- 3 *Wide-eyed, he looks about him.*
- 4 *Then he understands everything!*
- 5 *There they come, arm in arm, with happy faces: Mr Alexander and Miss Ann!*
- 6 Mr Alexander is a poet.
- 7 In his life, he has already written many rhymes.
- 8 He has written a poem about Danny, one about currant bread; one about the singing of the nightingale in the silent wood; and more than seven about Miss Ann!

- 9 Why did Miss Ann get so many poems?
10 Well, that is not difficult to guess!
11 Because Mr Alexander loves Miss Ann so much!
12 And, fortunately, Miss Ann loves Mr Alexander just as much!
13 What do two people who love each other do?
14 Well, that also is not difficult to guess!
15 They get married! Of course! They did in the past, they do so now,
and they always will!
16 Mr Alexander and Miss Ann act just like all other people.
17 And today is their wedding day!
18 The mayor is waiting for the pair in the town hall.

We can summarize the fabula of this page as follows: Danny watches the arrival of a bridal pair. Focusing on the actors and their actions, I would summarize what Danny sees as: the bridal pair arrives, the mayor is waiting. A lot disappears in this summary. Analysing what, exactly, helps distinguish between narrative and non-narrative parts of the text.

In lines 9 through 15 no events are presented. In addition, we are not exclusively confronted with objects from the fabula. Lines 9 through 12 convey the idea that Mr Alexander and Miss Ann love each other. The two actors are described in their relationship to each other, or rather, the collective actor "bridal pair" is described as consisting of two people who "love each other." But in doing so, we neglect the word "fortunately" in line 12. This word communicates an opinion, relating to the balance ("just as much") between the two actors. A balance of this kind is evaluated favourably. This adverb cannot be termed descriptive, because it refers to something of a more general, more public and cultural bearing than the fabula. Parts of the text referring to something general are best called argumentative. Argumentative textual passages do not refer to an element (process or object) of the fabula, but to an external topic. From this definition, it appears that the term "argumentative" should be taken in the widest sense. Not only opinions but also declarations on the factual state of the world fall under this definition: for instance, sentences like "water always boils at 100 degrees," or "Poland lies behind the Iron Curtain." Also, sentences of this type communicate no more than a vision of reality. High in the mountains, or using another method of scaling the thermometer, water boils at a different temperature (i.e., a different representation of temperature).

That the second example denotes not a fact but an opinion is evident when we change the sentence to “Poland lies in Eastern Europe,” or “Bonn lies behind the Iron Curtain.” Whereas the sentence could still appear factual when I first wrote this book, it has now become a “dated” sentence that is no longer true even if one still holds on to the opinion it expresses. Because the division between opinions and facts is difficult to draw, it makes sense to consider “argumentative” statements that refer to something of general knowledge outside the fabula.

The word “fortunately” formed part of a sentence that is, for the rest, descriptive. Analysing the story line by line, lines 9 to 12 describe elements of the fabula. Lines 13 to 15, however, do not contain any reference to elements of the fabula that could be described. Here we only see the representation of opinions about behaviour: people who love each other marry; this is what is usually done, and (therefore) is as it should be. This opinion is represented in a certain form. This form, the game of question and answer in a mock dialogue, had already started in line 2. The form conceivably has a convincing effect: the opinion is not presented as a personal one, but as something self-evident. This catechism is extended to convince the reader that she has known the truth all along. The numerous exclamation marks and additions like “of course” pursue the same goal. This kind of ideological drill may not be so common any longer in contemporary children’s fiction, but in subtler forms it is not absent at all.

In the next line, the actors are linked to the public opinion through mention of their conformism. They are merely described in that sentence. Only in the last sentence is a presentation of an event narrated. A new actor appears, the mayor. He is confronted with another actor, the bridal pair. This confrontation has a temporal aspect that will be explained in the next chapter. Though the act of the mayor is durative, not circumscribed in time, it appears from the lines following those of our passage that waiting must, nevertheless, be seen as an event. The mayor gets irritated because he has to wait, and takes action. It would be naive to suppose that only argumentative parts of the text communicate ideology. This happens equally in descriptive and narrative parts of the text; but the manner in which it happens is different. In addition, the example shows that the discursive form – here, the catechistic style – itself has ideological implications. What matters most is not the ideology of marriage as the universal form of “acting” upon love, but its presentation in a form of “teaching” of a particular kind: the drill.

The argumentative parts of the text often give explicit information about the ideology of a text. It is, however, quite possible that such explicit statements are treated ironically in other parts of the text, or are contradicted by descriptive or narrative parts of the text to such an extent that the reader must distance herself from them. If we want to evaluate the ideological tenor of a text, an analysis of the relationship between these three textual forms within the totality of the entire text is a crucial element. Non-narrative comments occur everywhere within narratives. The reverse is also true: non-narrative texts, including scientific ones, are also replete with narrative.

4: Description

Description is a privileged site of focalization, and as such it has great impact on the ideological and aesthetic effect of the text. But it is also a particular textual form, indispensable, indeed, omnipresent in narrative. In this section description will be analysed as a textual form; in chapter 2 the concept of focalization will be added.

Delimitation

Although descriptive passages would appear to be of marginal importance in narrative texts, they are, in fact, both practically and logically necessary. Practically, they help the imagined world of the fabula become visible and concrete. They make it possible to participate in the imagination of someone else. Logically, fabula elements need to be described so that their functions make sense. Narratology, therefore, must take these segments of the text into account.

- a Bob Assingham was distinguished altogether by a leanness of person, a leanness quite distinct from physical laxity, which might have been determined, on the part of superior powers, by views of transport and accommodation, and which in fact verged on the abnormal.

Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*

This excerpt is clearly a description. Mostly, things are less straightforward. Just try to define what a description is, and then consider: Is the following fragment, which not only describes objects and people but also accounts for the passage of a certain stretch of time, descriptive?

- b Presently he told her the motion of the boat upon the stream was lulling him to rest. How green the banks were now, how bright the flowers growing on them, and how tall the rushes! Now the boat was out at sea, but gliding smoothly on. And now there was a shore before him.

Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*

This passage is a description, for it ascribes features to objects: the banks are green, the flowers are bright, the bushes tall. I will, therefore, define a description as a textual fragment in which features are attributed to objects. This aspect of attribution is the *descriptive function*. We consider a fragment descriptive when this function is dominant. Thus, example a is predominantly descriptive, while b is a mixture of description and narration.

Within the realistic tradition, description has always been considered problematic. In the *Republic*, Plato tried to rewrite fragments of Homer so that they would be “truly” narrative. The first elements to be discarded were the descriptions. Even Homer himself attempted to avoid, or at least to disguise, descriptions by framing them as narrative. Achilles’s shield is described as it is in the process of being made, Agamemnon’s armour as he puts it on. In the nineteenth-century realistic novel, descriptions were at least narratively motivated if they were not made narrative. And despite its efforts to avoid representation, the *nouveau roman* has continued to follow this tradition.

Motivation

Working intuitively from the premise that descriptions interrupt the line of the fabula – a premise that, as we have just seen, is somewhat problematic – the ways in which descriptions are inserted characterize the rhetorical strategy of the narrator. In realistic narrative, insertion necessitates motivation. If, as Zola argued, the novel should be objective, this notion of objectivity necessitates naturalization – that is, making those interruptions known as descriptions seem self-evident or necessary, so that the inflections of the presentation, the attribution of qualities, and the ideological machinations remain invisible. This so-called objectivity is, in fact, a form of subjectivity in disguise. This is most conspicuous when the meaning of the narrative resides in the reader’s identification with the psychology of a character. This happens when characters are given the function of authenticating the narrative contents. If truth, or even probability, is no longer a sufficient criterion

to make narrative meaningful, only motivation can suggest probability, thus making the contents believable, plausible. That is why motivation is an aspect of realist narrative rhetoric.

On the basis of the theory of narrative presented in this book, we can distinguish three types of motivation. Speaking, looking, or acting – the three forms of narrative agency – bring about motivation. The most effective, the most frequent, and the least noticeable form is motivation through looking. Motivation is, then, a function of focalization. The description is the reproduction of what the character sees. Looking at something requires time, and, in this fashion, the description is incorporated into the time lapse caused by the interruption. But an act of looking must also have its exterior motivation. There must be enough light that the character is able to observe the object. Hence, there is a window, an open door, and an angle of vision that also have to be described and therefore motivated. Furthermore, the character must have both the time to look and a reason to look at an object. Hence the curious characters, the men of leisure, the unemployed, and the Sunday strollers.

Given the fundamental arbitrariness of the elements of the fictional world, there is, equally fundamentally, no end to the need for motivation. Later writers such as Nathalie Sarraute and Alain Robbe-Grillet in the French *nouveau roman* have mocked this predicament of realistic fiction. In the following fragment, for example, the motivation is easily integrated into the description itself (emphasis added):

When they had washed they lay and *waited* again. There were fifteen beds in the tall, narrow room. The walls were painted grey. The windows were long but high up, *so that you could see* only the top-most branches of the trees in the grounds outside. *Through the glass* the sky had no colour.

Jean Rhys, "Outside the Machine," *Tigers Are Better-Looking*

The sentence immediately preceding the description ("they lay and waited again") gives sufficient motivation for the act of looking. Hospital patients, particularly after their morning wash, have an ocean of time ahead of them. This is a subjective motivation. Not only is the act of looking itself motivated, but so also are the contents of what the women see. And this is indicated by "so that you could see," by the boundaries of the area that is visible. This exterior motivation is doubled up. The window motivates the fact that the women are able to

see anything at all of what is happening outside the hospital. But also, the restricted quality of the field of vision is emphasized: "Through the glass the sky had no colour." This lack of colour has its own thematic meaning, so that even in this respect the description is fully integrated into the text.

When a character not only looks but also describes what it sees, a certain shift in motivation occurs, although in principle all of the motivational demands mentioned remain valid. The act of speaking necessitates a listener – the "you" to whom the "I" speaks. The character-bound speaker must possess knowledge that the character-bound listener does not have but would like to have. The listener can, for example, be blind, or young, or amateurish; curious, in need of information, or threatened. There is yet a third form of motivation, one that resembles Homeric description. On the level of the fabula, the actor carries out an action with an object. The description is then made fully narrative. An example of this is the scene in Zola's *La bête humaine* in which a compulsive killer, Jacques, polishes (strokes) every individual component of his beloved locomotive.

Motivation occurs at the level of text when the character itself describes an object, as a character-bound narrator; at the level of story when the vision of the character supplies the motivation; and at the level of fabula when the actor carries out an action with an object. One clear illustration of the latter form, and one that also demonstrates that a distinction between descriptive and narrative is no longer possible within this form, is the following "description" of a dead man:

Then they went into Jose Arcadio Buendia's room, shook him with all their might, screamed in his ear, and held a little mirror in front of his nose, but they weren't able to wake him.

Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

Motivation is a way of making the relationship between elements explicit. Precisely because these relationships are not self-evident in fictional texts, they can never be motivated enough. And, for this reason, motivation is, in the final analysis, arbitrary.

A Rhetoric of Description

To enable the arbitrary to pass for inevitable or even "natural," writers appeal to rhetoric. This is particularly the case for descriptions because

their arbitrary motivation is in need of masking. Descriptions consist of a theme (e.g., "house"), which is the object described, and a series of sub-themes (e.g., "door, "roof; "room"), which are the components of the object. Taken together, the sub-themes constitute the nomenclature. They may or may not be accompanied by predicates (e.g., "pretty," "green," "large"). These predicates are qualifying when they indicate a characteristic of the object ("pretty"); they are functional when they indicate a function, action, or possible use ("inhabitable for six people"). Metaphors and comparisons can occur on any level. A metaphor can replace the theme or accompany it. The same holds for the sub-themes. The inclusive relation between theme and sub-theme is synecdochic (a part stands for the whole); the relation between the sub-themes is contiguous (one thing follows, or is adjacent to, another). Both relations can be termed metonymical. Between the theme or sub-theme compared and the predicates that replace them in metaphor, or specify them in comparison, the relation is termed metaphorical. On the basis of these two possible rhetorical relations, we can roughly differentiate six types of description.

1: The Referential, Encyclopaedic Description

In principle, there are no figures of speech in this type of description. The selection of components is based upon the contiguity of the elements of the contents. This means that the presence of some elements implies the absence of others. The reader can fill in the missing detail. General characteristics imply specific characteristics, unless the latter represent the former. The objective is to convey knowledge. The encyclopaedia is a model of this type of description.

2: The Referential-Rhetorical Description

The tourist guidebook rather than the encyclopaedia is the model for this second type of description. The units are now combined on the basis of both the contiguity of the components and their thematic function. The latter is evaluative. The objective is both to convey knowledge and to persuade. Persuasion occurs via the wording (a pleasing rhythm, a style that reflects the value of the object to be described, for example an "expensive" style to describe the Champs-Élysées), and via the contents; persuasion also occurs via the choice of traditionally valued sub-themes, and by the addition of evaluative predicates. Even when a number of metaphors are included in such a description, the construction of the text continues to follow the principle of contiguity.

3: Metaphoric Metonymy

Here again, contiguity is the dominating principle of construction. But in this case, metaphors are made of each individual component. Various compared elements may, in fact, be omitted altogether. Only the comparing elements are found in the text, which, as a result, is of a very metaphoric nature. However, there is no relation of contiguity among the components of the comparison. Such a relation exists only among the implicit components of the compared elements. Superficially, this type of description would make an incoherent impression upon the reader. That such is not the case indicates that the reader is engaged in a filling-in activity.

4: The Systematized Metaphor

This description is one large metaphor. The elements of the comparison and those of the compared objects are systematically related to each other. Each series is built upon the principle of contiguity. The series balance each other. The question as to which of the two series dominates the meaning cannot be answered without taking the context into consideration. Also included in this category are descriptions in which elements of the two series imply each other.

5: The Metonymic Metaphor

The description is one large metaphor. The elements are contiguously related to one another. They form a coherent description that, taken as a whole, is the comparison of an object that is compared to it. This relationship can remain implicit, in which case this type of description, when taken out of its context, cannot be distinguished from one of the other types. An explicit comparing element results in a Homeric comparison.

6: The Series of Metaphors

This description consists of a metaphor that is expanded without continually referring to the compared element. The metaphor is repeatedly "adjusted," creating the impression that the compared element is elusive and indescribable. This rhetorical categorization of description on the basis of its tropes has been used to characterize narrative in different historical periods or styles.

"Descriptology" in Practice

Delimitation, motivation, and the rhetorical features of description all appear in this fragment from Djuna Barnes's modernist novel *Nightwood* (1937).

On the second landing of the hotel [...] a door was standing open, exposing a red carpeted floor, and at the further end two narrow windows overlooked the square.

On a bed, surrounded by a confusion of potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers, faintly oversung by the notes of unseen birds, which seemed to have been forgotten – left without the usual silencing cover, which, like cloaks on funeral urns, are cast over their cages at night by good housewives – half flung off the support of the cushions from which, in a moment of threatened consciousness she had turned her head, lay the young woman, heavy and dishevelled. Her legs, in white flannel trousers, were spread as in a dance, the thick lacquered pumps looking too lively for the arrested step. Her hands, long and beautiful, lay on either side of her face.

The perfume that her body exhaled was of the quality of that earth-flesh, fungi, which smells of captured dampness and yet is so dry, overcast with the odor of oil and amber, which is an inner malady of the sea, making her seem as if she had invaded a sleep incautious and entire. Her flesh was the texture of plant life, and beneath it one sensed a frame, broad, porous and sleepworn, as if sleep were a decay fishing her beneath the visible surface. About her head there was an effulgence as of phosphorus glowing about the circumference of a body of water – as if her life lay through her in ungainly luminous deteriorations – the troubling structure of the born somnambule, who lives in two worlds – meet of child and desperado.

Like a painting by the *douanier* Rousseau, she seemed to lie in a jungle trapped in a drawing room (in the apprehension of which the walls have made their escape), thrown in among the carnivorous flowers as their ration; the set, the property of an unseen *dompteur*, half lord, half promoter, over which one expects to hear the strains of an orchestra of wood-wind render a serenade which will popularize the wilderness. (Barnes 56)

The narrator is describing a visual event: Felix Volkbein sees Robin Vote. An aristocrat in search of a wife meets the most fugitive human being, and the story of *Nightwood* can begin. In terms of form, this piece presents itself as a classical novelistic description. It comprises an introductory frame, a clear subject–object split, and a detailing of both the perception

of the object and the elements constituting it. An external narrator utters the words. But the passage also turns away from description, through its deployment of metaphor, its decentring evocation of endless other things – sea, forest, mushrooms, painting, circus (“unseen *dompteur*,” a key ambiance for the man Felix, framer of this description by his act of perception), music – and its narrativity. The reader is warned: “the thick lacquered pumps looking too lively for the arrested step” counter rational knowledge. At the same time, “arrested” foregrounds the descriptive nature of the passage; the way it stops narrative in its tracks.

This passage also ruptures linearity through its anticipatory foresight, turning from the metaphor-announcing “as if” to the referent, which escapes the focalizer and will continue to escape him forever: “the born somnambule,” who cannot be a wife to him, nor a lover to anyone, “meet of child and desperado.” Through a rhetoric ranging from expansion to the description of a non-existent painting (called *ekphrasis*), from disorder to distraction, and from deceleration to intensification of the moment, this description contains, in a nutshell, the history, the theory, and the criticism of description in narrative.

“On the second landing,” “On the bed”: these phrases literalize the realistic framing so characteristic of the modernist novel’s predecessors. The former narrativizes the focalizer, Felix, whose vision of Robin is the narrative referent of the description – what I term “motivation,” the subtle integration of the description into the narrative. He goes up, then looks down. The focalization establishes the link of perception between subject and object. Ascending in body, the focalizer descends in vision. Presenting the future object of obsessive pursuit – and the subject of obsessive withdrawal – as lying on a bed, the passage presents itself not only as a view from above, but also as a traditional painting. The frame comprises the paraphernalia of the late nineteenth-century artist’s studio – “potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers” – and the subliminal Orientalism inherent in it. The fake fairy atmosphere of that site of representation is further expanded by “faintly oversung by the notes of unseen birds,” a clause that thickens the subjectivism with senses other than vision, with sound, for example (soon, smell will be added), while enhancing the limited view.

The intensification of the focalizer’s perception, together with the narrative expansion of the moment, prepares the reader for a heightened sense of suspense, giving anticipatory importance to what will come. And here she is, the image of an odalisque in a Matisse painting: “half flung off the support of the cushions from which, in a moment of threatened consciousness she had turned her head, *lay the young woman*, heavy

and disheveled." Half flung: as a spectacle of arrested intimate movement, unsuitable for the public gaze, so that the man looking down on her is caught up in the inevitably voyeuristic position. Passive, with the door open, the young woman "asks for it." And, although the two people involved in this description are soon to marry and procreate, it seems predictable that in terms of *relationship*, their case is hopeless.

This description of Robin Vote, the central character of *Nightwood*, foregrounds what it is that has made description such a bone of contention, so subject to paradox, such an object of contempt. It also demonstrates that subjectivity and chance are the two critical responses to realist fiction, whose traps these two states of mind constitute. Moreover, it recalls the dual status of the non-narrative description of an imaginary visual image called *ekphrasis* as interruptive yet constitutive of narrativity. This convoluted and self-undermining love story begins when one of Robin's prospective lovers, Felix, chances upon her in a hotel room, where he goes because someone told him to. This description, therefore, is a beginning. It is also a prediction of an end. Thus it comprises the time of the novel, including the body of its fabula, which is none other than the repetition of the failure to relate that is staged here. Description, thus, is both narrative's "other" and an integral part of it.

Is the comparison "like a painting by the *douanier* Rousseau" a decorative, expansive, or specifying metaphor that clarifies the vision so that it can become visible for the reading viewers? Earlier, the woman was already described as "earth-flesh, fungi, which smells of captured dampness," so that the painted jungles follow, logically and aesthetically, rather than flesh out what is there on stage. Does the *ekphrasis* produce the woman, or the woman the *ekphrasis*? While the reader caught by focalization goes along with Felix, adopting his perceptual apparatus, including sight, sound, and smell, our narrative goodwill is put to the test when the focalizer loses his power in favour of the awakening text, which departs from the Sleeping Beauty to turn him into a generalized "one." This is the narrator's word, its direction for reading. The description neither presents nor explains the character for the narrative. Instead it produces the former *as the latter*, seducing the realistic reader into getting lost in the modernist jungle. This is why modernist novels appear difficult.

Much easier is the well-known strategy used, for example, by Thomas Hardy in his 1891 novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. There the heroine's moods and states correspond, almost point-by-point, with the brightness or darkness of the environment in which the character evolves. Colours appear to stand for – be a sign of – states of mind, which easily

translate into metaphorical colours and shades. Almost inevitably, the convergence of the visible features of the character and her environment produces a prose in which description mingles with the narration of events. Hardy's novel seems to get away with a kind of descriptive exuberance that rhetoricians and, later, theorists would somehow find problematic. I think it is because of the habit of scholars to reiterate the same examples from a limited corpus that the gap between critical writings on the novel and narrative theory is wider than necessary.

To the contemporary literary sensibility, the gap between a criticism that applauds description and a narrative theory that marginalizes it appears to come from the experience of reading versus the logic of structure. Structuralism is useful only when kept in its modest place: as a trigger and tool for discussion, a measure for comparison, and not as a truth that makes its overflow invisible. Like Cervantes's, these novels both deploy and denaturalize description. Whereas Cervantes's anti-hero is declared mad for seeing what is not there – for seeing an army in a cloud of dust produced by a herd of sheep – and Zola & Co boasted the referential existence of their described objects, modernism, with its dual philosophy of subjectivity and chance, is well placed to demonstrate an altogether different status for description.

The cited passage from *Nightwood* makes the complexity abundantly clear. The introductory frame represents the difficulty of keeping that frame within its own bounds. In this way framing is put on the table. The passage positions itself as ostentatiously far from naturalizing description through character-bound focalization. This agent binds each element – a painter's studio, a painting, and an object that refuses to stay still – to a larger whole, which is not a woman but a domain of sense-perception. As a result, this passage's descriptive discourse comments on the coherence within narrative as an altogether different kind of order from the real social one.

This is quite unsettling for those who are used to realist narrative. In the case of a person, for example, the description would move from head to foot and from the eyes to the rest of the face. This is the order from top to bottom combined with the move from centre to periphery. For landscapes, the order might be from foreground to background, vague to clear, left to right. Alternately, the description could run through the different senses involved in the perception of the object. The famous opening of Balzac's *Le père Goriot* (1835) follows the long shot zooming into a close-up, a move that, as it turns out, follows the steps of the character. And as this fellow, Eugène, enters the rooming house, the sense of

sight is complemented with the sense of smell. This ordered and neatly hierarchized expansion is parodied in Barnes's novel, where smell intervenes too early and practically takes over. This strategy results in a motivation that absorbs descriptions within the narrative.

5: Levels of Narration

In the fragments d to g of our discussion of Couperus's *Of Old People*, there was one phrase that remained unchanged throughout: "Oh, that voice of Steyn's!" This phrase shows several characteristics of emotive language use – that is, the use of language that aims at self-expression of the speaker with regard to that about which it speaks. The element of this phrase that most strikingly indicates an emotive function is the word "Oh." The exclamation mark is a graphic representation of an emotionally laden intonation. Moreover, the grammatical peculiarity that this sentence lacks a verb, reinforces its emotional effect.

Who is expressing this emotion? In other words, who says: "mama Otilie hissed"? The verb "hiss" is in this sense a declarative verb, comparable to "say" but colouring that verb. Declarative verbs indicating that someone is about to speak are, in a narrative text, signs of a change in level in the narrative text. Another speaker enters the scene. In d the external narrator temporarily yields the floor to Otilie. The character Otilie thus becomes a speaker at the second level, which I indicate as second-level character-bound narrator (if you like, CN2.) Note, however, that the use of that characterization is not entirely convincing. Though Otilie, at least temporarily, speaks, she does not narrate: what she says is not a story. Nevertheless, I will use this indication because it makes clear that the character is a speaker, just like the narrator. What that narrator says is another matter, to which I will return in the subsection "Relations between Primary and Embedded Texts." The concept "second-level character-bound narrator," then, refers to a character that is quoted by the narrator of the first level, whether that speaker is an external or a character-bound narrator. A second-level character-bound narrator is a speaker on the second level.

But what about that phrase in the fragments e, f, and g? It is on purpose that I have broken off the quotation in such a way that we cannot see who speaks. The declarative verb is missing. In e there are two possibilities:

e.i Oh, that voice of Steyn's, I hissed between my teeth.

e.ii Oh, that voice of Steyn's! I could not bear it any longer.

In e.i there is a declarative verb to indicate that what precedes is direct discourse, an embedded sentence. The speaker of the first level yields to the speaker of the second level. A character-bound narrator ("I") quotes a second-level character-bound narrator ("I"). Just as in d, the emotive sentence is an embedded sentence, a sentence within a sentence, which can be represented by the use of brackets: a character-bound first-level narrator quotes a second-level character-bound narrator, or CN₁[CN₂]. The character in both cases is called Otilie. But narratologically speaking, it is not the same Otilie. The character-bound first-level narrator only relates after the fact, in the narrative "now," albeit in the past tense, what the second-level character-bound narrator said earlier, "then," the past of the narrative "now." As a linguistic act, the emotive phrase forms part of the text. In another version of the same story, for instance, it might be represented thus: "Otilie expressed her irritation at the voice of Steyn." Direct discourse or direct speech, an embedded sentence, is the object of a language act. Thus it is, in principle, an event like so many other events.

In e.ii the emotive sentence belongs to the text of first-level character-bound narrator. Though the emotion communicated does form part of the text, the expression of it does not. In a summary of the fabula we would read: "Otilie was irritated by Steyn's voice." Not the act of verbal expression of the irritation but the irritation itself is, in principle, an event.

Fragment f contains the same possibilities:

f.i. Oh, that voice of Steyn's! Otilie hissed between her teeth.

f.ii. Oh, that voice of Steyn's! I understood how Otilie could not bear it any longer.

In f.i the first-level external narrator yields the word to the second-level character-bound narrator (Otilie). Thus we have an ordinary embedded sentence, as we might find in any narrative text. The sequel given to the emotive phrase in f.ii is of a piece with the interpretation of f given above, where I assumed that the perceptible external narrator, who is also the external focalizer, was on Otilie's side. The words of the emotive phrase are thus ascribed to the perceptible external narrator, and the first level is maintained.

Still, something has changed in this fragment. Through the addition into the narrative text of so clearly an emotive sentence of the first level, the external narrator's voice becomes much more perceptible than it already was. It suggests, in this emotive expression, that the external

narrator has heard Steyn's voice and that "it" has been irritated by it too. If this agent has heard the voice, he or she was, implicitly, present as an actor at the scene. That is why f and the variant f.ii have the same structure as g. The narrative "I" has become, by implication, a testifying actor. The reader will not be surprised therefore when a narrative situation with a character-bound narrator-witness presents itself in the text. This is one of the cases in which a superficial, general characterization of the narrative situation is unsatisfactory. The first-level external narrator may any minute start speaking on the second level as perceptible narrator, or do something else that turns it into an actor.

There is no reason to dwell on g. The possibilities are identical to those in f. Considering the narrative situation of g, it would seem obvious that either Otilie speaks the emotive sentence as perceptible second-level character-bound narrator, or the character-bound narrator-witness speaks it as a first-level character-bound narrator. In the analysis of examples e through g, we only took into account the possibility that the character-speaker, the second-level character-bound narrator, utters the words in fact. It does, however, also frequently occur that words, put in direct speech, are merely thought. Thus f might also have the following variant:

f.iii Oh, that voice of Steyn's! Otilie thought.

What the second-level character-bound narrator has narrated is not perceptible, because other actors who may happen to be present cannot hear the text. When an utterance narrated at the second level is not perceptible, this is also an indication of fictionality. If the narrator's realistic rhetoric seeks to keep up the pretence that it is relating true facts, it can never represent the thoughts of actors other than itself. This variant, then, only contradicts the pretence "I state autobiographically" or "I testify" when a first-level character-bound narrator ("I") quotes a second-level character-bound narrator (another actor). The verb is not declarative; rather, it is a synonym for "to think." This distinction helps us gain insight into the balance of power between the characters. When a character does not hear what another character thinks, and readers do receive information concerning these thoughts, readers may easily come to expect too much of the first character. They may, for instance, expect that the character will take feelings, only formulated in thought, into account, in this case that Steyn will speak less loudly because his voice upsets Otilie. But Steyn cannot know that it does, in this case,

because he is outside the room. Or, perhaps, because the irritation would not be expressed in words.

In most linguistic narratives, a narrator quotes speeches or thoughts of characters. Within such quotes, other characters can hear the second level narrator or speaker, but not always; nor is it always indicated whether others do hear the quoted words. If one character has thoughts that contain devastating judgments about another but does not express these to that character while the thoughts are narrated so as to appear like quotes, a fundamental inequality results. This inequality has been put to strategic use, for example, in the French novel *The Cat* by Colette. There, a young couple's first months of marriage are presented as an inexorable decline in the relationship. Systematically, the thoughts of the man, who judges his wife mercilessly, are quoted, often without the attributive verb that would make clear that the thoughts are not uttered out loud. The woman, in contrast, is only quoted when speaking, mostly to her husband. As a result, the criticisms the man holds against his wife are told to the reader over her head. She does not have a clue that he is so dissatisfied; nor does she have access to his negative responses to what she says to him.

Analysing Levels of Narration as a Tool for Literary History

Like description, as we have seen in the fragment from *Nightwood*, the structure of levels of narration can be a tool for characterizing narratives historically – to see them in light of literary currents. But in order to avoid facile categorizations, the same structure can inflect, modify, and nuance such characterizations. I will briefly demonstrate this with three opening sentences of novels belonging to three different periods with their own literary movements. Two of the most famous French novels, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, begin with an internal narrator. Flaubert: "Nous étions à l'Étude quand le proviseur entra, suivi d'un *nouveau* habillé en bourgeois et d'un garçon de classe qui portait un grand pupitre" (We were in study-hall when the headmaster entered, followed by a new boy not yet in school uniform and by the handyman carrying a large desk). Proust: "Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure" (For a long time I used to go to bed early).

Technically, in both novels all quoted speeches are, then, second-level narrations. In *Madame Bovary*, though, the first-level, first-person narrator disappears from view rather quickly. He actually never says "I."

The collective first person, repeated only once a few pages later, rather serves the purpose of positing the reality of the subsequent narration – the idea that the narrator was there when it happened, as a narrator-witness. Soon he will be forgotten, and the rest of the long novel seems to be told by an external narrator. But we will see later that his initial implication leads to other ways of implicating him, and “us.”

After the first few pages, the “nous” (we) returns one more time: “Il serait maintenant impossible à aucun de nous de se rien rappeler de lui” (It would be impossible today for any of us to remember anything about him). It is striking that the adverb *maintenant* (today, now) pulls the first person from the past into the present. Never mind that the preceding description is so precise, so detailed, and includes quoted speeches, and as such contradicts the double negative.

Since all evidence points to the presence of the narrator as an internal narrator, the emphatic denial of knowledge must serve some other purpose. The lack of memorability, the total ordinariness of the new classmate must be, then, the point of the use of “nous.” The narrator is a witness, but the character is so ordinary that he could be anyone, easily overlooked. This makes him, and the story that begins with his description, both allegorical – an “Everyman” – and as real as everyone else. The narrator’s status as a witness will enable him to present a devastating critique of his environment – the here-now – as well as shift his position constantly and creatively from identification with the main character Emma to an almost cynical outsider’s position.

What the narrator as witness is about to recount, then – so the “nous” intimates – is a story taken from real life, life in the countryside, as the subtitle “Moeurs de Province” suggests; and thanks to the “maintenant” in the second sentence in the first-person plural, we know that story will be contemporary. This discourse of “us” in the here-and-now is Flaubert’s realism. The narrator may be a witness, but the objectivity of realistic fiction is not guaranteed; on the contrary. The judgmental opinions about Emma, the novel’s main character, that one so often encounters indicate that those readers have not read the narrator’s text carefully, and only pay attention to the fabula.

Proust is a modernist, not a realist. His famous first sentence introduces the long novel that follows in a very different mode. The sentence implies an action – if we can call it that – that is repeated every day, and hence, a state of being, or a mode of living. It is followed by a long reflection on sleep, as a state between conscious and unconscious existence, and thus positions the first-person narrator as deeply subjective.

In distinction from Flaubert, Proust develops the subjectivity of his novel in detail and makes it the basis of the narrative. The quoted speeches are all, we presume, “heard,” witnessed, by this narrator and thus embedded in his subjective discourse. Far from the realism attributed to Flaubert, Proust’s novel stands for a modernist poetics because of this emphasis on subjectivity.

Neither Flaubert nor Proust can be consistently characterized in these historicizing period terms, however. They both give a special twist to what we commonly consider to be typical nineteenth-century realism (Flaubert) and early-twentieth-century modernism (Proust). Both use description and auditory and visual evocations to inflect those categories. We have seen how Flaubert refines the notion of realism as implicating the reader and placing the novel in a strictly contemporary provincial environment. Proust plays with the predicament of subjectivity in the face of speeches and events that the single subject who holds the narrative strings in his hands cannot correctly understand and therefore has difficulty narrating. Both authors use the possibility of quoting embedded speeches – the structure of narrative levels – to explore the limits of their chosen contemporary poetics.

Postmodern novelists draw on such examples to further complicate the structure of embedding. J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe* (1986) is a critical reworking of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), the latter a novel whose narrator is also the main character. Defoe’s text reads like a story told in retrospect, at the beginning not quite a diary, but later on more so. Turning the text uttered by an internal narrator upside down, Coetzee makes Crusoe (spelled without an e) *not* the writer of the report and diary; instead he invents a woman. She temporarily joins Crusoe on the island where he lives with the mute young black man Friday – a figure whose first appearance, as a footprint in the sand, occurs only in chapter 11 in Defoe’s text, but on the first page of Coetzee’s novel. Thus from the start, the form of narration by an internal narrator is both present and absent. What is lacking, and therefore prevents a full assessment of the novel’s form, is any indication of a second person. To whom is this narration addressed? Neither in Flaubert’s text nor in Proust’s is this an issue. Flaubert’s subject position is safely immersed in the group, and Proust’s “I” going to bed early is rigorously alone. In *Foe*, by contrast, this question is flaunted as a problem.

This, then, becomes the structuring question regarding Coetzee’s text. The woman, who turns out to be called Susan Barton, is the narrator as of the first sentence: “At last I could row no further.” The only

indication that she may not be the first-level narrator is the presence of quotation marks that open every paragraph up to part III (113). But until the end of part II (111), they never close. Does that mean that two-thirds of the text constitute a quotation embedded in a higher-level text of which there is, however, no trace? Yet the “you” occurs as soon as page 9, if only in brackets. There, the narrator says: “... while the stranger (who was of course the Cruso I told you of) gazed at me ...” Because nothing about Cruso has been mentioned before, we begin to suspect that a structure of *in medias res* (beginning somewhere in the middle) – a rather normal narrative device when it concerns the fabula – is here deployed on the level of text.

The identity of this addressee remains unclear for a long time, however, whereas the “you” is emphatically present. Only later do we realize that she is addressing her words to Foe, who appears to be in charge of writing her story. This makes sense of the quote marks that open each paragraph: Susan is not the narrator on the first level, but is being quoted by the genuine storyteller Foe. She is an embedded character-narrator parading as a first-level narrator. But up to page 113, this Foe is absent from the narrative, except as an anonymous “you.” There is another indication of the first-level narrator in his absence. In the first paragraph, Susan gives a description of herself that is impossible for an internal narrator when she says:

With slow strokes, my long hair floating about me, like a flower of the sea, like an anemone, like a jellyfish of the kind you see in the waters of Brazil, I swam towards the strange island ... (5)

This elaborate description of the way her hair floats, something she cannot see while being the one who is swimming, reads like an attempt to see herself from a distance, from above, so as to give the story more narrative clout. Her sense that she is unable to tell the story she lived – that narrative is radically divorced from experience – is the reason she commissions Foe to write it for her.

But while she is still the only narrator whose utterances we read, she presents herself as a narrator-witness:

When I reflect on my story I seem to exist only as the one who came, the one who witnessed, the one who longed to be gone: a being without substance, a ghost beside the true body of Cruso. Is that the fate of all story-tellers? ... Return to me the substance I have lost, Mr Foe:

that is my entreaty. For though my story gives the truth, it does not give the substance of the truth. (51)

What she lacks is substance, and that lack turns her into a witness. The floating hair predicts the loss of substance she deplors here. Hence, her ability to write the impossible description, one in which narrative wins over experience. Later (133) she says it in a simpler way, much more plausibly but without the poetic metaphors of the first version: “I slipped overboard, I began to swim, my hair floated about me, and so forth...” The “and so forth” suggests that what she is telling has already been told – that it is a cliché we already know, part of the idiom of storytelling. This means the choice is between poetic narration at the cost of experience – what she calls substance or truth – and flat narration that can only draw from the endless well of clichés.

This late moment in this novel of a mere 157 pages is followed by a passage where she discusses storytelling passionately with Foe, who, in the third and fourth parts, has turned into a character with whom Susan converses. Thus, it is she who talks on a higher level, quoting him. But this doesn't quite work either, because their discussions are strictly on the same level, hence, all quotations. The page ends with this decisive passage:

In the beginning I thought I would tell you the story of the island and, being done with that, return to my former life. But now all my life grows to be story and there is nothing of my own left to me. I thought I was myself and this girl a creature from another order speaking words you made up for her. But now I am full of doubt. Nothing is left to me but doubt. I am doubt myself. *Who is speaking me?* Am I a phantom too? To what order do I belong? And you: who are you? (133; emphasis added)

What Coetzee is staging, it seems, as an answer to both realism and modernism, is the impossibility of determining levels of narration. The question “Who is speaking me?” sums up the predicament of the narrator, who, while being the only (speaking) survivor of the adventure, must yield the telling of it to a first-level narrator, so that she is free to be a character, having the experience (“substance”) albeit *therefore* unable to tell about it in a way that others can enjoy. Between Foe and Susan – witnessed, in the shadow, by the mute Friday – the position of subject of narration is tossed back and forth, with no decisive

outcome. The competition between Susan and Foe about the position of narrator is never resolved. This wavering, the unanswerability of the fundamental question "Who is speaking?" that guides the narratology of the text level, characterizes postmodernist literature. Although it is constantly preoccupied with subjectivity, there is no subjective narrator. And although the truth of the story is endlessly discussed, this novel is not realist.

Intermediate Forms: Indirect Speech and Free Indirect Speech

Back to Steyn's voice. Why does the way in which example f.ii is phrased entail a change in narrative situation? I have emphasized the signs of emotive function because, with this emotive function, the narrator refers to itself. If in a statement the feelings of the speaker are expressed, the statement is about the speaker. Even if the narrator does not explicitly refer to itself, still, the "I" narrates about itself. This means that an actor with the same identity as the narrator forms part of the fabula. Signs of emotive functioning are, therefore, also signs of self-reference. There are more signs of this kind. I would even speak of two different language situations here: language about the contact between speaker and hearer, and language about others.

This distinction into two language situations, one personal and the other impersonal, may help us understand this and comparable phenomena. In f.ii we have seen details hinting that the narrator is involved with its object. Its language is personal in that it refers to the position of the narrator itself. In doing so, it places itself on the same level as that about which it is speaking in the same statement. Thus it has made itself into a virtual (possible, still unrealized) actor. We may say that, in this case, narrative levels begin to intertwine or even merge. The impersonal language situation we found in example f.ii is invaded. The personal language situation intrudes, but not, as in f.i, on the second level. When an actor in a story begins to speak, she does so, in principle, in a personal language situation, in contact with another actor. In the basic narrative situation, speech is only possible on one narrative level in the personal language situation. At first sight this happens when the narrator addresses herself explicitly, or implicitly, to the reader; at the second level, when an actor speaks to another actor (this may be the speaking actor himself). In f.ii we find a "mixture" of the two narrative levels, which is called text interference.

The two narrative situations can be distinguished on the basis of references in the text to personal or impersonal language situations. These references can be taken as signals, as signs indicating that "this

is a(n) (im)personal language situation.” These signals are often related to the following forms:

	<i>personal</i>	<i>impersonal</i>
1 personal pronouns	I/you	he/she
2 grammatical person	first and second person	third person
3 tense	not all past tenses are possible	all past tenses
4 deixis: indicative pronouns	this, these	that/those
adverbs of place	here/there	in that place
adverbs of time	today, tomorrow	that day, the day after
5 emotive words and aspects	oh!	(absent)
6 conative words and aspects: address, command, question	please	(absent)
7 modal verbs and adverbs which indicate uncertainty in the speaker	perhaps	(absent)

When the signals of the personal language situation refer to the language situation of the narrator, we are dealing with a perceptible narrator (NI(p)). When the signals refer to the language situation of the actors, and a clear change of level has been indicated by means of a declarative verb, a colon, a dash, or quotation marks, we speak of a personal language situation at the second level (CN₂). This situation can be called dramatic: just as on the stage, actors communicate through speech in a personal language situation. When, however, the signals refer to a personal language situation in which the actors participate without previously stepping down from their narrative level, then we have *text interference*. This was the case in f.ii. The NI(p) stepped across, so to speak, to the second level. But that was just one possibility. The inverse occurs more often. Then the words of the actors are represented at the first level, so that the narrator adopts the actor’s discourse.

The most common form of this is indirect discourse. Here the narrator represents the words of the actor as it is supposed to have uttered them. Compare the following examples:

h Elizabeth said: “I think I shall be able to find time to go out with you tomorrow night.”

- i Elizabeth said that she might be able to find time to go out with him tomorrow night.
- j Elizabeth said that she would probably have time to go out with him tomorrow night.
- k Elizabeth said that she would probably have time to go out with him the following night.

In i, j, and k the contents of Elizabeth's words are represented in an equally adequate manner. The words themselves are represented with maximum accuracy in i, with less accuracy in j, and still less in k. It is impossible and irrelevant to reconstruct the original direct speech from indirect discourse. Comparing the examples, however, it is as if i represents the allegedly spoken words more accurately than j, and j than k. We do not need h to come to this conclusion. In I, "she might be able to," the modal indication of uncertainty "might" has been combined with a subject-oriented positive verb, "be able to find." "Tomorrow" is a deictic adverb of time. In j the modal form is still present, but less strongly, in "would probably." The adverb is less emphatic about personal uncertainty than the expression "might be able"; in j we also find the deictic adverb "tomorrow night." In k only the weak modal value of "probably" is a trace of the personal language situation. In i, j, and k, we find, compared to h, a number of signs of the impersonal language situation, because the sentence is in indirect discourse. The personal pronoun "I" has been changed into 'she'; the verb is now in the third person, and not in the first; and the present future has been changed into a past future.

On the basis of this analysis, it makes sense to look out for three characteristics that distinguish these forms:

- 1 Indirect discourse is narrated at a higher level than the level at which the words in the fabula are supposed to have been spoken.
- 2 The narrator's text explicitly indicates that the words of an actor are narrated by means of a declarative verb and a conjunction, or a substitute for it.
- 3 The words of the actor appear to have been rendered with maximum precision and elaboration.

The first characteristic distinguishes indirect discourse from direct discourse. The second characteristic distinguishes indirect discourse from a

mode of representation that is even more indirect. This is most frequently termed *free indirect discourse*, but is also called “free indirect style” or “reported discourse.” I call it free indirect discourse (FID). The third characteristic distinguishes (free) indirect discourse from narrator’s text. This last distinction is the one that gives us the most problems in the practice of analysis. That is because the third characteristic is relative.

When characteristic 2 of indirect discourse is left out, and characteristic 3 is present, the result is free indirect discourse. This is a form of mixture or interference between narrator’s text and actor’s text. Signals of the personal language situation of the actor and of the (im)personal language situation of the narrator cross, without explicit reference to this. Thus we have:

1 Elizabeth might be able to go out with him tomorrow.

“Tomorrow” and “might” indicate the personal language situation of the actor Elizabeth, while the other signals suggest the impersonal language situation: third person, past tense.

Precisely because the second characteristic of indirect discourse is lacking – the explicit sign that there is indirect discourse – it is not always clear whether we are dealing with indirect discourse or ordinary narrator’s text. This is so because the third characteristic is relative. That is why we only distinguish free indirect discourse from the narrator’s text when there are positive indications that there is indeed representation of words of an actor. Such indications are:

- 1 The signals of a personal language situation, referring to an actor.
- 2 A strikingly personal style, attributable to an actor.
- 3 More details about what has been said than is necessary for the course of the fabula.

To demonstrate this I will represent one event – Elizabeth seeks a confrontation with John – in various forms.

direct speech m Elizabeth said: “I refuse to go on living like this.”

indirect speech n.i Elizabeth said that she refused to go on living like that.

n.ii Elizabeth said that she would not go on living like that.

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| free indirect | o.i Elizabeth would be damned if she'd go on living discourse like this. |
| | o.ii Elizabeth would not go on living like this. |
| narrator's text | p.i Elizabeth did not want to go on living like this. |
| | p.ii Elizabeth had had it. |

In the analysis of these sentences I assume that the verb "to refuse" fits the usage of the actor Elizabeth, and not the narrator. Of course, without a context, such an assumption is meaningless.

The direct discourse in *m* seems unproblematic. We read the precise text as it was supposedly uttered by the actor, and the indications of the changes in level are explicit. As soon as the actor's text is given by the narrator in the following sentences, changes occur. In *n.i*, the actor's text is represented as precisely as possible. As far as contents are concerned, this is also true for *n.ii*. But the style that is clearly recognizable as the personal style of the irritated actor refers to a personal language situation of the actor, involved in a quarrel. The difference between *n.i* and *n.ii* on the one hand, and *o.i* and *o.ii* on the other, lies in the presence or absence of a declarative verb with a conjunction. In *o.ii* the actor's text has been represented with less precision than in *o.i*.

Of course, in studying narrative texts, we never have such artificial combinations at hand. But even without comparison, we may say that *o.i* is strongly inflected by the actor's text, and *o.ii* by the narrator's text. Still, I also sense free indirect discourse in *o.ii*, because the adjunct "like this" signals a personal language situation of the actor. The presence of these words also distinguishes *o.ii* from *p.i*. In *p.i* I have used the heavy-handed expression "in the manner disclosed" in order to avoid a deictic element. But even if I had chosen "in that manner," "that" would refer to what had been stated earlier, hence to the language situation of the narrator, and not the actor. In *p.i* and *ii* we have a narrator's text. We cannot distinguish any signal of the actor's personal language situation. We have no reason to take *p.i* as the representation of certain spoken words. Finally, *p.ii* is the purest form of the narrator's text. The content is presented as an act. The words in which the refusal is uttered are not mentioned at all.

Indirect discourse, free indirect discourse, and the narrator's text in which language acts are narrated are all forms in which the words of an actor are narrated at first level. The degree to which, in this series,

justice is done to the text of the actor decreases; on the other hand, the degree to which the speaking of the actor is seen as an act gradually increases. The interference of narrator's text and actor's text may occur in widely varying proportions. At the first level, the actor's text is given minimal reflection in indirect discourse; sometimes the narrator's text dominates (o.n), then again the actor's text (o.i). In the narrator's text the words of the actor are represented not as text, but as an act. In that case we no longer speak of text interference.

Disentangling Interference

Flaubert is notorious as a master of confusing narrative variations of discourse, making it often impossible to disentangle them and distinguish between direct, indirect, and free indirect discourse. FID also facilitates a multiplication of subjectivities. These features make the novel "immersive," a term usually reserved for exhibitions, not novels. The immersive quality of Flaubert's text consists in its tendency to move from narration to FID without warning, transition, or clear indication. This is due to the unique, rigorous *contemporaneity* that is shaped in citational writing. Flaubert recorded not only views but also fragments of discourse, clichés he called *idées reçues*, from which to stitch the fabric of his novel.

One example must suffice. I selected a very ordinary passage that is neither dramatic nor focused on the central character Emma. Here, in chapter 7 of part II, is a conversation between Charles and his mother concerning Emma's vague and inexplicable malaises. It begins in direct discourse.

– Sais-tu ce qu'il faudrait à ta femme? reprenait la mère Bovary. Ce seraient des occupations forcées, des ouvrages manuels ! ... – Pourtant elle s'occupe, disait Charles.

"Do you know what your wife needs?" said the older Madame Bovary. "She needs to be forced to work – hard, manual work ..."
"She keeps busy, though," Charles said.

This is classical, perfectly clear quotation, including the verb "to say" and quotation marks as well as an indication of the subject who is speaking. Each speaker can be characterized by their discourse: the mother is harsh, and full of contempt for Emma; the use of the qualifier "forcées" with "occupations" qualifies the mother and her discourse

clearly. This insight can help us disentangle the indirect and free indirect discourses that follow. Charles weakly defends Emma, which tells us about his difficulty in taking decisions. Soon, the discourse changes. And all clarity vanishes.

Donc, il fut résolu que l'on empêcherait Emma de lire des romans. L'entreprise ne semblait point facile. La bonne dame s'en chargea: elle devait quand elle passerait par Rouen, aller en personne chez le loueur de livres et lui représenter qu'Emma cessait ses abonnements. N'aurait-on pas le droit d'avertir la police, si le libraire persistait quand même dans son métier d'empoisonneur ? (153)

So it was decided to prevent Emma from reading novels. The project presented certain difficulties, but the old lady undertook to carry it out: on her way through Rouen she would personally call on the proprietor of the lending library and tell him that Emma was cancelling her subscription. If he nevertheless persisted in spreading his poison, they would certainly have the right to report him to the police. (148)

The beginning of the passage seems to be a narrator's summing up, as a conclusive "so" indicates. The second sentence implies a conversation – let's say, the hesitant Charles objects that it will be difficult to do, and the resolute mother promises to solve the problem. We can already think of this first part of the sentence as approaching FID, rendering Charles's timid objection. Then, however, the mother's active meddling is rendered in narrator's discourse, as the descriptive "old lady" ("la bonne dame") indicates. Neither Charles nor the mother herself would qualify her in such terms. And "s'en chargea" ("undertook") is the narrator's verb that characterizes her readiness to act, again summing up. Possibly, the verb "carry it out" can be either a narrator's word choice or her own, as if saying: "don't worry son, you don't have to do anything, I'll carry it out."

The second half of the sentence clearly moves towards FID, however. This is not emotive discourse, but projecting a plan. She was leaving soon anyway, and it is as if we hear her say: "On my way through Rouen, I will call on the proprietor of the lending library and tell him that Emma is cancelling her subscription." The only words that change are the verbs, which are in the present tense in the direct discourse, in the past tense in FID. The final sentence of the fragment is more clearly FID, and we know that so clearly because it is in fact a double FID. It renders a quote within a quote. Imagine what the mother will have said to her

son: "I will threaten this man: 'if you nevertheless persist in spreading your poison, we will surely have the right to report you to the police.'" A narrator could have used the word "threaten" and summed up the rest with something like "with the police." But both "spreading your poison" and "have the right" smack of the angry, intimidating old woman's righteousness, as she will threaten the librarian with great passion.

The entire passage becomes a mixture of narrator's discourse, characters' quoted discourses, and FID. Why would a novelist structure this passage so confusingly? The point of this, as I interpret it, is to demonstrate the power of the meddlers, so important in this novel. Like Homais the nasty pharmacist, and the gossiping townsfolk who judge Emma's behaviour and rejoice in her downfall, Madame Bovary senior is herself a poison of sorts. Her domination over her son makes Charles an unhelpful mate for Emma. Such phrases as "his poison" – meaning novels (the French is even stronger, "son métier d'empoisonneur," "his profession of poisoning") – can hardly be attributed to the primary narrator of a carefully crafted and proudly presented novel; and one claiming realism to boot, as it was understood at the time, namely as objectivity. Instead, the narrator here quotes, freely-indirectly, not just the mother but the public opinion of a large segment of the population. Thus, the structure of embedded speech builds up the oppressive environment in which Emma is obliged to live. Realism, here, does not mean objectivity but rather a fiercely ironic rendering of a real social structure of embedding whatever a character says in *idées reçues*.

Relations between Primary and Embedded Texts

When there is text interference, narrator's text and actor's text are so closely related that distinctions between narrative levels can no longer be made. The relationship between the narrative levels has exceeded the boundary of maximum intensity. When the texts do not interfere but are clearly separate, there may still be a difference in the degree to which the embedded actor's text and the primary narrator's text are related. A number of relationships between texts are possible. I systematically term the narrator's text "primary," of course without implying a value judgment, (temporal) priority, or (qualitative) primacy. This only means that the connection is one of levels in the technical sense. In the end, the narrative text constitutes a whole in which, from the narrator's text, other texts are embedded. The dependence of the actor's text with regard to the narrator's text should be seen as the dependence of a subordinate clause to a main clause. According to this principle, narrator's

text and actor's text are not of equal status. The formally hierarchical position of the texts is indicated by the fundamental principle of *level*. The relations between narrator's text and actor's text may be different in kind and in intensity. A quantitative aspect is of influence here: the more sentences frame the actor's text, the stronger is the dependence.

Embedded Narrative Texts

Frame narratives are the clearest examples of the structure of embedding. The primary narrator of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is an internal one, the snowed-in guest Lockwood. After a strange experience during the night, he asks the servant Nelly Dean about the family, and thus she becomes the narrator, already on a second level. As a servant, she is a typical narrator-witness, and it is as a witness that Lockwood asks her to tell the tale. The mostly invisible servant, in the class hierarchy of the day, sees everything, precisely because no one takes her seriously enough to hide things from her. Her tale is so long and elaborate, and so containing of things she cannot have seen, that we soon forget she is telling the story. Thus, we act as the other members of the household: Nelly is just as invisible to us as she is to the others. This produces a liminal affiliation between the structure of narratorial embedding and the social structure of a class society.

This structure can also encompass many different narratives – more short stories than novels – embedded in a frame narrator. The classic example is the story cycle *Arabian Nights*. Here we find narration at several levels. The primary narrative presents the story of Scheherazade, who is threatened with death by her husband, the king. Only if she succeeds in fascinating him with her stories will she survive the night, night after night. Every night she tells a story, and in that story new stories are embedded, so that we have this construction: Scheherazade tells A that B tells that C tells, and so on, sometimes until the eighth degree. In this case, it is possible to say that the structure of narration echoes the paranoid view of women the king holds. When the story is interrupted, he does not kill his wife because he wants to know how the story ends, as much as whether she will be faithful to him. The paranoia and the suspense are mutual representations of each other.

Relations between Primary Fabula and Embedded Text

When the embedded text presents a complete story with an elaborate fabula, we gradually forget the fabula of the primary narrative. In the

case of *Arabian Nights*, this forgetting is a sign that Scheherazade has accomplished her goal: as long as we forget that her life is at stake, the king will too. Here, the apparently loose relationship between primary and embedded text is relevant to the development of the primary fabula. The narrative act of the actor-narrator Scheherazade that produces the embedded text is an important event – even *the* event – in the fabula of the primary text. The relationship between the primary text and the narrative subject lies in the relationship between the primary fabula and the embedded narrative act. Summarizing the primary fabula, we might also say: “That night Scheherazade enchanted the king.” From this summary it is immediately clear what the function of the act of narration is. That interpretation is endorsed by the motive for the threat: the infidelity of a previous wife of the king. To the king and to Scheherazade, narrating means life, in two different senses.

Another possible relationship between the two texts presents itself when the two fabulas are related to each other. This structure has two possible meanings: either the embedded story explains the primary story, or it resembles the primary story. In the first case the relationship is made explicit by the actor narrating the embedded story; in the second the explanation is left to the reader, or merely hinted at, in the fabula.

Sometimes the embedded fabula explains the primary one. Here, it depends on the relationship between the two which fabula the reader sees as more important. It may well be the embedded one. Often the primary fabula is hardly more than the occasion for a perceptible, character-bound narrator to narrate a story. The primary fabula may, for instance, be presented as a situation in which the necessary change cannot be made, because ... Then the embedded narrative follows. A stereotypical example: a boy asks a girl to marry him. She loves him, and would rise on the social scale by marrying him. Still, she cannot accept him. The reason is [that in the past, she was seduced by a ruthless villain, with the usual consequences. Since that time she has carried the stain of her contact with a perfidious man who took advantage of her innocence ...]. The girl retires to a nunnery, and the boy soon forgets her. This structure is, in fact, extremely common.

The embedded text may take up the larger part of a book, as sometimes happens in cautionary tales of this type. The primary fabula is minimal here, because the number of events is small: proposal – exposition – rejection. In this example, the embedded story merely explains the primary fabula. The situation is unchangeable. The fact

that the woman tells her story is of no influence on the outcome of the primary fabula.

In other cases, however, an explanation of the starting situation may also lead to change. For instance, if the young man had been deeply moved by the sad account of his beloved's past, and recognized her innocence, he might decide to forget the past and "give her a second chance." The function of the embedded fabula is then no longer merely explanatory: the exposition influences the primary fabula. Consequently, the structure of narrative levels becomes more than a mere storytelling device: it is part of the narrative's poetics and needs to be understood for the narrative to be fully appreciated.

This is particularly important in a novel like *Beloved*, where the secondary narrators' joint efforts slowly narrate Beloved into life. As the meta-narrative phrase quoted earlier ("the two did the best they could to create what really happened," 78) has already suggested, narration is an act of creation. In this sense the narrative aligns the power of narration with the divine creation as recounted in the biblical book of Genesis, which is also primarily a speech act. This attention to the relations between narrative levels in *Beloved* also solves the dilemma of this novel's critics: does Beloved, the reborn girl who was murdered as a baby, "really" exist, or is she a supernatural phenomenon? The novel gives "evidence" of both possibilities. If we take the relation between primary and secondary narrator seriously, however – but without *a priori* deciding that the primary level is more important or more "truthful" than the secondary – the question becomes moot. The point of the narrative is, precisely, the creative power of story-telling itself, as a life-giving act.

In proportion to the degree of intrinsic interest of the fabula in the primary as well as in the embedded text, the tie between the two texts will be more intense and the explanation more functional. The previous fictional example of a banal love story is extreme in one respect; both *Beloved* and *Of Old People* are extreme in another. In *Of Old People*, the embedded texts relate bit by bit the story of the events in "the Indies" – events that explain a number of events in the primary fabula. In this case, the relationship between the texts is so intense because the embedded fabula, the *thing*, the murder in the Indies, is always presented only in part. Moreover, the functioning of the CN₂ (Harold) is also curious. Sometimes he narrates the story of CN₂ (Harold), the older man who remembers things; and sometimes he tells the story of CN₃ (Little Harold), the boy who witnessed without understanding. Views of the

past as seen *then* are presented, intermingled with images of the past interpreted with the insight of *the present*. Within this subtext, a double, or subtly varying, focalization is narrated. This in turn relates to the events in the primary fabula, the slow, inevitable encroachment of the past upon the present. The influence of the explanatory sub-fabula, in all its doubleness, is of decisive importance.

But when the embedded text is kept to a minimum, its importance for the primary story diminishes. A sentence like "I shall kill you at dawn to prevent you from deceiving me, because my first wife betrayed me" (*Arabian Nights*) contains an example of a minimal, declarative, embedded narrative text.

In other cases, the fabulas resemble each other. If they resembled each other completely, we would have identical texts. Then, the primary text would quote itself. Resemblance, however, can never be identity, even if, as in the example of Borges (see below), the entire thrust of the narrator is to establish such identity. Therefore, we speak of stronger and weaker, not absolute resemblance. Even in passport photographs, taken with the express intention of showing resemblance to the person portrayed, degrees of likeness vary.

When can we speak of resemblance between two different fabulas? A simple and relative solution is this: we speak of resemblance when two fabulas can be paraphrased in such a way that the summaries have one or more striking elements in common. The degree of resemblance is determined by the number of terms the summaries share. An embedded text that presents a story that, according to this criterion, resembles the primary fabula may be taken as a sign of the primary fabula. This phenomenon is comparable to infinite regress. I use the term "mirror-text" for this.

The following case offers an idea of one particular, frequently established relation, namely that of resemblance, of which it is an extreme case. Between resemblance and repetition the line is fine and subject to scrutiny. Consider the famous story by Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote." The story is a paradigmatic example of postmodern literature that questions the foundations of its own art. We have seen this already in Coetzee's *Foe*. Borges's Pierre Menard is a deceased poet who had verbally transcribed portions of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. The narrator states that, although verbally identical to Cervantes's text, the transcription by Menard is "almost infinitely richer." He goes on to demonstrate how that is possible by comparing a half-sentence. I will quote a rather long stretch of Borges's text:

[Cervantes] wrote (part one, chapter nine):

... truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counsellor.

Written in the seventeenth century, written by the "lay genius" Cervantes, this enumeration is a mere rhetorical praise of history. Menard, on the other [hand], writes:

... truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counsellor.

History, the *mother* of truth: the idea is astounding. Menard, a contemporary of William James, does not define history as an inquiry into reality but as its origin. Historical truth, for him, is not what has happened; it is what we judge to have happened. The final phrases – *exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counsellor* – are brazenly pragmatic.

The contrast in style is also vivid. The archaic style of Menard – quite foreign, after all – suffers from a certain affectation. Not so that of his forerunner, who handles with ease the current Spanish of his time. (69)

Borges's Menard has, the narrator says towards the end, "enriched, by a new technique, the halting and rudimentary art of reading: this new technique is that of the deliberate anachronism and the erroneous attribution" (71).

What is the point, for Borges's primary narrator's rhetoric, of such copying? The issue is time, and history. What this fictional story proposes is not that we all start to copy historical works in order to update them. But there is an important point to make about the reversal that Borges's narrator operates, without really saying so, between writing and reading. Writing – and by extension, painting or making a film – is an act of reading, and reading is a manner of rewriting or repainting. And such acts don't occur in empty time but in a time filled by the present. In the present, social agents – subjects with more or less easy access to the codes that direct the cultural integration of images – confront images and see mirrors held up to them. Showing how to read – that is, how to give meaning to messages one vaguely senses but

fails to analyse when only dogmatically restricted methods are consecrated as “historical” or “visual” enough – seems to me a valuable contribution made by narratorial experiment to our understanding of art and literature. That is, art, not as a fixed collection of enshrined objects, but as an ongoing, live process. For some, even life-saving; for others, just enlivening; for us all, part of life.

An Indication to the Reader

When the primary fabula and the embedded fabula can be paraphrased so that both paraphrases have one or more elements in common, the subtext is a sign of the primary text. The place of the embedded text – the mirror-text – in the primary text determines its function for the reader. When the mirror-text occurs near the beginning, the reader may, on the basis of the mirror-text, predict the end of the primary fabula. In order to maintain suspense, the resemblance is often veiled. The embedded text will be interpreted as mirror-text and “give away” the outcome only when the reader is able to capture the partial resemblance through abstraction. That abstract resemblance, however, is usually only captured after the end, when we know the outcome. Thus, suspense is maintained, but the prefiguring effect of the mirror-text is lost.

The reverse also occurs: the fabula of the embedded text does not veil its resemblance to the primary fabula. The foreshadowing effect is preserved at the expense of suspense. This does not always imply that suspense is entirely lost. Another kind of suspense may arise. From the kind in which both reader and character are equally in the dark, we have stepped up to a second kind: the reader knows, but the character does not, how the fabula will end. The question the reader raises is not “How does it end?” but “Will the character discover it in time?” We can never be sure of this, because resemblance is never perfect. Until the end, there is always the possibility that the embedded fabula resembles the primary one apart from the ending.

When a mirror-text has been added more towards the end of the primary text, suspense presents itself less emphatically. The course of the fabula is then largely familiar, and the function of the mirror-text is no longer predictive, but retrospective. A simple repetition of the primary fabula in a mirror-text would not be as interesting. Its function is mostly to enhance or inflect significance. The paraphrase of the primary and of the embedded text that we have made in order to infer resemblance will have a more general meaning. This more general sense – a human

being always loses against a bureaucracy, or, even more abstractly, “no one escapes fate” – lifts the whole narration to another level. Kafka’s novels do this. The mirror-text serves as directions for use: the embedded story contains a suggestion of how the text should be read. Even in this case, the embedded text functions as a sign to the reader.

An Indication to the Actor

Just now I have hinted at the possibility that the actor her- or himself may also interpret the mirror-text as a sign. In this way she may discern the course of the fabula in which she is herself engaged. Thus the actor can influence the outcome. She can take fate into her own hands. This happens, for instance, in Poe’s story “The Fall of the House of Usher.” The actor who relates the story in which he himself figures saves his own life by correctly interpreting the signs that are presented to him. In the embedded text, which is read out loud, there is mention of a fall. This word “fall” and the concept “house” have two meanings. *Fall* refers of course to the reduction of a house to ruins, but also to the end of a family line. The Usher family will fall with the death of its last descendant, and the castle will fall down. This is what the CN (“I”-witness) realizes. Because he has the insight that double meanings should be taken seriously, the actor is able to interpret the embedded fabula as a mirror of what is about to happen. That is why he can save himself. He flees, and behind him he sees the castle crumble. Thus he can be a witness and relate this curious story.

This mirror-text is interesting for yet other reasons. The actor’s realization that double meanings should be taken seriously is itself a sign. It is a “prescription” for the reading of literature. The embedded text, with its double meaning, consists of a piece of literature. This text, interpreted in the widest sense, suggests: “Literature has (at least) a double meaning, or it is not literature.” Thus this embedded text also implies a poetics, a declaration about the ideas on literature that have been embodied in the events in this text. Just as for the actor-witness the correct interpretation of the doubleness of the meaning of the embedded text was a matter of life and death, so the double interpretation of the relationship between primary and embedded text is a matter of life and death, to be or not to be, for literature. As is so often the case, the title of the text, through its use of puns, has already given an indication of these meanings. But at the same time, this title seems deceptively simple. It needs the whole story to disclose the multiplicity of its meanings.

Non-Narrative Embedded Texts

By far the majority of embedded texts are non-narrative. No story is related in them. The content of an embedded text may be anything, from assertions about things in general, to discussions between actors, to descriptions, to confidences, and so on. The predominant form is dialogue. Dialogues between two or more actors may even make up the larger part of the entire text. Dialogue is a form in which the actors themselves, and not the primary narrator, utter language. The sentences spoken by the actors produce meaning together in those parts of the text. Such embedded texts share that characteristic with dramatic texts. In dramatic texts the entire text (except, of course, for the stage directions in the paratext) consists of the utterances of actors, who, in their interaction, produce meaning. The dialogues embedded in a narrative text are dramatic in kind. The more dialogue a narrative text contains, the more dramatic that text is. This is why I insisted on the relative nature of the corpus.

Of course, the same applies to other modes and genres. In some dramatic texts a narrator appears, albeit as a (meta-narrative) figure with actor status in his own right, as happens often in the plays of Bertolt Brecht. The statement “the more dialogue, the more drama,” however, is an oversimplification, since not only quantity matters here. Also, how the dialogues are presented influences the degree to which a text may be experienced as dramatic. When between each utterance of an actor the primary narrator intervenes with additions like “Elizabeth said,” or even more elaborate commentary, the hierarchical relationship between N₁ and N₂ remains clearly visible. When the clauses follow each other without intervention by the N₁, we are likely to forget that we are dealing with an embedded dialogue.

When the embedded text is spoken – or thought – by one actor, it is a soliloquy or monologue. The content of a monologue can, again, be practically anything. There is no intrinsic difference between an embedded monologue and other language use. Embedded passages contain confidences, descriptions, reflections, self-reflections. This is the reason I will not discuss the monologue further here.

I began this chapter with the thesis that all utterances, and hence all narratives, imply a speaker. In the course of the chapter it has also become apparent that all speakers address an interlocutor; that “I” can only be “I” if there is a “you” who allows it. As if to make the case against a purist narratology, *Arabian Nights*, that canonical instance of narrative, dramatizes this situation in an intensive and complex way.

Sheherazade's interlocutor is primarily the king, who lets her live as long as her stories keep him engaged. But there is a second interlocutor, Sheherazade's sister Dinarzade, who hides under the royal bed. She is the one who keeps the narrative clock, so to speak; she wakes the couple to request the continuation of the storytelling. Narratively speaking, the two interlocutors exist on the same level. But in this dramatic situation, a single act of storytelling is addressing two very different realms. In one realm, Sheherazade is the speaker, telling stories to the king; in the other, she is the dramatic dialogist, giving her sister encoded instructions.

When the embedded text itself is not discussed in great detail, little can be said about its relationship to the primary text. In every case, the relationship tends to be determined by two factors. Sometimes, explicit commentary on the embedded text that influences our reading of that text is given by the N₁. That commentary may be disguised when the embedded text is only hinted at by implication.

The contents of the embedded text sometimes link with those of the primary text; sometimes the embedded is even the primary's natural sequel. At other times the embedded text is completely divorced from the primary text; or has an explanatory function; or is similar to the primary text; or contradicts or contravenes it. In each case, the relationship is different. It is, therefore, impossible to just assume that as a general rule, the assertions of either a narrator or an actor carry the meaning of the whole text. Given the technically hierarchical relation between the two texts, one negative word of the N₁ would, in principle, be sufficient to radically change the meaning of the whole. That this cannot possibly be maintained means that such technical structures have limited relevance.

Remarks and Sources

Regarding the distance between author and narrator on which this book is based I have learned from French philosopher Michel Foucault and literary and cultural critic Roland Barthes. Barthes declared the "death of the author" – a powerful statement that triggered a great deal of discussion and controversy. But it was Foucault who developed the arguments. In his attack on the concept and authority of the author, Foucault banishes four different concepts of authorship ("What is an author?"). He questions the psychological idea of the author; the authorial intention; and the historical author as the origin of the work; he also jettisons the

last stronghold of the concept of the author, the author-function as the centring of meaning. He does this by arguing that function to be a projection of a reader who requires semantic centrality in order to deal with the work. Foucault's alternative is a radical proliferation of meaning, where the author/work becomes a fluctuating function always interacting with other functions in the larger discursive field.

When I speak of the narrator, I do not mean the "implied author," either. That term was coined by Wayne C. Booth (1961) as a means for discussing and analysing the ideological and moral stances of a narrative text without having to refer directly to a biographical author. As such it preceded the generalized use of the term "narrator." There are three problems with the term implied author. First, in Booth's usage, it denotes the totality of meanings that can be inferred from a text. Thus the implied author is the *result* of the investigation of the meaning of a text, not the *source* of that meaning. Only after interpreting the text on the basis of a text description can the implied author be inferred and discussed. But by then the need of or wish for it has probably vanished.

Second, the term is too easily harnessed to grant one person – for example, a teacher or critic – the authority of knowing "what the author meant to say"; in this way, it consigns other readers to the margins. Third, the notion of an implied author is, in this sense, not limited to narrative texts, but can be applied to any text. This is why the notion is not specific to narratology, which has as its object the narrative aspects of a narrative text.

A final issue must be kept in mind regarding the author. As has been argued, in what is now generally called neoliberal (late capitalist) culture, the author has become a marketable commodity. This constitutes a trap for readers seeking to translate their intimate experience of narratives into a discussable, intersubjective proposal. The commodified author is as fictitious as any character in a narrative and must be subjected to analytical criticism, lest the interpreter be locked from the start into a specific partiality. The result of such a position is disempowerment, a political position that places a strain on interpretive creativity and that generates blindness to alternative possibilities.

The notion of the narrator needs further positioning, however. I do not mean a storyteller, a visible, fictive "I" who interferes in his/her account as much as s/he likes, or who even participates as a character in the action. This sort of explicit narrator is a specific version of the

narrator, one of several possible manifestations. The idea that a narrative text is “uttered” by a narrator is inferred from the communicative nature of the text: if a text can be conveyed, some agent must be doing the conveying. In this discussion, I will rigorously stick to the definition of narrator as “that agent which utters the (linguistic or other) signs that constitute the text.” Only when we confine ourselves to that definition can we avoid confusions that ultimately lead to an appropriation of authority, a blurring of textual nuances, and the erasure of the power inequalities involved.

In this chapter I have discussed only the status of the narrative agent and its relationship to what is narrated. Linguistically oriented disciplines such as stylistics, but also grammar, syntax, and semantics, are important for different kinds of investigations of the text. Nevertheless, the connections with related disciplines have made themselves felt at several points. The differences between direct, indirect, and free indirect discourse, discussed here because they concern the status of the narrative agent with regard to the object of narration, are a classic topic of linguistics.

The confusion between pragmatics and semantics that has arisen around Booth’s concept of the implied author is especially noticeable in the work of Booth’s followers, who are numerous. A clear discussion of this problem, as well as a useful discussion of dialogue, can be found in Pelc (1971). I entirely refrain from using another concept from classical narrative theory, the “omniscient narrator.” I find it both fantastic and ideologically manipulative to even suppose such a possibility. See Culler (2007) for a definitive critique of that concept and its cognates.

Benveniste (1966) distinguished between personal and impersonal use of language, for which he used the terms “histoire” and “discours.” Because these terms have given rise to confusion, I have avoided them there. Benveniste’s work, translated into English (1971), remains of fundamental importance. Silverman (1983) offers a wonderful discussion of the usefulness of this theory (among others, many also relevant here) for the subject of this chapter, including for film. Her 1996 book 1996 pursues this direction.

Ideology and the resulting politics of narrative are difficult to pin down. I would not isolate these from the narrative structures in which they function, as narratologists like Bertens (2001) and Cohan and Shires tend to do (1988). Several examples in this chapter have demonstrated the utility of binding ideology and structure. Memory is

another important concept. The useful concept of “multidimensional memory” has been developed by Michael Rothberg (2009). The concept is meant to account for a view of memory that is able to draw similarities between historical catastrophes – most obviously, between slavery and the Holocaust.

Regarding the difference between “pure” narration and non-narrative commentary, see Genette (1969), which has appeared in English as “Boundaries of Narrative.” There are many different views of free indirect discourse. McHale offers a clear survey (1978). Perry (1979) labels the phenomenon “combined discourse.” On text interference, see Doležal (1973). Ron (1981) connects this narrative style to issues of world-making and language games. One competing theory of free indirect speech that explicitly rejects the thesis that all narrative utterances can be attributed to a narrator is worth mentioning. Ann Banfield’s alternative theory views such speeches as “sentences without speaker,” or even “unspeakable sentences” (1982; for a philosophical underpinning, 2000). Strong as this theory is in itself, I cannot accept the elimination of responsibility it entails.

Dällenbach (1977) wrote an interesting book about mirror-texts. A critical discussion and systematization is offered in Bal (1991). See also Jefferson (1983).

There is a book (1981) by Hamon about description. Motivation as a strategy is best explained in Culler (1975). This phenomenon is also called “naturalization.” On motivation in postmodern fiction, see Van Alphen (1988); for a good survey of the concept of postmodernism, see Van Alphen (1989). For an in-depth theory of description, see Bal (2004). The example from *Nightwood* is borrowed from it.

The concept of the narratee is attached to the name of Prince, who decisively integrated it in his book on narratology (1982). For more on dialogue as a principle of language use, see Bakhtin (1981). Peeren (2008) makes Bakhtin’s ideas available for the analysis of popular culture, especially film and television. Todorov’s introduction to Bakhtin’s work is also useful (1984). On intertextuality and interdiscursivity as a more general cultural phenomenon as “recycling,” see Moser (1981) and Moser and colleagues (2016).

For *Don Quixote* I have used J.M. Cohen’s translation (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950). Borges’s “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote” is in *Labyrinths* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), 62–71.

The example of the family accident comes from Arno Bohlmeijer, *Something Very Sorry*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996). The comments on *Beloved* are an implicit response to Shlomith Rimmon Kenan (1996). The page numbers refer to Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Signet, 1987).

The example of second-person narrative is from Michel Butor, *La modification* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1957). The most important study of this text is Françoise van Rossum-Guyon's *Critique du roman. Essai sur "La Modification" de Michel Butor* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), a book-length study that is also a theoretical discussion of narrative structure, but within an earlier, more or less pre-structuralist framework. On second-person narrative, including Butor's novel, see Kacandes (1996), who is much more positive about the success of Butor's experiment than I am. In another important article (1993), she develops second-person narrative specifically in the context of postmodernism.

The passages from *Budapest Diary* are from Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Budapest Diary: In Search of the Motherbook* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996). On the poetics of apostrophe, see Culler (2015), and on the political implications, Johnson (1987). For *Arabian Nights*, see the excellent discussion in Khanna (2008).

Story: Aspects

1: Preliminary Remarks

I call *aspects* those features that distinguish the structured story from, on the one hand, the text, and on the other, the fabula. A simple rule of thumb – if deceptively so – is this. If one regards the text primarily as the product of the use of a medium, and the fabula primarily as the product of the imagination, the story could be regarded as the result of an ordering; as orientated, focused, fleshed out; in short, as subjectivized. The distinction does not imply that the one layer exists before the other. The aim of textual analysis is not to account for the process of writing, but for the conditions of the process of reception. Thus, the following questions underlie this part: How is it that a narrative text comes across to the reader in a certain manner? Why do we find the same fabula beautiful when presented by one writer and trite when presented by another? Why is it so difficult in a simplified edition of a classic, or of a masterpiece of world literature, to preserve the power of the original? And why are we so frequently disappointed by a film adaptation of a great novel? All of these questions are poor ones insofar as they imply a hierarchy, the priority of the earlier version, or a preference for a medium. But it remains meaningful to ask them in order to assess how the will be at least equally dependent on the way the material, the fabula, has been manipulated.

Manipulation originally meant simply “handling,” “treatment,” and even though its modern sense has shifted to include more negative connotations, the original meaning is still synonymous with “operation.” The fabula is “treated,” and the reader is being manipulated by this treatment. Such manipulation occurs not only in that actors are turned

into specific, fleshed-out characters, placed in specific spaces with mutual symbolic and circumstantial relations. Something else is inevitably involved when a series of events is turned into a story. The primary means of manipulation is what is traditionally known as point of view or “perspective.” The view from which the elements of the fabula are being presented is often of decisive importance for the meaning the reader will assign to the fabula. This concept plays a part in the most everyday situations. A conflict is best judged by letting each party give his or her own version of the events: their own story. Focalization, then, is the technical aspect, the placing of the point of view in or with a specific agent. Thus it is the principal tool for subjectifying the story. But many other aspects participate in that operation.

Some aspects of the story are a consequence of a sort of “story logic.” Depending on how classical, realist, modernist, postmodernist or otherwise experimental a narrative is, readers expect certain consistencies in time, place, focalization; and they are annoyed when unexplained jumps occur. Other aspects seem random but may have a profound causality only discovered when the reader or viewer accepts that randomness is relative. I will give examples of such expectation-dependent forms of manipulation.

2: Temporality

In one sense, time is a given, self-evident for the time-based arts – narrative, theatre, film, video, dance, music. These arts unfold in time. But for our purposes here, it is the many ways in which narratives complicate this apparently self-evident temporality that are of interest.

The time that regulates our lives by means of clocks, schedules, and other forms of regimentation is so incorporated, interiorized, or naturalized that it is difficult to imagine that conflicts are built into it. The *day-to-day time* of schedules does not align with the long-term sense of time we learn mainly from history. *Monumental time* denies even *historical time*; it aspires to eternity. At the other end of this continuum, brief moments and variations in intensity of experience cross through the regulated time of one’s daily activities. These tensions shift throughout one’s life. Mothers with small children live in a rhythm that is stricter than that of the other parent (if present) or of mothers of older children. The routine of small acts of care determines the experience of time – even sleep is no longer continuous. We could call it *micro time*.

Time is thick and complex, not at all linear and single-stranded. To grasp this thickness of time, imagine the life of an undocumented

immigrant. The moment of border crossing occurs after a long journey. The heightened danger intensifies that moment, even if it can take days to actually cross. Once inside the new country, the immigrant's inner clock starts ticking. The justification for the departure, for leaving behind family and friends, is to make money to help out at home. But as long as residency permits and work permits are not forthcoming, much of the immigrant's time is spent waiting. This produces a kind of social schizophrenia that makes the migrant always rushing and always stagnating at the same time, and this is a different experience of time than that of the host country's residents. If and when the long-awaited documents finally arrive, the hoped-for relief is slow in coming. The time lost is also a loss of the opportunity to learn the new language, acquire work skills, and make new friends. People in such situations are condemned to live in the present. As a consequence, the memories of their past that should sustain them are put on ice. This living in an enforced presentism is a symptom of disenfranchisement.

Once we realize this, the thickness of time becomes impressively complex. Looking at temporality in *Arabian Nights* is rewarding, for example. The king, who kills all virgins at the end of the night, is a slave to day-to-day time. He suffers from chronophobia, the fear that time is the enemy's gain, as much as from gynophobia, the fear that women have a life and desires of their own and hence, a subjectivity. In response to the king's disease, Sheherazade steals time, or borrows it. But how can you borrow something, or steal it, when it has no owner? She needs to make things very complicated to overcome this hurdle. She does so by seducing the king into the different temporality of her stories. This temporality is itself complex. It comprehends at the very least the time of telling, the time of the events, and the suspense of time wherein these two do not match up. That is, she borrows time from narrative, not from the king.

Here I present only three forms of temporality that emerge specifically from the three-tiered narrativity that underlies this book's theoretical principles. The characterizations of different temporal experiences outlined above will remain a useful interpretive backdrop while, below, I sketch the technical devices that narratives deploy to produce such experiences for their readers.

3: Sequential Ordering

In these subsections the relations are being explored that hold between the order of events in the story and their chronological sequence in the

fabula. The latter sequence is a theoretical construction, which we can develop on the basis of the laws of everyday logic that govern common reality. According to that logic one cannot arrive in a place before one has set out to go there. In a story that is possible, however.

- a John rang the neighbours' doorbell. He had so irresistibly felt the need to stand eye to eye with a human being that he had not been able to remain behind the sewing machine.

This is a quite ordinary passage, which no one would be surprised to come across in a narrative text. But everyone knows that in "reality" (fictitious or not), the sequence of events must have been the other way around: first John must have felt the desire to go and see someone; then he acted accordingly and went to ring a friend's doorbell. The reader assumes this, but such assumptions are narrative effects; they do not imply that there exists, or has ever existed, such a series of events, in that order.

Information is needed for such a confrontation between the ordering of events in the story and their sequence in the fabula. The latter can be inferred from explicit information or from indirect indications. In a, for example, the tenses of the verbs in the text indicate the sequence of events: simple past for the later event; past perfect for the preceding events. But even without such indications in the text there is information that, with our sense of everyday logic, we can combine in such a way that we can say, "The ringing of that doorbell is likely to be the result of the occurrence of the desire."

At least one argument for the relevance of such an investigation can be given. Unlike various other art forms – architecture, visual arts – a written text is linear. One word or image follows another; one sentence or sequence follows another; and when one has finished the book or the film is over, one has sometimes forgotten the beginning. It is even customary to speak of a double linearity: that of the text, the series of sentences or sequences; and that of the fabula, the series of events. Moreover, narrative texts are usually fairly long – longer than most poems – which is why one tends to read them straight through, not retracing one's steps, as one does more easily in the case of poems. There are various ways of breaking such linearity, compelling the reader to read more intensively. Deviations in sequential ordering may contribute to intense reading, for example. If deviations in sequential ordering correspond with conventions, they will not stand out. They can, however, be so intricate as to

exact the greatest exertions in following the story. In order not to lose the thread it is necessary to keep an eye on the sequential ordering, and the very effort forces one to reflect also on other elements and aspects. Playing with sequential ordering is not just an artistic convention; it is also a means of drawing attention to certain things, to emphasize, to bring about aesthetic or psychological effects, to produce suspense, to show various interpretations of an event, to indicate the subtle difference between expectation and realization, and much else besides. It is narrative's way of achieving a density that is akin to the simultaneity often claimed for visual images as distinct from literature.

Not all narratives are so complex or, for that matter, so gripping. Turns of phrase such as

- b Little could I then foresee
- c Only yesterday I was thinking

point in their own way at different interpretations of events. In b speaks, let's say, a disillusioned old man looking back on the mistakes he made in his youth; in c someone may have recently discovered some important information on the basis of which she has changed her opinion. Often, the misapprehensions of actors who are not in possession of the correct information are afterwards cleared up and explained in this way on the level of story.

In the children's book *Something Very Sorry* (see chapter 1), the child whose voice is the narrator needs the chronological deviations to convey the sense of loss in the character:

- I'm in the hospital.
- The others are also injured. That's why they don't come to take me home.
- Doctors and nurses keep coming in to examine me. They tell me what happened – we crashed into a tree. It was a serious accident. These words stick in my head. 7

The movement back and forth from present to past to present is the story's basic rhythm. The girl's slowly returning memories of the accident alternate with her experiences in the hospital and the happy past before the car crash. These delicate alternations contribute to the story in a very meaningful way: they provide insight into the broken sense of self of the

traumatized child in a modulation that makes the reader experience it with her on an emotional level as well. In what follows, I give examples of three aspects of chronological deviation: direction, distance, and range.

Differences between the arrangement in the story and the chronology of the fabula are called chronological deviations or *anachronies*. Practically all novels contain anachrony – even emphatically chronological novels, such as Dutch writer Gerard van het Reve's *The Evenings* (1947). Deviations from chronology tend to be more drastic when the fabula is more complex. Sometimes this seems to be the result of the need to explain much in a complicated fabula. The explanation often takes the form of reference to the past. Also, the difficulty of bringing the many different threads of a fabula together to form a coherent unity may create the need to refer back or point ahead. In particular, the "classic" novel, after the model of the nineteenth-century realistic novel, makes much use of this possibility. A conventional construction of a novel is the beginning *in medias res*, which immerses the reader in the middle of the fabula. From this point she is referred back to the past, and from then on the story carries on more or less chronologically through to the end.

However, anachrony can also be used to realize specific literary effects. A chaotic temporality can even be concealed behind an apparent chronology, as in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and Marguerite Duras's *L'après-midi de Monsieur Andemmas* (1962). In other respects, these two novels are totally different. The significance, therefore, that can be attached to this astonishing game with chronology is equally different. The effect of García Márquez's novel is to allow people, generations, and social contexts to succeed each other in rapid turmoil over the course of a hundred years that seem to contain a history of mankind, terminating in the absurd failure of (communal) life. Duras simply makes a man wait three hours for his daughter, and presents in those three hours the vision of a growing despair through a mixture of inertia and chronological chaos, indolence and the effort to endure that indolence – one of the tragic aspects of the aging person, who must continue living when socially and emotionally he is already dead. In neither novel is it easy to grasp the deviations in sequential ordering; both seem strictly chronological. Here, too, the "failure" of an analysis done with the aid of a systematic concept is a significant result in itself. The analysis is based not on the application of a concept that is, like a master code, beyond questioning, but rather on a confrontation between theoretical concept and narrative text that is mutually illuminating.

Direction

Seen from that moment in the fabula that is being presented when the anachrony intervenes, the event presented in the anachrony lies either in the past or in the future. For the first category I use the term *retroversion*; for the second, *anticipation*. I avoid the more common terms “flashback” and “flashforward” because of their vagueness and psychological connotations. An example of a complete anachrony is the beginning of Homer’s *Iliad*:

d Sing, Goddess, the anger of Peleus’ son Achilles and its devastation, which put pains thousandfold upon the Achaians, hurled in their multitudes to the house of Hades strong souls of heroes, but gave their bodies to be the delicate feasting of dogs, of all birds, and the will of Zeus was accomplished since that time when first there stood in division of conflict Atreus’ son the lord of men and brilliant Achilles.

What god was it that set them together in bitter collision? Zeus’ son and Leto’s, Apollo, who in anger at the king drove the foul pestilence along the host, and the people perished, since Atreus’ son had dishonoured Chryses, priest of Apollo, when he came beside the fast ships of the Achaians to ransom back his daughter, carrying gifts beyond count and holding in his hands wound on a staff of gold the ribbons of Apollo who strikes from afar, and supplicated all the Achaians but above all Atreus’ two sons, the marshals of the people: “sons of Atreus and you other strong-grieved Achaians, to you may the gods grant who have their homes on Olympus Priam’s city to be plundered and a fair homecoming thereafter, but may you give me back my own daughter and take the ransom, giving honour to Zeus’ son who strikes from afar, Apollo.”

book 1, 59

The first object presented here is the grudge of Achilles. Subsequently we are told about the distress of the Achaeans, which resulted from it. Then the dispute between Achilles and Agamemnon is treated, which, as the direct cause of Achilles’s anger, should precede it. The disease (the plague) is, in turn, the cause of the dispute, and the insult to Chryses was its cause in turn. I indicate the five units presented with A, B, C, B, E in the order in which they are presented in the story.

Chronologically, their positions are 4, 5, 3, 2, 1, so that the anachronies can be represented by the formula A₄-B₅-C₃-D₂-E₁. Clearly, with

the exception of the beginning, they form a direct return to the past. This beginning of the *Iliad* fits the convention that prescribes that one indicates what the story will be about. The apparently endless series of causes and effects shows, moreover, how strongly the vicissitudes of human beings are determined by powers beyond them. And at the same time the reader is, already at the beginning, presented with a summary of the book's contents: the summary that the muse is asked to sing is what the reader will hear.

The following example, from a modern story this time, gives a sense of how to analyse chronological manipulation, and why. It shows an entirely different sequential ordering from the examples above:

e A I saw that he could not take it. With a haggard face he looked at what was left of Massuro. He wanted a reason – otherwise, where was he? And the only thing that could pass for a reason, with a great deal of good (and occult) faith, was fear. B But there was no fear. Massuro hadn't known what fear was. C I knew Massuro well, in a manner of speaking. D So I shall tell it to you as if you were a friend, Gentlemen, although it's a mystery to me what you will do with the information when you have it.

E Two years ago, when he was posted to my section at Potapego, I happened to be standing jabbering to the village headman. The truck from Kaukenau arrived, and out of the cab stepped a swarthy, heavily built fellow with a big head, round eyes and thick lips. F Then, suddenly, I saw his name in the Major's letter before me again. G "Heintje Massuro!"

Harry Mulisch, "What Happened to Sergeant Massuro?" (126)

The capital letters indicate the various chronological parts into which the fragment can be divided.

This fragment is taken from a Dutch short story that made a strong impression on me in high school. Harry Mulisch (1927–2010) lived with his German-Austrian father after his parents divorced. His mother was Jewish. The war influenced him deeply. Mulisch elaborated his philosophy throughout his oeuvre, and explicitly in his *De compositie van de wereld* (The Composition of the World; 1980). For him, art is the only possible way of understanding and knowing the world. Reality only becomes meaningful when it is re-created in art. Language possesses a sheer-magical power that allows the writer to create and to conquer time. For Mulisch, the mystical philosopher Pythagoras was the first

true artist. The collection of short stories *What Happened to Sergeant Massuro?* (1972) contains the story with the same title, which was written in 1955. The story consists of a report, written by Massuro's friend at the request of the Ministry of War, in which the friend tries to explain, or rather to understand, the mysterious event that happened to Massuro: his slow petrification during an expedition in the jungle of New Guinea. The personal-language situation is relevant for an understanding of the story, which, with its dense symbolic structure, is reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899).

Chronologically, all parts but one precede the story-time proper. That *one* is the moment when the I-narrator, reporting the events, addresses the Dutch authorities, the War Department, with these words: "It is a calm man who is writing this to you – a man with the calm that comes to the surface when hope has fled." I would infer here that we are going to be presented with some kind of fantastic story that has ended unhappily. In A the speaker is in contact with a medical officer – a rather emotional sort of contact, as far as we can judge. No wonder, since there is between them the "remains" of a human body, the body of Massuro, who has gradually turned into stone. B treats the possible fears of Massuro, who has already died in A.

So, in the fabula, B precedes A. C covers a longer period – let us say from the renewed acquaintance between Massuro and the speaker, and the beginning of the sinister events, whether or not they were caused by the fears mentioned in B. In D we return to the story's present: the I is writing his report to the department. E recalls the moment at which the renewed acquaintance in New Guinea took place, and thus immediately precedes C, or rather E introduces the beginning of C. F lies even deeper in the past: the speaker recalls the moment when, before Massuro's arrival, he sees his name mentioned in a letter. Indicating the various parts with capital letters, and their chronological position with numbers, the following formula ensues: A5-B4-C3-D6-E2-F1-G2.

The fragment began with a haggard look and confusion; it ends in the placidity of a renewed meeting with the man – "Heintje Massuro!" The contrast between the familiar Dutch first name and the exotic surname is striking – something like the contrast between "Chuck" and "Charles," not unlike Suleiman's "Mother" and "Daddy." In view of the mysterious events that happened to the man in question, this contrast, combined with the conflicting circumstances of the actors (a conflict already present in the colonial name of the place, Dutch New Guinea), is by no means accidental. The chronological sequence of events, so

clearly violated here, is broadly maintained from this passage onwards. But this confused beginning has already given us a picture of the confusion that underlies the fabula as a whole.

Nuances of Anachrony

I have ignored one thing in this analysis. The chronological deviations are not all of the same order. F, for instance, takes place in the “consciousness” of the first-person actor. In fact, the event is not the seeing of the name, but the remembering of the seeing. Note that again, there is a coincidence of anachronical complexity and an emulation with visual perception. In that sense the fragment is not a chronological deviation, and it belongs to E (“Then”). In many texts, however, one finds this type of “unreal” anachrony almost exclusively.

In E, I labelled the time in which the speaker writes the letter as primary. With respect to this primary time, all the events that actually constitute the contents of the fabula – the gradual fossilization of Sergeant Masuro – are retroversions. If the rest of the story were now to be presented chronologically, it would be pointless to note in each sentence that we are concerned with fabula-time 2, the period of renewed acquaintance until the death of Massuro. In Mulisch’s text, for instance, it is also possible to take 2, the time of renewed acquaintance, as the starting point and consequently to view all references to periods 3 up to and including 6, the writing of the letter to the Ministry of War, as anticipation.

The question as to which time segment is primary can be highly charged. An example is Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Texaco*, set in Martinique, an intricate narrative (1992). In this text what first seems to be the primary story line, in which an urban planner comes to the neighbourhood of Texaco in order to erase it, is interrupted by the secondary story told by Marie-Sophie, who provides the place that is about to be erased with a past that makes the erasure impossible. As a result, the urban planner converts and becomes the saviour of the site. Which line of the fabula comes chronologically first is clear: the past, embedded one. This embedded fabula then takes over and becomes the main one that rearranges the rest of the fabula set in the present. The point is not to decide this unambiguously, but on the contrary, to acknowledge the important effect of the irresolvable conflict between the technical subordination of the past and its power to change the present.

Not all anachronies have the same narrative status. “Stream-of-consciousness” literature, for instance, limits itself to the reproduction

of the contents of consciousness, and thus is not subject to chronological analysis at all. To solve this problem, and in order to be able to indicate in other texts the difference between such “false” anachronies and others, I introduce the terms *subjective* and *objective*. A subjective anachrony is an anachrony that can be only be regarded as such if the contents of consciousness lie in the past or in the future – not the past of being conscious, but the moment of thinking itself.

One final problem, however, is in some cases insoluble. Once again, example e serves to demonstrate it. There I stated that c covers the period between the renewed acquaintance of the I-speaker with Masuro and the latter’s death. That this is the period concerned seems probable in view of the fact that it is during this segment of time that the events occurred that the speaker must relate. However, as we continue to read Mulisch’s text, it becomes clear that the two actors knew each other before then. So it is no longer possible to determine whether c refers to the period in New Guinea alone, or whether the time that they knew each other in Holland is also included. In the case of Massuro, we have already been confronted with traces of confusion between the periods in Holland and New Guinea.

A similar problem arises when a retroversion or anticipation is presented as direct discourse. Properly speaking, here too there is no question of a real anachrony. The moment of speech is simply part of the (chronological) story; only in the contents are past or future mentioned. Example a, for example, could continue as follows:

f Sobbing, John sat on his neighbour’s couch, pouring out his woes.
 “I didn’t know, when I married Mary five years ago, that she would sacrifice everything to her work, did I? That I would be no more to her than a cheap servant, always at hand to pour her a drink and fetch her an ashtray?”

The outburst itself chronologically follows the ringing of the doorbell in a. But the substance of John’s lament has to do with the past – with his marriage five years ago and the entire period from his wedding to the present moment. This issue of narrative levels has been treated in the previous chapter. Here we need only note that the above constitutes a retroversion of the second degree, since speech takes place on the second level.

A third issue concerns the position of the narrative units we have distinguished with respect to each other. Which time should we consider

the primary story-time – that is, the time in relation to which the other units may be called anticipations? Obviously, the answer to this question is relative. There are texts, moreover, in which the relationship between story and fabula is so complex that a thorough analysis would be useless. In such cases a rough indication of the different time units suffices, and interesting or complex fragments can be studied in detail. This is the method Gérard Genette has used in his analysis of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (written 1908–22), a novel of more than four thousand pages. The question as to which time can be declared primary is not especially significant; what is relevant is to place various time units in relation to each other.

Finally, a fourth complication. Sometimes anachronies are embedded in each other, so closely intertwined that it becomes too difficult to analyse them. Such is the case with the second-degree retroversion in f: “when I married her five years ago.” The contents of John’s words are a retroversion: the words “I didn’t know ... did I” belong to it, but that which follows, the substance of the knowing, is, with respect to “five years ago,” in turn a (subjective) anticipation. This is borne out clearly by the form of the verb itself, “would sacrifice.”

I have raised these issues mainly to dispel the illusion that sequential analysis is simple, but also to indicate the myriad possibilities of variation available if we wish to experience the structural thickness of a story compared to its fabula. One final problem, however, is in some cases insoluble. In some contexts it is impossible to ascertain whether the word *bank* refers to a financial institution or the side of a river; the word and its homonym look and sound identical. So too it may be impossible to determine which period in the fabula is being referred to. And just as it is possible to use puns to achieve certain effects (confusion, humour, a sense of the absurd), so too chronological *homonymy* may be purposefully employed for the same effect. This is why in such cases acknowledging it as an *achrony* is more helpful than developing yet another category, as if classifying would rid us of the problem.

Distance

An event presented in anachrony is separated by an interval, long or short, from the present; that is, from the moment in the development of the fabula with which the story is concerned at the time the anachrony interrupts it. On the basis of *distance*, we may distinguish two kinds of anachrony. Whenever a retroversion takes place completely outside the

time span of the primary fabula, we refer to an external retroversion. If the retroversion occurs within the time span of the primary fabula, then we refer to an internal retroversion. If the retroversion begins outside the primary time span and ends within it, we refer to a mixed retroversion. The same applies to anticipations – but these occur much less frequently. With respect to the latter, too, three possibilities can be discerned: external, internal, and mixed.

Massuro's arrival in Potapego occurs, as is indicated, two years prior to the writing of the letter. The other time units are more difficult to pinpoint, although we do know that A should be placed after the death of Massuro and shortly before the writing of the letter, since the doctor's examination and the writing of the letter are both part of the administrative winding up of the extraordinary death, that is, the certification of the cause of death – a process usually carried out as speedily as possible. Somewhat later in the text we notice that this period covers six days.

In Butor's *La modification* the distance is much greater. The primary story-time is the train journey from Paris to Rome. The subjective retroversions to the past, and the broken marriage of the man making that journey, span a distance of years. Facts from the present, things observed during the journey, are associated with facts stored in his memory. Clearly, all of the flashbacks in this narrative are subjective. Whenever a retroversion takes place completely outside the time span of the primary fabula, we call it an external retroversion. This is the case in *La modification*, if we take only the return journey to be the primary fabula.

Fragment A from example e (Massuro) becomes an internal retroversion if we take as our primary time span the period running from the renewed acquaintance until the "present," the writing of the letter. If, however, we view only the writing of the letter as the primary fabula, all retroversions become external. As a rule of thumb it seems to make more sense to opt for the solution that helps account for the greatest number of phenomena. Consequently, in this case, our choice falls on the first one. Thus we establish as our primary time span the period between the meeting and the writing. If, as I propose, we then view c as a chronological homonymy, this retroversion becomes a mixed one: starting before the meeting in Potapego, it continues until Massuro's death.

Functions

I have already suggested that in *La modification* the subjective retroversions explained the man's dissatisfaction with his wife and his nervousness

about the confrontation with his mistress. The very fact that these are subjective retroversions increases, in this case, the explanatory function: dissatisfaction is subjective, after all. This, incidentally, demonstrates the potentially political importance of such narratological aspects.

At one point in "What Happened to Sergeant Massuro?" an anecdote is recalled about the schooldays of the two actors, their first meeting, and the mutual feelings of friendship that neither of the two ever expressed. This anecdote elucidates the odd, sober relationship between the two men in New Guinea, which in turn accounts for the narrator's inability to explain Massuro's strange death, even while he denies so vociferously that fear was the cause. More and more, it becomes likely that a colonial problematic underpins this story. All of this corresponds to the other facts we have discovered in this text. Because of all these aspects, the peculiar atmosphere of menacing mystery in this text becomes stronger and stronger. The genre of the fantastic, I am beginning to sense, serves the purpose of a colonial perspective.

External retroversions generally provide indications about the antecedents, the past of the actors concerned, insofar as that past can be relevant for the interpretation of events. Internal retroversions often (partly) overlap with the primary narrative; they may overtake it. They do not do so when the information communicated by the internal retroversion is new, when it is a sidetrack of the fabula. This is the case when information is given about a newly introduced actor, who during the events of the primary fabula has been concerned with other things that afterwards turn out to have been important.

If the contents of an internal retroversion overlap with those of the primary fabula, the retroversion usually serves as compensation for a gap in the story. This occurs because the information was not yet complete. There may be a gap in chronological succession, for instance. When we are told, in one chapter of a novel, that the heroine is pregnant, and when, at the beginning of the next chapter, we find ourselves in the baby's room, now in use, the information about the delivery is missing. In Victorian novels such a gap in the flow of information, such an *ellipsis*, will, for decency's sake, not have been filled. The ellipsis – a form to which I will return shortly – can also be maintained for more specific reasons. In Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, the end of the first part – "When they left Tostes, Madame Bovary was pregnant" – skips the conception; indeed, that skipping is enhanced by the succinctness of the narrator's sentence. This serves to underline the great disappointment

of Emma's marriage, specifically its sexual poverty. A less economical narrator might erase such ellipses by means of internal retroversion.

Internal retroversions can have yet another function. When they do not fill up an ellipsis or *paralipsis* (i.e., lack of information concerning a side-track), but instead elaborate on information already given, they seem to be a repetition. The repetition of a previously described event can change, or add to, the meaning of that event. The same event is presented as more – or less – pleasant, innocent, or important than we had previously believed it to be. It is thus both identical and different: the fabula elements are the same, but their meaning has changed. The past receives a different significance.

In Proust, such internal retroversions form part of the famous and specifically Proustian interruption of the linearity in searching for and recovering the elusive past. But in much simpler literature too, frequent use is made of such possibilities. Detective novels and all kinds of texts constructed around mysteries, masquerades, and puzzles adopt this technique as an important structural device.

Span

The term *span* indicates the stretch of time covered by an anachrony. Like its distance, the span of an anachrony may vary greatly. If a letter states

h Last year, I went to Indonesia for a month.

the span of the retroversion is a month, while its distance is a year. In Couperus's *Of Old People* (1906), all of the allusions to the murder in "the Indies" are subjective (when the old people again call the scene to mind) or second-degree (when they talk about it) external retroversions with a distance of sixty years, and a span that varies from a quarter of an hour to one night to, at times, a few days.

The anachrony is either incomplete or complete. A retroversion, for instance, is incomplete if after a (short) span a forward jump is made once again. Disconnected information is thus given about a section of the past, or, in the case of an anticipation, of the future. In *Of Old People* the retroversions concerning the murder are incomplete, as they are in any detective novel. Only when all of the consequences of the murder – in *Of Old People*, the anxiety that has remained with them – are discussed up until the present is the retroversion complete. Only then has the entire development of the retroversion, from its starting point to its conclusion, been presented. All of the antecedents have thus been completely

recalled. This occurs quite frequently in the tradition of beginning *in medias res*, where the narrative begins in the middle of the fabula and the preceding events are then recalled in their totality. This is a special kind of anachrony: distance and span cover each other precisely; the retroversion ends where it began.

A classical example of an incomplete anachrony is the retroversion in which the origin of Ulysses's scar is explained in the nineteenth book of the *Odyssey*. When Ulysses, still incognito, appears in his own house and the servant who had nursed him when he was a baby washes his feet according to the custom of hospitality, she recognizes him by his scar. She begins to cry out for joy, but Ulysses stops her. At that moment, the story is interrupted by a lengthy explanation of how the young Ulysses came by the scar. After this extensive retroversion, the chronological narrative is resumed; Ulysses is still trying to silence his servant. The distance of this retroversion is many years; the span is a few days – the infliction of the wound and its healing.

There is yet another way of considering anachronies in terms of their spans: by distinguishing between *punctual* and *durative* anachronies. These terms have been borrowed from the linguistic distinction of the time-aspects of verb tenses. Punctual corresponds to the preterite in English and Spanish, the *passé simple* in French, and the aorist in Greek. Durative indicates that the action takes longer. In French and Spanish the imperfect is used to indicate a durative aspect; in English this is expressed by the use of the progressive form. Punctual indicates that only one instant from the past or the future is being evoked – the moment the wound was inflicted on Ulysses. Durative means that a somewhat longer period is involved – the days of convalescence that followed.

Often, a punctual anachrony recalls a brief but significant event; that significance then justifies the anachrony, despite its short span. Durative anachronies tend to sketch a situation that may or may not be the result of an event that is recalled in a punctual anachrony. Sometimes this distinction covers the one between incomplete and complete anachronies, as in example f. The presentation of the marriage between Mary and John is both punctual and incomplete. What follows, the situation of John, who, after the romantic honeymoon period, feels neglected by his ambitious wife, is both durative and complete.

But durative and complete do not by any means always coincide. In *Of Old People* the memory of the murder is itself a (subjective) punctual retroversion; whereas that of the period following it – the uneasiness and the feeling of guilt, with the doctor's blackmail – is a (subjective)

durative but incomplete retroversion. These possibilities can characterize the author's narrative style and may even give insight into his or her view of life. Frequent use of punctual anachrony sometimes makes for a bare, informative style; systematic combinations of punctual and durative retroversions can create – or at least add to – the impression that the story is developing according to clear, causative laws: a certain event causes a situation to emerge that makes another event possible, and so on. When durative retroversions are dominant, the reader quickly gets the impression that nothing particularly spectacular is happening. The narrative appears to be a succession of inevitable situations.

In *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Proust makes especially powerful use of the possibilities offered by these two forms. Quite frequently he begins a retroversion in a punctual manner, writing something like “This reminded me of the day I entered ...” and then develops the retroversion at such length that it ends up as a durative, almost descriptive passage. The opposite also happens with great frequency in the same novel: a durative retroversion (“I used to visit my aunt every Sunday”) gets fleshed out in such detail that it becomes inevitably punctual. The detailed account makes it simply too hard to believe that such events all happened every Sunday. In this risky play with time, Proust announces the postmodernist experimental novel half a century beforehand, while also honouring Flaubert's opening passage. The tone for this is set at the very beginning of the book with its famous opening line, “Longtemps je me suis couché bonne heure” (For a long time I used to go to bed early).

In the novel *Migas de pan* (2013) by the Colombian writer of Polish Jewish descent Azriel Bibliowicz, the author stages a situation that never gets resolved. Columbian guerrillas have captured Josué, the father of the main character and a Holocaust survivor. The entire novel is structured around the horrible repetition of the violent capturing, decades later. It is clear that Josué has been profoundly traumatized by his camp experience, and now his son Samuel and his other relatives, as they wait to hear from the captors, imagine what must be going through Josué's head. Their own waiting becomes the experience of powerlessness that their father had gone through decades earlier. This repetitiveness – a tragedy without crisis – becomes the primary story line. Early in the novel, the narrator interprets for the characters what is happening, and it is all about the time span:

g Con el paso de los días, la repetición, la duplicación de los movimientos, la desesperanza encarnaban el triunfo de la impotencia.

Desde el momento en que se llevaron a Josué y recibieron la primera llamada transcurrieron tres largas semanas.

With the passing of days, the repetition, the duplication of movements, the despair incarnated the triumph of powerlessness. From the moment they took Josué and they received the first call, they went through three long weeks. (24)

The retroversion is clearly measured: three weeks. But the substance of that stretch of time is qualified (“long weeks”).

Soon after, Samuel’s experience of time changes. It comes to be ruled by anticipation, but owing to the unpredictability of what he is expecting, the span of the anticipation is so undetermined that it takes on a torturous quality. The anticipation of a phone call becomes the new way in which time, its duration, affects him:

Para Samuel la palabra espera comenzó a cobrar un nuevo significado: se aferraba a una llamada, a una señal que interrumpía la realidad.

For Samuel the word waiting took on a new meaning: it clung to a phone call, a signal that would interrupt reality. (25)

The son becomes aware of the strange fact that his father’s obsession with time is contaminating him, whereas before he had never given that dimension much thought. Now he realizes that his father’s musealization of the family home, consisting of cabinets, each devoted to specific themes, is anchored in the old man’s experience of being locked up in indefinite time. When the span of the present is without end, it becomes a locked room – which is precisely how Josué has organized the house. The transfer of this obsession from father to son does not happen on the sole basis of the *postmemory* that circulates in families of traumatized people (i.e., children hear of or feel the experiences of their parents without having been there themselves and thereby instead suffer from secondary trauma). Instead, that transfer is now happening due to the son’s experience of being inside a repetition of what he never experienced.

Anticipations

Everything I have discussed so far concerning anachrony is, in principle, applicable both to retroversions and to anticipations. Anticipations

are mostly restricted to a single, covert allusion to the outcome of the fabula – an outcome that one must know in order to recognize the anticipations for what they are. They may serve to generate tension or to express a fatalistic vision of life. One more or less traditional form of anticipation is the opening summary. The rest of the story explains the outcome presented at the beginning. This type of anticipation can suggest a sense of fatalism, or predestination: nothing can be done, we can only watch the progression towards the final result, in the hope that next time we recognize the handwriting on the wall. This type robs the narrative of suspense. The suspense generated by the question “How is it going to end?” disappears; we already know.

However, another kind of suspense – or rather a tension that keeps the reader engaged – may take its place, prompting questions like “How could it have happened like this?,” with such variants as “How could the hero(ine) have been so stupid?” or “How could society allow such a thing to happen?” or “How did the hero(ine) find out about this?,” and so on, according to the direction in which the genre’s conventions steer the reader. Narratives with a CN (so-called first-person novels) are most suitable for references to the future. A narrative whose narrator claims to be presenting his own past can easily contain allusions to the future, which, in relation to the story-time, is the present or may even already be the past. A sentence like

h Little could I then suspect that ten years later I would again run into the man who is now my husband.

contains such an anticipation. In relation to the time of the fabula (“then”) this sentence is an anticipation (“ten years later”), but in relation to the story-time (“now”) it is a retroversion, although the distance of the retroversion is smaller than that of the retroversion in which, in the form of an anticipation, it has been embedded. Whether such a sentence is regarded as an anticipation or as a retroversion is of little importance; what matters is both the fact that there are three distinct moments involved, and the question of how they are related to one another. In *La modification*, Cécile’s visit to Paris is constantly being evoked. By the end of the story we still do not know whether that visit will ever take place. That uncertainty fits in with the overall defensiveness of the man who is running away from the situation and who does not really want to know it. The allusions to Cécile’s moving house, all subjective anticipations, cannot be classified as internal or external, although they appear to me to be internal.

Implicit hints and overt announcements abound in *Madame Bovary*. Sometimes these challenge their own readability. During the scene of the Ball at La Vaubyessard Castle – a key scene in that this is Emma’s last hope of a life of glamour – there is a reiterated mention of white powder sugar. This detail could be set down as an “effect of the real” à la Barthes. But if we consider the current knowledge about the damage sugar can do to our health, it becomes a hint that predicts Emma’s suicide by arsenic – also a white powder. Once picked up, it turns out there are many more hints, especially in that scene but in fact all through the novel. These hints make the novel less realist and move it in the direction of (post)modernism.

Anticipations, too, can be grouped as internal or external, and here, too, uncertainty can be effectful. Internal anticipations frequently complement a future ellipsis or paralipsis: things are made clear now so that later on they can be skipped or only mentioned in passing. Conversely, such anticipations may have a connecting or an accentuating function when they constitute nothing more than the marker “I shall be coming back to this.” Such is the case in this book, for instance, whenever I am compelled to touch briefly upon a subject that I discuss in detail later.

A highly effective use of anticipation is the so-called iterative anticipation. In an iterative anticipation an event is presented as the first in a series. Such anticipations often begin in the following way:

- i Then the President appeared on the screen, a spectacle that would weigh on our spirits every Friday from now on.

Subsequently, the spectacle in question is presented in full detail, and the reader is to view each particularity as an example of something that will occur again and again in the future. The more detailed such a report, the less credible its iterative character, for it is unlikely that the same actions could be performed in exactly the same way every week, right down to the smallest detail.

In such a case, one is apt to forget quickly that the event was the first of a series, and with its iterative character its anticipatory aspect dissolves. One obvious advantage of this form is that it offers a good opportunity for showing the scene through the eyes of an inquisitive newcomer, which makes its detailed character immediately more plausible. Precisely this combination of iterativity and the uniqueness of the first time gives this form its special possibilities. As I mentioned, Proust makes frequent use of this figure.

A novel that has already been discussed in this book, Duras's *L'après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas*, is constructed for the most part around the tension between the promise, made just before the beginning of the fabula, and the fulfilment of that promise, just after the end of the fabula. Both the anticipation of the promised return of Monsieur Andesmas's daughter and the uncertainty concerning the distance of that anticipation determine the importance of the events in the story, events that ultimately consist of various phases of waiting. This temporal play produces an emotional suspense that is the very stuff of this novel.

For some anticipations, the realization is certain, for others, it is not. This distinction undergoes adaptation, however, when the terms *announcement* and *hint* are employed. Announcements are explicit. Attention is drawn to the fact that we are now concerned with something that will take place only later on. Adverbs such as "later" and verbs such as "expect" or "promise" are used in the text or may be logically added to it. Hints, in contrast, are implicit. A hint is simply a germ, of which the germinating force can only be seen later. The clues in a detective novel function primarily as hints. In such cases, a good story takes care to keep the knowledge from the reader, to prevent the understanding that these hints are anticipations; otherwise, the puzzle will be solved prematurely. On the other hand, it must remain possible for the attentive reader to glimpse their anticipatory nature. It is this possibility that initiates the game between story and reader.

Announcements work against suspense; hints increase it, because the trained readers of detective fiction will be asking themselves constantly whether a certain detail is an anticipation or not. This curiosity can then be manipulated by means of false hints: details that create the suggestion of being clues but turn out to have been only details after all. A good example of the above is offered in Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* (1852). There, the impulses are often not really false, but turn out to be irrelevant.

Achrony

In the preceding sections I have assumed that it is possible to determine the direction, the distance, and the span of a deviation in chronology. Sometimes, however, although we may see clearly that we are dealing with a deviation, either the information cannot be sorted out or there is too little of it to define the deviation further. I call such a deviation an *achrony*, a deviation of time that cannot be analysed any further.

Various kinds of deviations resembling achrony occur. The anticipation-within-retroversion – that is, referring forward within a back-reference – has already been mentioned. This form does not always lead to achrony. Example *f* seems clearly an anticipation from within a retroversion, which together form a complex and complete second-degree retroversion. However, when an anticipation from within a retroversion brings us back once again into the present, direction is no longer relevant. If a continuation of *f* were to read:

- j When she asked me to marry her, she promised she would be home every evening, that she would have a lot of time for me.

a future that would have to be the present is being evoked from within the past. This expected present stands in shrill contrast to the realized present: instead of running home after work, Mary calls more and more often to say that urgent business will keep her a few more hours ...

As far as the passing of time is concerned, the situation predicted in *j* should have been realized by now. But reality has turned out differently, as if to give the lie to overconfidence in anticipations. Such an anticipation-within-retroversion, which verges on achrony, can effectuate a confrontation between an expected and a realized present. In that capacity it may even contribute to an implied meta-narrative commentary, for example, by emphasizing the fictionality of the fabula.

A second possibility is the opposite form, the retroversion-within-anticipation. This occurs, for instance, when we are told beforehand how circumstances in the present will be presented to us. The meaning of an event can only be made known later, and the coming of that revelation is announced “now”:

- k Later, John would understand that he had wrongly interpreted Mary’s absence.

The revelation of John’s mistake will come later, but “now” it is being foreshadowed. At the moment of revelation, reference is made to a mistake made in the past; but in relation to the future, that past is the present evoked by means of a retroversion-within-anticipation.

A third anachrony that comes close to achrony occurs when an anticipation in relation to the fabula turns out to be a retroversion in the story. An event that has yet to take place chronologically has already been presented – for example, in embedded speech, in the story. Then an

allusion is made to it that is an anticipation with respect to the fabula, but a retroversion with respect to the story (Later John understood that ...).

In addition to these three forms, which are difficult to pinpoint because of their complex structure and, consequently, because they come close to achronies, there are two more possibilities for definite achrony – that is, deviations that are impossible to analyse because of lack of information. To begin with, an achrony is sometimes undated, when it does not indicate anything about its direction, distance, or span. One example:

1 I have never seen him without his wig.

Here a relationship of sorts with the past is given. In a pinch, this sentence could be seen as a complete retroversion of indeterminate distance. In fact, however, nothing indicates whether the span is restricted to the past or not; in any case, it includes the present if nothing establishes that the situation has come to an end. A second possibility lies in the grouping of events on the grounds of other than chronological criteria, without any mention of chronological sequence.

Proust sometimes presents a whole series of events, all of which have occurred in the same place. Spatial connections thus replace chronological ones. This is a significant feature of Proust's narrative style that cannot easily be analysed on the level of either the text or the fabula. Proust, like other modernists such as Virginia Woolf, makes his story particularly visual. If such a series were to be constructed solely according to spatial or any other criteria such as association, for instance, the text would no longer fit my definition of narrative. But if such a series occurs in a narrative in which chronological connections are indicated everywhere else, we are dealing with an achrony. With this last form of achrony we have exhausted the possibilities for structuring the chronological flow within a story into a specific sequence. Here, the linearity of the fabula and the linearity of its presentation to the reader no longer have any correspondence at all.

In the section titled "Span" I mentioned the Colombian novel *Migas de pan* by Azriel Bibliowicz. There, the repetition of capture, first by the Nazis, now by the *guerilleros*, triggered the son Samuel's "contamination" by his father's trauma. In this novel, the specific temporality of trauma is the central issue, thinly disguised by a form of suspense that makes us wonder whether Josué is going to be released "during" the

novel, so as to ensure a happy ending. However, given the topic – the Holocaust, the repetition of the captivity and the subsequent disempowerment that is its central cruelty – a happy ending is not to be expected. Nor is there an unhappy ending; we don't hear that the captive has been found murdered. The lack of an ending that would satisfy our traditional sense of an ending is the key to the novel as a whole and to its resistance against traditional conceptions of time as specifically linear. This is why achrony is its central trope. Speaking of his mother, Samuel – who shares the narratorial function with an external narrator – says the following: “El Holocausto dividió sus mundos y congeló el tiempo de sus vidas.” (The Holocaust divided her worlds and froze the time of her lives, 49). The key word is “congeló” (froze), but more important is the use of the plural of “mundos” (worlds) and “vidas” (lives).

“El tiempo,” time, remains in the singular as the reigning dimension. It has the power to break up a life into lives, a world into worlds, because it refuses to continue. And Samuel, the son, realizes that he is trapped by his parents' trauma:

No había nada que hacer: yo era hijo del Holocausto, aun cuando no lo hubiese padecido, era una sombra, una sombra larga que me acompañaba y de la que no lograba desprenderme. Era parte de mi piel.

There was nothing to be done about it: I was a son of the Holocaust, although I had not suffered / undergone / experienced it, it was a shadow, a large shadow that accompanied me and of which I didn't manage to get rid. It was part of my skin. (49–50)

And although the larger part of the novel is devoted to a description of the different cabinets in the house in which Josué had tried to preserve the history of humanity, it is the deep sense of time itself that is the subject of his spatial arrangements. Apropos of Noah, and of Utnapishtim, a similar hero in the *Gilgamesh epos*, Josué had said to his children that “tuvieron que darle tiempo al tiempo para que las aguas se retiren” (they had to give time to time, so that the waters could recede, 65). The novel is replete with reflections on and experiences of the slow pace of time in times of captivity. And as this son suggests, trauma, including the trauma of the generation before the present, is a form of captivity. This has a strong impact on the rhythm of the novel.

4: Rhythm

Background

Rhythm is as striking as it is elusive. Narrative media, especially film, work with rhythm, yet the analysis of it has not been successful. The notion seems better suited for poetry and music. In 1921 Percy Lubbock published his *Craft of Fiction*, in which he distinguished between a summarizing, accelerating presentation and a broad, scenic one. Twenty years later in Germany, Günther Müller wrote a number of extensive studies on this subject (1968). Students applied Müller's principles to a large number of texts. But what is narrative rhythm? What are we to take as a measure of the speed of presentation, the rhythm? Let's assume that it is possible to calculate, at least approximately, the time covered by the events. The problem is with what kind of time this time of the fabula should be compared.

Nevertheless, we can estimate the speed with which the various events are presented. Just as speed in traffic is gauged by juxtaposing the amount of time involved with the distance covered (she is doing 60: she is travelling 60 kilometres in one hour), so too the amount of time covered by the fabula can be juxtaposed with the amount of space in the text that each event requires: the number of pages, lines, or words.

Every analysis is continuously preoccupied with demonstrating its own relevance; there is no point in initiating a detailed calculation of temporal relationships unless some relevance can be predicted. Hence, such an analysis should not simply aim at the precise calculation of the number of words or lines per event; the amount of text set aside for each event only indicates something about how the attention is *patterned*. The attention paid to the various elements gives us a picture of the vision on the fabula communicated to the reader. The attention paid to each element can only be analysed in relation to the attention for the other elements.

Overall Rhythm

Once we have a rough idea of the amount of time covered by the various events or series of events, episodes, it becomes possible to use this to determine the general rhythm. Let us take as an example a complete life-story of the kind frequently written in the nineteenth century. The fabula contains the birth of the hero, his childhood, adolescence, military

service, first love, the period of social ambition, decline, and death. It is possible to determine the number of pages devoted to each episode. Often, this simple exercise alone will make clear that certain episodes are given more attention than others. Childhood, for instance, is often summarized quickly, while first love is dwelt upon in much more detail. On the other hand, the novel may also reflect an even division of attention. In Dickens' *Dombey and Son*, for instance, the story begins with the birth of Paul Dombey. At that time, his father is forty-eight years old. After approximately one-third of the story Paul dies, at about the age of twelve. The story continues until Dombey's old age, so that, as far as rhythm is concerned, Paul's death takes place "at the right moment," for Dombey then has twenty-odd more years to live.

Whether or not the attention is spread more or less evenly across the fabula, there will always be an alternation of sorts between extensive and summarizing presentation. In *The Craft of Fiction*, Percy Lubbock distinguished between these two forms, the scene and the summary. It has been noted that this relative contrast should be pushed to its limit. On the one hand, we can distinguish the *ellipsis*, an omission in the story of a section of the fabula. When a certain part of the time covered by the fabula is given absolutely no attention at all, the amount of TF (time of the fabula) is infinitely larger than the TS (story-time). On the other hand, we can distinguish the *pause*, when an element that takes no fabula-time (hence, an object, not a process) is presented in detail. TF is then infinitely smaller than TS. This is the case in descriptive or argumentative fragments.

Both *summary* and *slow-down* are to be viewed relatively, in relation to each other. The easiest way to set up such a comparison is to establish a kind of norm tempo, a zero-line. Real *isochrony*, a complete coincidence of TF and TS, cannot occur in language. We can, however, assume that a dialogue without commentary takes as long in TF as it does in TS. The dialogue, and in principle every scene, every detailed presentation of an event with a claim to isochrony, thus functions as a point of comparison. By scene I here mean a segment of text in which TF = TS. In total, five different tempi would thus become distinguishable:

Ellipsis	TF = ∞	TS = 0	thus	TF > ∞ TS
Summary				TF > TS
Scene				TF = TS
Slow-down				TF < TS
Pause	TF = 0	TS = n	thus	TF < ∞ TS

Here > means longer than
 < means shorter than
 ∞ means infinite
 = means is ± equal

Every narrative can be divided into segments corresponding to one of these five tempi. In the following sections I discuss some characteristics of each tempo.

Ellipsis

An ellipsis cannot be perceived: according to the definition, nothing is indicated in the story about the amount of fabula-time involved. If nothing is indicated, we cannot know what would have been indicated. All we can do is logically deduce that something has been omitted. Note that this kind of deduction is based on a realistic reading, which may be predominant but is not always meaningful. That which has been omitted – the contents of the ellipsis – need not be unimportant; on the contrary, the event about which nothing is said may have been so painful that it is being elided for precisely that reason, an example being the conception of Madame Bovary's child. Or the event is so difficult to put into words that it is preferable to maintain complete silence about it. Another possibility, already mentioned, is the situation in which the actor wants to deny that an event has taken place. By keeping silent about it, he attempts to undo it. Here the ellipsis is being used for magical purposes, as an exorcism. This reading of the ellipsis is central in Robbe-Grillet's *Le voyeur*, a postmodern mystery novel from 1955.

How are we to become aware of these ellipses, which can, apparently, be so important that it seems worth the trouble to look for them? To begin with, our attention is sometimes directed towards an elided event because of a retroversion. We know that something must have happened, and sometimes we know approximately where, but it is difficult to indicate the exact location.

Sometimes, however, an ellipsis is indicated. Mention is made of the time that has been skipped. If a text reads:

a When I was back in New York after two years ...

we know exactly how much time has been left out. It is even clearer when an ellipsis is mentioned in a separate sentence:

b Two years passed.

In fact, this is no longer an ellipsis, but could be called a minimal summary, or rather, a summary with maximum speed: two years in one sentence.

Such a pseudo-ellipsis, or mini-summary, can be expanded with a brief specification concerning its contents:

c Two years of bitter poverty passed.

The pseudo-ellipsis is beginning to look more and more like a summary. Whether we still regard the next sentence as a pseudo-ellipsis or whether we now label it a summary depends on what the overall rhythm of the story is, or simply how far we wish to go: the borderline between these two tempi is flexible.

d Two years of bitter poverty passed, in which she lost two children, became unemployed, and was evicted from her home because she could not pay the rent.

Summary

In example c the specification of content indicated a situation. None of the events of those two elided years are mentioned, even though according to the realistic reading game, it is unlikely that no events took place at all. In d, however, various events are presented – at least three, but probably four or more. Let's say that the children died one after the other and that loss then counts as two events. The unpaid rent implies a good many events, such as the landlord's visits, the woman's desperation and its expression, her attempts to find money and the failure of those attempts. The woman is evicted. What then? At that moment in the fabula, the situation changes. Consequently, the rhythm of the narrative changes. A slower tempo is adopted, the next event – a meeting? an inheritance? a discovery? – must alter the situation radically. Consequently, this key event receives all the attention.

So-called dramatic climaxes are events that have a strong influence on the course of the fabula – they are its turning points, moments at which a situation changes, a line is broken. Such events are presented extensively in scenes, whereas insignificant events – insignificant in the sense that they do not greatly influence the course of the fabula – are quickly summarized. This can be phrased the other way around: it is

because they get more narrative time that events take on major importance. The opening of Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, a classical example of a realistic novel, exhibits something like this rhythm. Oliver's birth is presented extensively: three pages. Then, at the age of nine months, the hero is sent to a charitable institution. The situation there is sketched in a page and a half, and suddenly Oliver is nine and is taken away: three pages.

The rhythm of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is very different. Many events that one could expect to have been presented as dramatic climaxes, are summarized rapidly, whereas routine events – for instance, situations that recur every week – are presented extensively. This reversal of the traditional rhythm is very well suited to a fabula that reflects boredom, the emptiness of a person's existence. In this sense the novel is realistic; rhythm matches content. But the reversal of the expected rhythm can also initiate reflection on the non-realistic poetics of this novel. It can even qualify as (proto-)postmodern as a result. To a great degree, the originality of Flaubert's work is determined by this double-edged technique.

As should be clear, the summary is a suitable instrument for presenting – and, for the reader, gleaning – background information, or for connecting various scenes. The place of the summary in a story depends strongly on the type of fabula involved: a crisis-fabula will require much less summarizing than a developing fabula (see "Duration").

Scene

In longer narratives such as novels, scenes predominate. Although traditionally an even alternation between summary and scene used to be the aim, in order not to overtire readers with too rapid a tempo or bore them with one that was too slow, in the course of time a development has made itself felt towards rejection of that stereotypical pattern. In *Madame Bovary* the scenes frequently present an event *in extenso* as an example of a whole series of such events. Every Thursday the heroine goes to Rouen to visit her lover: thus a long scene follows, in which such a visit is presented in detail. The effect of this technique is to dull the newness of the event, to indicate that daily routine has once again re-established itself in Emma's life, at exactly that moment that was intended to demonstrate her efforts to break out of that routine. A hopeless enterprise, we therefore conclude. Proust, who was greatly (albeit ambivalently) inspired by Flaubert, also showed a preference

for scenes. But in his work they function differently. In *À la recherche du temps perdu* scenes are often the first in a series of similar scenes. This transforms them into anticipations. In these instances, the intensity of the sensations of a first time justifies the lavishness of the presentation.

In a scene the duration of the fabula and that of the story are roughly the same. Roughly, because most scenes are full of retroversions, anticipations, non-narrative fragments such as general observations, or atemporal sections such as descriptions. A truly synchronic scene, in which the duration of the fabula coincided completely with that of the presentation in the story, would be unreadable. The dead moments in a conversation, the nonsensical or unfinished remarks, are omitted. In the eighteenth century, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1767) explored and mocked the impossibility of describing real time. Even a writer who tries to give precisely these aspects of a conversation their due – Marguerite Duras, for example – is forced to abridge them considerably, on penance of unreadability.

A writer who wishes to fill out a scene will automatically employ more attention-grabbing material – which can also serve to connect the preceding and the following chapters. Thus a scene is often a central moment from which the narrative can proceed in any direction. In such cases the scene is actually anti-linear. The coincidence of TF and TS is then no more than appearance.

Slow-Down

Slow-down stands in direct contrast to the summary. In practice this tempo occurs very rarely. It is difficult if not impossible to achieve synchrony in a scene because the presentation is soon experienced as too slow. Still, the theoretical possibility of this tempo cannot be ignored. Although it is, in general, set aside for use in small sections of the narrative only, it can nevertheless have an extremely evocative effect. At moments of great suspense, slow-down may work like a magnifying glass.

Sometimes, a brief slowing down occurs within a scene, in such cases often reinforced by, for instance, a subjective retroversion. Imagine the arrival of a visitor or a letter. In the short time between the ringing of the bell and the opening of the door, the actor is bombarded by all sorts of thoughts, his nerves are taut – a whole life passes through his mind, and it takes pages before he actually opens the door. Rare as they may be, some slow-down passages rank among the classic scenes in world literature.

Pause

Pauses occur much more frequently. This term includes all narrative sections in which no movement of the fabula-time is implied. A great deal of attention is paid to one element, and in the meantime the fabula remains stationary. When it continues later on, no time has passed. Here we are dealing with a *pause*. Pause has a strongly retarding effect; yet the reader easily forgets that the fabula has been stopped, whereas in a slow-down our attention is directed towards the fact that the passage of time has slowed down.

In various periods of literary history, different opinions have been held about pauses. In Homer, pauses are avoided. Often descriptions of objects are replaced by retroversions, which also have a slowing-down effect, but still replace the broken line of time by another temporal sequence. This is the case during the explanation of Ulysses's scar by which his old nurse recognizes him on his return. The shield of Achilles is described in retroversion, while it is being made, thus becoming a case of description motivated on the level of the fabula. Similarly, Agamemnon's armour is described while he is putting it on, so that we can no longer refer to an interruption, but to a scene.

During the era of Naturalism, the pause was less of a problem; the explicit goal of these novels was to sketch a picture of reality. To do that, a good many object descriptions were necessary, while the flow of the fabula-time was of secondary importance. Lengthy descriptive sections and, to a lesser extent, generalized argumentative expositions are certainly not exceptions in the novels of this period. The pause was an accepted tempo. And when such descriptions led to excessively long interruptions of the fabula, their presence was justified by tying them to the vision of an onlooker.

Post-Naturalist novelists adopted this last solution. Whenever a long description had to be inserted, they made sure that the seam was hidden. In Zola's novels, this takes the following form. An actor looks at an object, and what s/he sees is described. The passing of a certain amount of time is thus implied, so that such descriptions do not constitute a real pause, but a scene. That flow of time is indicated by means of a verb of perception – usually *to see* – supported, in many cases, by adverbs of time: *first*, *subsequently*, and *then finally* all suggest the passing of time, even if everything else indicates that there can hardly be any passing time. The pause is thus concealed.

In modernist narrative the pause is frankly adopted. Many novels by Virginia Woolf, to mention one of the best-known cases, alternate

the presentation of slow, unimportant events with lengthy descriptive passages. The difference between the presentation of events and the description of objects is often hard to make out, so that the entire story moves on like a long descriptive flow. The exploration of the nuances of perception is characteristic of modernist narrative. With postmodernism, the question of narrative rhythm along these lines loses its meaning altogether.

In spite of the difficulty of grasping different narrative tempi and making statements about rhythm, then, this concept is important because for all its lack of precision it is helpful in characterizing different modes of narrative *historically*. The question of the delimitation and definition of descriptive and argumentative sections as opposed to narrative sections was discussed in the previous chapter. Here it is relevant only to note that such sections disrupt the flow of time and function, therefore, as pauses.

In short: the tools of narrative to vary its overall rhythm are the figures of ellipsis, the elision of events we expect, summary, the quick enumeration of events that take a much longer time, and its opposite, the scene that spins out a single event over a relatively long stretch of text, and the slow-down that stretches time beyond simultaneity. The paradox of narrative, in this respect, is the use of scenes as building blocks in the face of chronology, the linearity that suggests a complete rendering of the sequence of events while such completeness would make the narrative unbearably slow.

A very clear example of this paradox is *L'étranger* by Albert Camus (1942). This novel, in which chronological sequence is maintained, consists almost entirely of scenes. These scenes cannot possibly coincide completely with the time of the fabula. After all, the latter covers quite a few days. In fact, they are pseudo-scenes, scenes that are presented in a strongly accelerated manner, with myriad invisible ellipses. This lack of synchrony is even explicitly indicated, as Meursault, the protagonist, regularly consults his watch to ascertain that it is, again, much later. The same thing happens in the Dutch novel *The Evenings*, contemporary with Camus's novel. The scenes, usually slow-paced, in these novels are used to indicate the rapidity of time together with the immeasurable emptiness in spending it. This gives the suggestion of too little time reflected in an excess of time. The scene is the most appropriate form to do so.

This is the case, for instance, in *L'après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas* where at the end, a few seconds of the fabula span pages. The occasion

is the long-awaited arrival of Monsieur Andesmas's daughter. The girl's voice, her footsteps, can all be heard, and still it takes a terribly long time before she actually appears. This last event we are not even allowed to see. As if to indicate that her late arrival is definitely too late for her father, as proof that he has lost her, the arrival itself is not presented at all. It occurs outside the story and outside the fabula. The fabula of the novel spans the time from just after her departure to just before her return.

Rare as they may be, moments of slow-down rank among the great passages of world literature. One such passage is the first kiss that Marcel, the protagonist of *À la recherche*, bestows on Albertine, the object of his obsessive love, repulsion, jealousy, and possessiveness alternatively. This passage is remarkable for a great number of reasons, one of which is its insistence on the difficulties of seeing. The kiss becomes the crucial example of the impossibility of seeing:

[S]uddenly my eyes ceased to see, then my nose, crushed by the collision, no longer perceived any odour, and, without thereby gaining any clearer idea of the taste of the rose of my desire, I learned, from these obnoxious signs, that at last I was in the act of kissing Albertine's cheek. (2.378)

This impossibility, which seems here to be absolute, is the culmination of a whole development, stretched out in time; of an entire "study" of the sensorial imperfection of the body and, in particular, of the lips as a tool for gaining knowledge, a true epistemological instrument. The difficulties that intervene are of various orders: the perception is displaced, the object is transformed, and the skin as a surface breaks up into "coarse grain":

At first, as my mouth began gradually to approach the cheeks which my eyes had recommended it to kiss, my eyes, in changing position, saw a different pair of cheeks; the neck, observed at closer range and as though through a magnifying glass, showed in its coarser grain a robustness which modified the character of the face. (2.378)

The slow-down is necessary because instead of the act of kissing itself – the relevant element in the fabula – it is the nuances of perception that accompany it that the narrator is describing.

The story overrules the fabula here. And those nuances are too complex to be presented in scenic simultaneity. An entire drama of vision inserts itself between fabula and story. For the magnifying glass does not improve close-up vision – it modifies it. The object seen is a different one, and this difference continues until the perception is reduced to nothing. The lens allows too much to be seen. But this operation nonetheless functions by splitting the vision into multiple elements. All these elements are so detailed that presenting them takes more time than a simple kiss. What ultimately happens here, as often in Proust, is that the fabula disappears under the weight of the story so that a miniature new fabula appears to insert itself, pushing the banality of events away and replacing it with the exciting discovery of what is hardly perceptible. The difference between the presentation of events and the description of objects is often hard to make out, with the result that the entire story moves along in a long descriptive flow.

The following passage from Virginia Woolf's novel *The Waves* (1931) bears this subtle movement out:

And then tiring of pursuit and flight, lovelily they [the birds] came descending, delicately declining, dropped down and sat silent on the tree, on the wall, with their bright eyes glancing, and their heads turned this way, that way; aware, awake; intensely conscious of one thing, one object in particular.

Perhaps it was a snail shell, rising in the grass like a grey cathedral, a swelling building burnt with dark rings and shadowed green by the grass. Or perhaps they saw the splendour of the flowers making a light of flowing purple over the beds, through which dark tunnels of purple shade were driven between the stalks. (53)

The presentation of a minuscule event – the descent, then rest of the birds – progresses into a description of the birds sitting on their respective perches. As in the Proust passage of the kiss, the fabula is snowed under by an account of an act of perception. The rhythm is slow, but whether the stillness that results is a pause in the fabula or, on the contrary, completely covers the fabula-time of the act of perception, cannot be made out. Duration is the backdrop against which these nuances of perception are being explored.

With postmodernism, the question of narrative rhythm along these lines loses its meaning altogether. In her novel *Blood and Guts in High School* (1978), Kathy Acker seems to mock any attempt to establish

temporal equivalences between story-time and fabula-time. This does not mean that the story has no narrative rhythm. On the contrary, it seems hasty and fragmented, frantic, and, as a result, verging on incoherent. It is by disrupting the correlation between fabula and story in this respect that the novel achieves its postmodern “feel.” Here are a few passages to get a sense of this. The first, about a character, Janey, who works in a hippy East Village bakery, shows how Janey has to “forget” her self in order to be able to work. In the workplace she is addressed as a function, not as a person. She tersely verbalizes this lack of self that comes with being a labourer in a phrase that sounds like a reversal of Descartes’s famous dictum “I think therefore I am”: “I am nobody because I work” (37). Later she explains this condition of being nobody when working:

I had to do all the counter work. My father stopped sending me money. I had to work seven days a week. I had no more feelings. I was no longer a real person. If I stopped work just for a second, I would hate. Burst through the wall and hate. Hatred that comes out like that can be a bomb.

I hated most that I didn’t have any more dreams or visions. It’s not that the vision-world, the world of passion and wildness, no longer existed. It always is. But awake I was disconnected from dreams. I was psychotic. (40)

As one critic wrote: “When Janey tells about the abortions in her life, she immediately makes clear that they should not be seen as dramatic moments in a life story. She tells about her abortions because they have for her symbolic value.” This critic cites the following two passages:

I’m not trying to tell you about the rotgut weird parts of my life. Abortions are the symbol, the outer image, of sexual relations in this world. Describing my abortions is the only way I can tell you about pain and fear ... my unstoppable drive for sexual love made me know. (34)

I didn’t know how much these abortions hurt me physically and mentally. I was desperate to fuck more and more so I could finally get love. Soon my total being was on fire, not just my sex, and I was doing everything to make the non-sexual equivalent of love happen. (35)

The critic comments: “she explicitly tries to prevent the reader from turning the narration of her abortions into a narrative event, that is, into part of a plot” (Van Alphen 1997a).

5: Frequency

A third aspect often distorts the two aspects of time treated above (i.e., order and rhythm). Gérard Genette labels this aspect *frequency*. By this he means the numerical relationship between the events in the fabula and those in the story. The phenomenon of *repetition*, which is the one under discussion here, has always had a paradoxical side. As the example of Borges’s quotation of *Don Quixote* in his story “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quichote” (1939) demonstrates, even two literally identical texts are not really identical. Similarly, two events are never exactly the same. The first event of a series differs from the one that follows it, if only because it is the first and the other is not. Strictly speaking, the same goes for verbal repetition in a text: only one can be the first. Yet a series such as

a I went to bed early. I turned in betimes. I was in bed before dark.

will be seen as a repetition of one and the same event: the actor went to bed early. Obviously, it is the onlooker, and the readers, who remember the similarities between the events of a series and ignore the differences. When I refer to a repetition, I mean different events – or alternative presentations of events – that show similarities. The most common frequency is the singular presentation of a singular event.

b She came at length and opened the door to her sister’s importunities.

Kate Chopin, “The Story of an Hour,” *Portraits*

However, a story entirely constructed of such singular presentations would create a highly peculiar and ragged effect. Usually, a combination of this and other possible frequencies is employed.

A second frequency occurs when an event happens more often and is presented as often as it occurs. Thus, there is repetition on both levels so that, again, we should really term this a singular presentation. This is not the case if the event occurs often and is presented often, but not as often as it occurs. If something happens every day in the course of three months, and it is presented five times, numerical disproportion results.

Whether such a frequency creates a strongly repetitive effect or not depends on the nature of the event and on the amount of attention paid to it. The more banal the event, the less striking the repetition: this could serve as a rough guideline. In cinema, convention has it that three occurrences of the same event stand for an endless repetition.

I refer to a repetition when an event occurs only once but is presented a number of times. Some experimental novels employ this possibility lavishly. Robbe-Grillet's *Le voyeur* is a case in point. In general, it is used with much more discretion. Moreover, the repetition may be disguised to a certain extent by stylistic variations, as in example a. Sometimes variations in "perspective" (see focalization, below) are also used to justify the repetition: the event may be the same, but each actor views it in his own or her own way. This device was used regularly in the eighteenth-century epistolary novel. Another famous example is Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). Every internal retroversion or anticipation that does not fill in an ellipsis belongs to this frequency. These constitute repetitions of something that has already been mentioned before.

The reverse of a repetition is an *iterative* presentation: a whole series of identical events is presented at once. We have already seen examples of this. Flaubert and Proust make systematic use of iteration. Iterative presentation used to be regarded as subordinate to singular presentation. It was employed to sketch a background, against which the singular events were highlighted. Flaubert was the first writer in Western literature to my knowledge to give iteration a dominant position in his work. Proust went even further: his novel consists for the most part of iterative scenes. These are often so extensive that their iterative nature becomes questionable. One visit, supposedly an example of a long series, is described in eighty pages: the conversations, the gestures, the guests, everything is presented in detail. It is no longer credible that such a visit is an example of weekly visits, performed year in year out. This then is a case of pseudo-iteration – a form through which Proust marked his modernist anti-realism.

There are three forms of iteration. If they are generalizing and are concerned with general facts that also exist outside the fabula, then they come very close to situation-descriptions. The opening of Dickens's *Oliver Twist* is a good example: the scene in the poorhouse is an instance of what it was like, in general, in the poorhouses of that time, besides being from the fabula of this poor little boy. One may also highlight events that are related to a specific fabula but that exceed its time span. These we could call external iterations.

c And yet she had loved him, sometimes. "The Story of an Hour"

This love has sometimes, though not often, been felt, but is mentioned only once. The period lies outside the borders of the fabula, and the iteration could therefore be termed external. It is not generalizing, however, as it concerns this one woman, the woman who is the actor in the fabula. For the sake of quick, efficient notation I have drawn up a formula, according to which these kinds of frequency may be defined:

- 1F/1S: singular: one event, one presentation
- nF/ns: plurisingular: various events, various presentations
- nF/ms: varisingular: various events, various presentations, unequal in number
- 1F/ns: repetitive: one event, various presentations
- nF/1S: iterative: various events, one presentation

Again, iteration functions differently in postmodernist narrative. Acker's *Blood and Guts* also contains the following passage:

Of course, daddy and Sally and the boys in his band are given their rooms first. My room is the room no one else in the world wants. My bedroom is the huge white hexagon in the front left corner of the hotel. It has no clear outside or inside or any architectural regularity. Long white pipes form part of its ceiling. Two of its sides, which two is always changing, are open.

My bedroom's function is also unclear. Its only furniture is two barber's chairs and a toilet. It's a gathering place for men.

Hotel men dressed in white and black come in and want to hurt me. They cut away parts of me. I call for the hotel head. He explains that my bedroom used to be the men's toilet. I understand. My cunt used to be a men's toilet.

I walk out in a leopard coat. (36)

The passage appears to begin with a singular event, coated with description. But how often do the "hotel men dressed in white and black" come in? Does the conflation between "my bedroom" and "my cunt" retrospectively turn this event into an iterative one, ironically turning the "explanation" of the hotel head into an indictment of gender relations? This iterative effect is thereby loaded with meaning. The final sentence is totally unclear in terms of frequency.

Flaubert, as mentioned before, was a master of rhythmic storytelling. By the sheer use of verb forms he managed to predict the entire outcome of an episode, and thus undercut suspense. I remember how struck I was, long ago, when reading the first sentence of chapter 5 of the third part of *Madame Bovary*. Emma has just begun her liaison with Léon. She has plotted a way of seeing him on a weekly basis, with piano lessons as a pretext. "C'était je jeudi" (it was Thursdays) begins the chapter. Thus, the verb tense indicates routine. The detailed narration of the small events that precede the encounter with her lover, all in the *imparfait* of routine, are plausible enough as iterations.

The passage of about a page and a half ends, however, with the following sentence, which in isolation would be considered almost a-grammatical: "Puis, d'un seul coup d'œil, la ville apparaissait." (Then, in the blink of an eye, the city appeared / would appear). The suddenness implied in the adverbial clause is contradicted by the tense of routine. Preceding this sentence is a clause that "explains" the apparent contradiction: "... afin de se faire des surprises, elle fermait les yeux." (... in an attempt to surprise herself she would close her eyes). In self-deception, Emma tries desperately to recover the excitement of a liaison that already, we can surmise, bores her. This is a brilliant example of Flaubert's mode of predicting the tragic ending by means of subtle indications, all through the novel. No quantitative analysis of rhythm will do justice to this literary art.

Heterochrony

At the end of this discussion of temporality and the various forms it can take in narrative, I feel compelled to briefly indicate how all this technical fussing can be justified as highly relevant. Hence, a short note on what I call *heterochrony* is in order. Others call it by different names; David Herman, in an analysis of a short story by Anna Seghers, speaks of "polychrony" (2002, 224–32). My choice of the term *heterochrony* is motivated by the emphasis on difference, rather than multiplicity only. Migration, a much-discussed topic of our time, is the exemplary situation of the experience of time as multiple, heterogeneous. The time of haste and waiting, the time of movement and stagnation; the time of memory and of an unsettling present not sustained by a predictable future. The phenomenon considered from the outside I call *multi-temporality*; the experience of it, *heterochrony*. Multi-temporality is a phenomenon that has always existed, but seems overruled by the predominance of measurable, linear

time in the organization of social life. Heterochrony is something one can be afflicted by, suffer from. You can “have” heterochrony as you can have the flu. When multi-temporality becomes a problem, an inhibition, and paralysing contradiction, you “have” heterochrony. But it may also lead to a pleasurable sense of fulfilment, when the multiple temporal strands in a day make that day particularly intense or meaningful. Both video as a storytelling medium and migratory culture intensify the experiences of heterochrony.

Time, in all its internal differentiation, is usually, sometimes forcefully, subjected to one of its aspects only, that of chronology. This linear logic has a profound sensate effect on everyone, and more strongly so on those whose relationship to the local chrono-logic is oblique. Thus conceived, chronology is a stricture that looms over events and thus colours the experience of time with a dark shadow of inadequacy.

Heterochrony is more than subjective experience, however. It contributes to the temporal texture of our cultural world, and thus to our understanding and experiencing it is a political necessity. This texture is multi-temporal. This trains the viewer to be sensitive to this aspect of temporal disjunction in the lives of people among whom we live. Thus, it is now obvious that analyses of narrative in all its forms, with its capacity to manipulate time in the ways described above, can contribute to an understanding of, and the development of a greater sensitivity to, the multiple ways in which cultural experience engages time.

6: Characters

Narrative – fiction as well as journalism, films, and informal narratives of everyday life – thrives on the affective appeal of characters. Whether we like them or not, we are compelled to read on because we respond to those paper, celluloid, or digital people. In this section I use the term *character* for the anthropomorphic figures provided with specifying features the narrator tells us about. Their distinctive characteristics together create a character-effect. In the course of this section, the difference between the more specific term *character* and the general, abstract term *actor* at issue in the next chapter will gradually become clearer. To begin, more often than not a character resembles a human being and an actor need not necessarily do so. For the moment, let us assume that a character is the effect that occurs when a figure is presented with distinctive, mostly human characteristics. In this view, an actor in the fabula is a structural position, while a character is a complex semantic unit. As readers, we

“see” characters, feel with them, and like or dislike them. These characters are only reducible to actors in a process of abstraction.

On the level of the story, characters differ from one another. In that sense they are individual. On the basis of the characteristics they have been allotted, each of them functions in a different way with respect to the reader. The latter gets to know them more or less than other characters, finds them more or less appealing, identifies more or less easily with them. The aim of this section is not to determine (define) the characters (who are they?), but to characterize them (what are they?, and how do we find out?).

Why Characters Resist Us

Characters resemble people. Literature is written by, for, and about people. That remains a truism, so banal that we often tend to forget it, and so problematic that we as often repress it. On the other hand, the people with whom literature is concerned are not real people. They are fabricated creatures made up from fantasy, imitation, memory. That no satisfying, coherent theory of character is available is due to this anthropomorphic aspect. The character is not a human being, but it resembles one. It has no real psyche, personality, ideology, or competence to act, but it does possess characteristics that make readers assume they do and that make psychological and ideological descriptions possible. Character is intuitively the most crucial category of narrative, and also the one most subject to projection and fallacies.

It is fair to say that characters do not exist; yet narratives produce *character-effects*. The character-effect occurs when the resemblance between human beings and fabricated figures is so strong that we forget the fundamental difference: we even go so far as to identify with the character, to cry, to laugh, and to search for or with it – or even against it, when the character is a villain. This is a major attraction of narrative. But it also leads us to ask questions that are frankly irrelevant (“How many children had Lady Macbeth?”) and that reduce the narrative to flat realism. This is a risk, for example, when we identify so much with the characters in *Beloved* that we absolutely insist on the live, natural status of Beloved or, for the very same reason (the need for clarity), her supernatural status. Attempts to understand characters’ behaviour often inspire psychological criticism where such criticism is clearly not adequate to account for the literary or cinematic qualities of the text.

The kind of response that judges characters as real, modern, psychologically complex people has had nefarious effects on scholarship. It has

produced the myth of primitivism in the scholarship about ancient and folk literature and about geographically and culturally remote literatures. It has also produced a large body of critical literature that, seemingly reiterating the misogyny of the texts studied, projects sexism on texts whose function is not moral at all, or whose standards of representation have nothing to do with what realist literature has taught us to expect. This is a major ideological trap. It is also a literary-historical pitfall, for it obscures the characteristics of modes of storytelling that are far different from those of a modern and Western sensibility. For example, in their efforts to explain events in biblical narratives that seemed incongruous to the modern reader, biblical critics tended to qualify glib actors as “dumb” or “stupid” characters, and transgressive actors such as Eve in the creation story as wicked characters.

With a view to overcoming this flattening tendency, I suggest that we restrict our investigation to what is presented to us in the actual words of the text. Rather than producing formalist descriptions, such restraint will produce rewarding surprises, unheard-of possibilities, and innovative social attitudes to emulate. Characters give the most pleasure when they are allowed to resist their readers instead of being overruled and forced to conform to readers’ expectations. Such wiping away of the dust of interpretive traditions makes even millennia-old texts appear shining new. But within the material of the story – the entire mass of information presented to us by the narrating agent – more confusion occurs. When we come across a detailed portrait of a character who has already been mentioned, we are justified in saying that that information – that portrait – “belongs to” the character, that it “creates” the character, maps it out, builds it up. A certain measure of coherence results. But when they rely on the analogy between character and human being, readers tend to attach so much importance to coherence that this material is easily reduced to a psychological portrait that has more bearing on the reader’s own desire to recognize the character than on the interchange between text, story, and fabula. It is crucial to distance oneself from this anthropomorphism. Moreover, a story contains other information that, while connected less directly with a certain character, contributes as much to the image of that character that is offered to the reader. What a figure does is as important as what he or she thinks, feels, remembers, or looks like.

Another drawback of a certain critical tradition is the division of characters into the kinds of categories that literary criticism is so fond of. E.M. Forster’s 1927 classical distinction between round and flat

characters was based on psychological criteria. Round characters are like complex persons, who undergo a change in the course of the story and remain capable of surprising the reader. Flat characters are stable; they are stereotypical, and they exhibit or contain nothing surprising. Even if such classifications were to be moulded into manageable distinctions, they would still only be applicable to the limited corpus of the psychological narrative. Entire genres, such as fairy tales, detective fiction, and popular fiction, but also ancient literature such as biblical or qur'anic stories, as well as modernist novels like Proust's and postmodern novels that mock precisely such categories, thus remain excluded from observation or aesthetic appreciation because all of their characters are "flat."

I am concerned here with establishing a framework for characterizing specific narrative characters, as a way to at least partly explain the character-effect. A summary of the kinds of information the readers have at their disposal in order to construct an image of a character, and a summary of the information they actually use while doing so, should make this possible. But in this discussion even more than in the rest of the concepts offered in this book, it is important to realize that much remains resistant to analysis. And rather than viewing that resistance as a failure of narratological analysis, I emphasize that it is evidence of the success of such an analysis.

The so-called extra-textual situation creates yet another ambiguity. This concerns the influence of reality on the story, insofar as reality plays a part in it. Even if we do not wish to study the relations between text and context as a separate object of analysis, we cannot ignore the fact that direct or indirect knowledge of the context of certain characters contributes significantly to their meaning. The character President Eisenhower in Coover's *The Public Burning* (1977) is not the factual president of the United States, Eisenhower as we know him from historical evidence. But the impression we receive of that character depends to a great extent on the confrontation between our own image of Eisenhower and the image the story offers, which in its turn is shaped by another context. The influence of data from reality is all the more difficult to determine since the personal situation, knowledge, background, historical moment, and so on of the reader are involved here.

Finally, the description of a character is always strongly coloured by the ideology of critics, who are often unaware of their own ideological hang-ups. Consequently, what is presented as a description is an implicit value judgment. And here the realistic tendency promoted by

the anthropomorphism of characters can play nasty tricks. Characters are attacked or defended as if they were people that the critics like or dislike. Even worse, author and character are viewed as one and the same. Existentialist criticism tended to do this. Emotions flared at the publication of Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955). The character Humbert's mentality was all wrong; the man was an immoral hypocrite, and quotations from the text could prove this. If, however, we examine all the utterances of the character-bound narrator, then to say the least, a much more problematic picture emerges. And even if this narrator is an immoral hypocrite, this does not mean that the entire novel is immoral. A good deal more needs to be considered to back up the claim of immorality, always limited to the context in which the particular morality is generally accepted.

These problems should be neither denied nor ignored, as a formalist approach would do. Rather, they should be clearly formulated and brought to bear on other issues. Ideological discussions and value judgments should not be censured, but should be conducted with insight into the many issues involved. Only then can they be discussed, and this can only benefit the analysis. The discussion below may help make this procedure a bit easier.

Predictability

The preceding section expanded character; this one reduces it. Both moves are necessary and productive. On the basis of bits of information, the character becomes more or less predictable. These data determine him or her, mostly so inconspicuously that the reader processes the information without giving it a thought. I call this fixating process *determination*. To begin with, there is information that is always already involved, that relates to the extra-textual situation, insofar as the reader is acquainted with it. Indeed, the moments that one realizes that some information is not "in" the text are precisely those moments when one fails to make a connection because of lack of information. I will treat that section of reality or the outside world to which the information about the person refers as a *frame of reference*.

Few readers who have memories of the 1990s will fail to see the humour when reading, in Karen Harper's mystery novel *Black Orchid* (1996), "'What's the name of that gray-haired boy who's president right now?' Hattie asked." We really don't need the next sentence: "'Bill Clinton, Grandma,' Jordan told her" (68). Readers share the frame of reference in which it is elementary knowledge not only who ran the United

States at that time but also that Clinton had grey hair and a boyish face. The answer, rather than identifying Clinton, serves to characterize Hattie's relationship to her grandmother, a relationship of affectionate resignation. This frame is never entirely the same for each reader, or for reader and writer. Younger readers may not laugh at all. By frame of reference I here mean information that may with some confidence be called communal. For most American readers, Coover's Eisenhower fits into a frame of reference of that kind.

Historical characters are often brought to life in novels. Napoleon we meet quite regularly. Legendary characters, like King Arthur and Santa Claus, also fit into a frame of reference. Historical characters are not more strongly determined than legendary ones. On the contrary, legendary characters are expected to exhibit certain stereotypical behaviours and set attributes; if the story were to depart too far from these set characteristics, they would no longer be recognizable. If presented in opposition to the referential characteristics, however, such characters can be a powerful trigger of surprise, suspense, or humour. Santa Claus loves children; his whole status as a legendary character is based on that. A Santa Claus who sets out to murder people is blatantly a fiction, or as the case may be, a fake.

Where historical characters are concerned, the possibilities are somewhat greater. Because we are more confident about the identity of such a character, an unfamiliar side can be shown and will be accepted more easily: a tyrant during a fit of weakness; a saint in doubt or in temptation; a party-going revolutionary. But here too the possibilities are limited because of the frame of reference. A mature Napoleon presented as a poor wretch would create a very odd effect: he would no longer be Napoleon. In yet another way, mythical and allegorical characters fit a pattern of expectation, established in the basis of our frame of reference. The goddess of justice cannot make unfair decisions without destroying her identity as a character. Only for those who know that this character is conventionally blind will a wide-eyed goddess of justice be a problem. All of these characters, which we could label referential characters because of their obvious slots in a frame of reference, act according to the pattern that we are familiar with from other sources. Or not. In both cases, the image we receive of them is determined to a large extent by the confrontation between, on the one hand, our previous knowledge and the expectations it produces, and on the other, the realization of the character in the narrative. Opting for a referential character implies, in this respect, opting for such confrontation. The ensuing determination,

and the extent to which it is realized, is therefore an interesting object for study.

There is another reason for such studies. The expectations aroused by the mere mention of a historical or mythical character are also traps for the reader. We tend to notice only what we already know, unless the deviation from the expectation is strongly enhanced. An amusing case is Sophocles's King Oedipus. Owing to the success of Freud's psychoanalysis, we all know Oedipus. He's the guy with the Oedipus complex, of course. He killed his father and desired his mother. Well, that is precisely not the case. Oedipus the character does not have an Oedipus complex, for two opposed reasons. First, because he did nothing of the sort; he did not know the old man he killed was his father, so his act of killing did not make him a parricide. Neither did he know that the queen was his mother. Today we would say: these people were only his biological parents; his actual parents were the kind shepherd and his wife who raised him. But if this argument fails to convince, the opposite one will: he has no Oedipus complex because he acted upon his desires, whereas an Oedipus complex emerges, precisely, out of the repression of that desire. And if neither of these reasons are convincing, that is because the question – Does Sophocles's Oedipus have an Oedipus complex? – is one of those "How many children had Lady Macbeth" questions.

Amusing as it is, this example is highly instructive. We can deduce from it that characters don't have an unconscious; only people do. Psychoanalytic criticism does not, or should not, consist of diagnosing characters but of understanding how texts affectively address the reader on a level that comes close to or touches unconscious preoccupations. In general, returning to the ancient texts about the mythical characters that have fed our culture's clichés and prejudices is exciting and valuable.

Referential characters are more strongly determined than entirely fictional characters. But in fact, every character is more or less predictable, from the very first time it is presented onwards. Every mention of the identity of the character contains information that limits other possibilities. Reference to a character by means of a personal pronoun alone limits its gender. And, in general, this then sets off a whole series of limitations. *A he* cannot find himself unintentionally pregnant. *A she* cannot, as long as that contested rule of priestly celibacy lasts, become a Catholic priest. Insofar as they are traditionally determined, these limitations are subject to change. One of the earliest inspirations of

feminist literary studies was the insight that, in much traditional literature, women only function as protagonists in certain types of fabulas, in which the goal pursued is a characteristic of the character itself (happiness, wisdom) and not a concrete object that would necessitate a long journey or a physically taxing ordeal.

When a character is indicated with "I" these gender restrictions do not (yet) apply, but in that case other restrictions are possible. The character, the I, is not presented from a spatial distance, and this in turn involves all sorts of other limitations. When the character is allotted its own name, this generally determines not only its sex/gender but also its social status, geographical origin, sometimes even more. Names, too, can have a bearing on the character's characteristics. To this category belong not only names such as Tom Thumb and Snow White. Agatha Christie's Poirot has a pear-shaped head. Miss Marple is not only a woman but also unmarried, and that state implies a number of stereotypical qualities conventionally connected with elderly unmarried ladies: inquisitiveness, a great deal of spare time, reliability, innocence, naivety; all of these qualities are necessary for the development of the fabula in which the character functions, or in a converse perspective, to which the character leads. Indeed, because of the inseparable link, including the alliteration, between the title Miss and the name Marple this character is also highly referential.

A description of the exterior character further limits the possibilities. If a character is old, it does different things than if it were young. If it is attractive, it lives differently from the way it would live if it were unattractive, or so the reader tends to assume. One's work, too, greatly determines the frame in which the events take place or from which they receive their meaning. A thatcher falls from a roof (*L'assommoir*, Zola, 1876); sooner or later a miner will be trapped in a shaft that has collapsed (*Germinal*, Zola, 1885; *Sans famille*, Malot, 1892) if he doesn't die of some kind of lung disease; a soldier dies at the front or is sent to a faraway country (*A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway, 1929). None of these determining factors is determining at all. The fact that work, sex, external factors, or quirks of personality are mentioned creates an expectation. The story may fulfil that expectation but may just as easily frustrate it. Either way, character features activate the reader.

Genre plays a part in a character's predictability. A detective must, in principle, find the murderer. This genre-bound expectation is sometimes broken – for instance, in *The Locked Room* by Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö (1972), where the murdering character is arrested for another

crime and the mysteries are never entirely solved. The alterations to which a genre is subject are influenced by the interplay among the evocation, the satisfaction, and the frustration of expectations. The stronger the determination, the greater the shift away from the tensions generated by questions concerning the outcome and towards the tensions generated by the question whether the character will realize its own determination and/or break away from it. A character's predictability is closely related to the reader's frame of reference in which it seems to fit. But the effect of this predictability also depends on the reader's attitude with respect to literature and the book he or she is reading. Is she strongly inclined to fill in, or will she let herself be led by the story? Does she read quickly, or does she interrupt the reading often to stop and think about it?

What I am suggesting here is that information about a character's predictability can only provide clues to its potential determination. Thus we can analyse the way in which possible determination emerges in the story. Afterwards we conclude that a certain detail about a character was related to an event, or to a whole series of events. Establishing connections, coherence, in this way is not the same as signalling predictability beforehand. Predictability makes it easy to find coherence; it contributes to the formation of a unified image of one character out of an abundance of information. But it is not the only way in which that image is formed. We can distinguish various relations between bits of information on the basis of which an image of a character can be formed.

In general, returning to the ancient texts about the mythical characters that have fed our culture's clichés and prejudices is exciting and valuable. It helps us to understand how thick the historical layer is on which the present rests, as well as to assess our dependence and reliance on patterns established in a culture quite different from our own. Let me give one example.

The myth of Narcissus is traditionally attached to narcissism, a psychoanalytic concept that has taken on ordinary meaning and that, more often than not, is applied in a moralizing way. A narcissistic person overindulges in self-love and self-interest. Narcissus, as the myth has it, died because he did not recognize himself when he looked at the mirror-image of himself in the shiny surface of a pool, fell in love with the image, and drowned when he tried to touch it. Nor did he perceive the mirror for what it was: a boundary between reality and fiction. The erotic effect of the image worked on him, but not the formative one.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, when his mother, the nymph Liriope, consulted the seer Tiresias and asked whether her son would live to old age, the answer he gave her was: "If he does not know himself" ("si se non nouerit," 346). Self-knowledge, which supposedly entails wisdom if spiritual, kills when "carnal," erotic; or so it seems.

Yet later on, the opposite seems to be the case. Ovid presents the denial of carnal knowledge as Narcissus's fatal failure: "he falls in love with an image without body" ("spem sine corpore amat" 417). Imputing bodily existence to what is only a visual image – or, in this case, water – he condemns himself ("corpus putat esse quod unda est," 417). This story of "death and the image" is about the denial of the true, natural body.

Prefiguring Narcissus's imminent demise, Ovid enacts his soon-to-occur rigor mortis:

He remains immobile, his face impassive, like a statue sculpted in marble of Paros. (Adstupet ipse sibi uultuque inmotus eodem haeret, ut e Pario formatum marmore signum.) (418–19)

"Ut signum": he becomes like a sign – an iconic sign of a sign – as an enactment of radical constructivism: a character is a construction, not a person. Notwithstanding common lore, Narcissus is not wrong to admire himself: "He admires everything that makes him admirable" ("cunctaque mirator quibus est mirabilis ipse," 424). His tragedy is brought about not by excessive self-love so much as by naive realism: "what you are seeking does not exist" ("quod petit est nusquam, 433). He does, in the end, recognize that he loves himself, and, destroyed by the sense of tragic hopelessness that he has inflicted so often upon others, he begins his slow descent into death. Rather than blaming him – or the narcissism named after the mythical figure – for moral shortcomings or formative failure, I propose that we take Ovid's Narcissus as an allegory of the reader who conflates character and person.

Construction of Content

When a character appears for the first time, we do not yet know very much about it. The qualities that are implied in that first presentation are not all grasped by the reader. In the course of the narrative the relevant characteristics are repeated so often that they emerge more and more clearly. Repetition is thus an important principle of the construction of

the image of a character. Along with repetition, the piling up of data fulfils a function in the construction of an image. The accumulation of characteristics causes odd facts to coalesce, complement one another, and form a whole: the image of a character.

Relations with others also help build the image of a character. The character's relation to itself in an earlier phase also belongs to this category. These relations tend to be processed into similarities and contrasts. A semantic model for describing these categories is a reflection of cultural cognitive habits. Finally, characters change. The changes or transformations that a character undergoes sometimes alter the entire configuration of character as it looked during the analysis of mutual relations. Once a character's most important characteristics have been selected, it is easier to trace transformations and to describe them clearly.

Repetition, accumulation, relations to other characters, and transformations are four different principles that work together to construct the image of a character. Their effect can only be described, however, when the outline of the character has been roughly filled in. This is a constant element in narratological analysis: a dialectic back-and-forth between speculation and verification through open-minded analysis.

Filling In, Fleshing Out

How do we decide which we consider provisionally to be a character's relevant characteristics and which are of secondary importance? One method involves selecting relevant semantic axes. Semantic axes are pairs of contrary meanings. Characteristics like "large" and "small" could be a relevant semantic axis; so could rich-poor, man-woman, kind-unkind, reactionary-progressive. Selecting relevant semantic axes involves focusing, out of all the characteristics mentioned – usually an unmanageably large number – only on those axes that determine the image of the largest possible number of characters, positively or negatively. Of the axes that involve only a few characters or even just one, only those are analysed that are "strong" (striking or exceptional) or that are related to an important event. Such a selection involves the ideological position of the analyst and also points at ideological stances represented in the story, and can therefore be a powerful tool for critique. Once one has chosen the relevant semantic axes, this selection can function as a means of mapping out the similarities and oppositions between the characters. With the help of this information we can determine the qualifications with which a character is endowed. But by whom? By the story, or by

the reader? This is an ongoing question, to be continued with “why?” Because the features are attributed to the character by a focalizer, I use the concept *qualification* rather than “quality,” which suggests they really possess those features.

Some qualifications belong to a social or a family role. In such cases, determination comes into play. A character is, for instance, a farmer and a father. Both roles strongly determine what qualifications he receives. In a case like this, no one will be surprised if the character – in a traditional story – is strong, hard-working, and strict. The opposite of strong is (let’s say for the moment) weak; of hard-working, lazy; of strict, flexible. A character with an equally clear role fills the opposite pole along each of these axes. It will hardly surprise anyone if the farmer is contrasted with his weak, effeminate, artistic, or studious son. In accordance with prejudice, the young man will be lazy. The qualification “flexible” is hardly applicable to the son, who does not occupy the kind of position of power that allows him the choice between strictness and leniency. This pole will be filled – how could it be otherwise? – by his mother. If we now attempted to collect the various qualities we have isolated for all these cliché characters, we would end up with a diagram of the following kind, which, for the sake of clarity, is somewhat crude.

role	character qualification		
	strength	diligence	flexibility
farmer/father	+	+	–
student/son	–	–	0
mother	0	0	+

Here + = positive pole
 – = negative pole
 0 = unmarked

This results in a picture of a set of characters, strongly determined by social and family roles. The father is not only qualified as strong; he is also the most strongly qualified character. Two of the three qualifications mark him as positive; all three apply to him. The mother plays a less prominent part, in accordance with her social position. She is marked by one quality alone, albeit a positive one. The young man is marked twice, both times negatively. The mutual relations between the characters are immediately visible. In this way, more complexly structured sets of characters may also be mapped out.

But binary opposition, as a structure of thought, is problematic. The process of establishing semantic axes of this kind subjects its object – say, a particular semantic field – to three successive logical moves, each of which aggravates the damage: reduction, of an infinitely rich but also chaotic field, to two centres; the articulation of those centres into polar opposites; and the hierarchization of these two into a positive term and a negative one. But here, logic catches up with this structure of thought. For the logic of opposition has it that negativity is by definition vague, if not void. It cannot be defined, and hence it cannot be articulated, and as a result it remains unmanageable.

Once we analyse which characters appear marked by a certain semantic axis, we can set up – using a diagram such as this – a hierarchy of strongly and weakly marked characters. If the same axes with the same values, positive or negative, mark a number of characters, they can be regarded as *synonymous* characters – that is, characters with the same content. Inconspicuous duplications of characters can thus become visible. But this is an overly simplistic two-way division of axes. It can be useful to determine whether differences of degree and modality are evident within each qualification. Degree can transform a polar scale into a sliding scale, from very strong, reasonably strong, not strong enough, somewhat weak, to a weakling. Modality can result in nuance: certainly, probably, perhaps, probably not. Especially if synonymous characters have been discovered, these can allow for a valuable refinement of the descriptive model.

So far, this model is blatantly ideological, not only because of the content of the axes, but also due to the binary structure itself. It depends on our use of it whether it is a mode of projecting ideology on the text or, on the contrary, whether it is a critical tool that lays bare the text's ideological tenets. Moving from the one position to the other is the goal of a critical analysis. To move beyond believing in the truth of such an analysis, and instead to examine the contents of the character further, we can look at the connections among the various characteristics. Are, for instance, certain sexes constantly combined with a certain ideological position? In many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century novels a clear connection can be discerned between the male sex and a military ideology. There is, however, no systematic connection in the same corpus between the female sex and a pacifist attitude, although sometimes there is (e.g., in Corneille's play *Horace*, 1640). When there is not, in female characters the axis militarism–pacifism is not marked. The question then arises whether the fact that a certain character or group of

characters is not marked by a certain axis has any significance. If in a seventeenth-century novel the women do not take a clear stand either for or against war, this can certainly be regarded as significant: it indicates something about their (lack of) social position. The very binary opposition that is such an ideological trap also helps us notice ideological positions.

A character exhibits more than similarities to and differences from other characters. Often, there is a connection or a discrepancy between the character, its situation, and its environment. Finally, the description of a character that has been obtained can be contrasted with an analysis of the functions it performs in a series of events. What kinds of actions does a character perform, and what role does it play in the fabula? This confrontation can yield information about the construction of the story with respect to the fabula. Because of a certain event, alterations may take place in the “build” of a character, and internal relations between the various characters may also change. Conversely, alterations in the make-up of a character may influence events and determine the outcome of the fabula.

Information

How do we come by our information about a character? Either the character itself mentions characteristics explicitly, or we deduce them from what the character does. We refer to a *qualification* when the information is given directly by a character. There are various ways this happens. If a character talks about itself and to itself, it is practising self-analysis. We cannot be sure that it is judging itself correctly; indeed, in literature we encounter many unreliable, deceitful, immature, incompetent, mentally disturbed self-analysts. The genres that are particularly well suited to this manner of qualification are obviously the autobiographical ones: diary, confession, autobiographical novel. In “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843), Edgar Allan Poe allows his character to explain why he is not insane, although he has murdered someone, and these confessions clearly demonstrate, because of their negation, the existence of his insanity.

A character can talk about itself to others. If it receives an answer, the qualification becomes plural, in that it is derived from various sources. If one character says something about another character, this may or may not lead to a confrontation. The character under discussion may or may not be present. If it is, it can react, confirming or denying what has

been said. If it is not, it may or may not already know what people think of it. A third possibility for explicit qualification lies with a third party outside the fabula: the narrator makes statements about the character. This agent, too, may be reliable or unreliable. The party, for instance, that presents Dombey in Dickens's *Dombey and Son* as an entirely decent man is unreliable. This presentation involves irony.

When a character is presented by means of her actions, we deduce from these certain implicit qualifications. Such an implicit, indirect qualification may be labelled a *qualification by function*. The reader's frame of reference becomes a crucial element in picking up such qualifications. A deserter is, say, qualified as either a pacifist or a coward. A revolutionary who participates in a wild party qualifies either as an epicurean or as a hypocrite. Moreover, one character can do something to another that qualifies the latter, or that seduces him into qualifying himself. A detective who unmasks a murderer qualifies that character as a murderer. In such cases, the qualification is explicit. But before the final arrest takes place the detective can lure her suspect into a trap, so that the latter qualifies himself as a murderer. She can also, without words, push a gun to his chest, produce a piece of evidence, and directly qualify him as a murderer.

A good example is the tenacious idea that the biblical character Eve in Genesis 2 and 3 is both derivative, and therefore inferior to her male counterpart, and wicked, because she disobeyed the deity who forbade the humans to eat from the tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden. Both interpretations are anachronistic – the former because the logic of the story is not based on the chronological priority as superior, and the latter because it fills in with a later moralizing interpretation what in the story is very differently interpreted. Both wrong-headed interpretations are based on a plus/minus logic of positive/negative.

If, however, we look at the text in which this story occurs, we immediately notice that the divine act of creation is based on separation but without necessarily attributing the values attached in the traditional interpretation. Separating dark from light, water from earth, animals from humans – all of this is what creation *is*. By this logic, taking a morsel of earth and kneading a human figure out of it is one such separation. This earth creature, named after the whole from which it was taken (Adam, from *ha adama*), is emphatically androgynous. Genesis 1:27 reads: "So God created man(kind) in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." At this point that creation has not yet taken place. This happens in two phases in Genesis 2.

In verse 7, the earth creature is shaped from mud, or clay. Then in verse 22, from the rib of that earth creature a woman is shaped. Her name, Eve, or Hawah, is close to Yaweh, indicating that she, too, is capable of creating, if only in the sense of procreating. If need be, we can say that she is superior to Adam in the sense of more developed; but there is, of course, no such need – why would we take such guidance into social life from a story millennia old? But the opposite – to proclaim woman’s inferiority on the basis of this story – is clearly wrong.

As for the transgression of the interdiction to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Eve’s reasoning is that it is a fruit that will make her wise. Instead of being greedy or lustful, as is often alleged, she endorses the human condition, where procreation compensates for mortality. Adam acknowledges this: “And Adam called his wife’s name Eve; because she was the mother of all living” (3:20). I am turning to this story simply to demonstrate, not that the “truth” of it is different from what we tend to assume, but to show how interpretations, if they are not critical of their own models, lead us astray. The difference between the standard interpretation and this one only goes to show that structural analysis must come with its own critique if it is to avoid the ideological manipulations it is meant to counter. To be critically literate is to see not only what the text does but also what we do with it.

If we now involve the various frequency possibilities as well, further differentiation becomes possible. Every qualification is always durative, so that the frequency possibilities are restricted to two. The implicit qualification through action can be split into potential actions (plans) and realized ones. The first category of information sources leads to explicit qualification, the second to implicit qualification. Explicit qualifications shed more light than implicit ones, but that light need not be reliable. Different readers can interpret implicit, indirect qualifications differently, as in the case of the deserter. But implicit qualifications may also provide a means of uncovering lies and revealing secrets.

On the basis of sources of information, a division can be established, so as to classify the character according to the degree of emphasis with which it is qualified. The more ways in which the qualification is communicated, the more frequently a character is qualified, the more emphasis it receives. In conjunction with the number of semantic axes by which it is marked, a classification of characters may be achieved that is somewhat subtler and more plausible than the old one based on round and flat characters.

It is crucial to take enough distance from this anthropomorphism to understand, for instance, that Proust's Albertine is a paper person in the true sense. Looking more closely at this character makes us aware of the extent to which Proust's modernist masterpiece has strong features of what would later be called postmodernism. Such a close look helps us to understand his novel beyond realist projections and to relativize the periodization that forms the backbone of literary history. Albertine is an object of the protagonist's obsession, and does what he thinks she does; and when he no longer needs her to make his point about the relationship between jealousy, love, and knowledge, she dies in an unlikely accident. Once we accept that she has no psychological depth of her own, we not only grasp the specifically Proustian construction of character – which is crucial for an appreciation of the work – but also the aesthetic and epistemological thrust of the narrative. In contrast, a realistic reading of this character as a “real girl” will only frustrate us, make her irritating and antipathetic, and the CN a selfish monster (this has actually been alleged against Proust in all seriousness). What the character as analogue to humans loses in appeal, it gains in literary excitement. Proust's masterpiece is much more fascinating when it is allowed to play with its paper people than when it is reduced to realist, moralist norms.

Indeed, Proust's Albertine is explicitly presented as flat – a flatness that precisely constitutes the complexity of this figure, if not her “density.” To get a sense of the relevance of character analysis on the basis of an endorsement of its impossibility, let us take a look at how this character emerges. Albertine is first noticed by Marcel, and selected from within a group and chosen to be his love object, on the basis of an image of her at a distance, on the beach. This is no easy selection. The first description of her hardly singles her out:

But I could not arrive at any certainty, for the face of these girls did not fill a constant space, did not present a constant form upon the beach, contracted, dilated, transformed as it was by my own expectancy, by the anxiousness of my desire, or by a sense of self-sufficient well-being, the different clothes they wore, the rapidity of their walk or their stillness. (II 867)

The description of Albertine is not simply an account of the perception of her by the narrator. Others evoke her first – as “the famous ‘Albertine’” (I 552), then as “You've no idea how insolent she is, that child” (I 643).

Both prefigurations, if I may call them that, occur while the narrator is still pining for Gilberte, his first love. The real sighting of Albertine – there is not yet a meeting – occurs in an extended descriptive-reflective passage that takes no less than ten pages, in “Place-names: The Place” of *Within a Budding Grove*.

It begins with “In the midst of all these people” (I 847) and ends when Marcel enters the hotel (“I went indoors,” I 856), with the end of his stroll, hence, in terms of the event in the fabula, quite arbitrarily. This piece is an astonishing allegory of the difficulty of describing because of the impossibility of knowing other people. The problems of *distinction* and its inevitable arbitrariness are at the heart of the event and highlight the fundamental artificiality of character. Let me select just a few moments from this extended passage. The length of the passage is motivated by a struggle to keep abreast of an accelerated temporality that rules the novel’s combined temporalities of fabula, discourse, and reading that the story sums up.

The phrase “*In the midst* of all these people ... the girls *whom I had noticed ...*” introduces a description of the girls’ collective movement through space as they walk towards the narrator. In the fabula the latter is diegetically walking towards, in the text, “speaking” about, and in the story, “reading” the *spectacle* of the girls. (In this analysis, all emphases are added.) When he sees them from closer proximity, the rationale for the collective description is rendered in a combined terminology of classification and aesthetics: “Although each was *of a type* absolutely different from the others, they all had *beauty*; ... I had yet not individualized any of them.” The struggle for distinction is rendered in a nightmare that resembles a parody of descriptive detailing, and explained through the effect of time: “I saw a pallid oval, black eyes, green eyes, *emerge*, I did not know if these were the same that had already charmed me *a moment ago*, I could not relate them to any one girl whom I had set apart from the rest and identified” (847).

The narrator experiences the incapacity to distinguish as a lack (“want”), but also as a source of beauty. Thus he is placed outside of himself and his subjectivity as perceiving agent: “And this *want*, in my vision, of the demarcations which I *should presently* establish between them *permeated* the group with a sort of *shimmering* harmony, the *continuous transmutation* of a fluid, collective and *mobile* beauty” (747–8). The source of beauty is the negation of distinction, yet time lifts a prescriptive finger (“should presently”). Clashing with this routine temporality is the temporality that inheres in the group: “continuous

transmutation," the mobility that is the site of beauty. Clearly, a stable character endowed with permanent beauty is not going to result from this descriptive dystopia.

The rhetorical make-up of this initial stage of the production of the character-effect is reconfirmed throughout the passage (e.g., "to the delight of the other girls, especially of a pair of green eyes in a doll-like face" 849). But even when distinction is achieved, the result is emphatically not closer to an individualizing and stabilizing character description. "By this time their charming features had ceased to be indistinct and jumbled" (850), confirms the narrator in an uncharacteristically short, summing-up sentence, but

I had dealt them *like cards* into so many heaps to compose [...]: the tall one who had just jumped over the old banker; the little one silhouetted against the horizon of sea with her plump and rosy cheeks and green eyes; the one with the straight nose and dark complexion who *stood out among the rest ...*

Curiously, the first act of distinction is hidden in a subclause ("who stood out"), whereas the actual description of the chosen one is couched in an emphatically parallel series ("the one with the straight nose"). The next step is based on the usual (deceptive) appearances and negativity: "a girl with brilliant, laughing eyes and plump, matte cheeks, a black polo-cap crammed on her head, who was pushing a bicycle" is cast as belonging to the popular classes, as being of light virtue, and as rather vulgar. One motivation for the negative judgments that accompany the descriptions – in terms of both social class and ethical judgments – is the continuous adjustment that problematizes appearance. Another, I propose, is to isolate for consideration the ethics of representing the other as such, which ultimately leads to an ontological assessment. Ideological reduction appears, in effect, to result from character description.

But distinction on the level of the fabula – the represented object – is not enough to facilitate a successful emergence of the character. Even after this crucial moment of election, the narrator continues his musings on the impossibility of individualizing:

Though they were now separately identifiable, still the *interplay of their eyes*, animated with self-assurance ... an invisible but harmonious bond, like a *single* warm shadow... making of them a whole as

homogeneous in its parts as it was different from the crowd through which their procession gradually wound." (851)

And for hundreds of pages, the narrator continues to struggle with the impossibility of knowing his elected other.

In *The Prisoner*, Albertine, who has lost her former, fixed quality of the beach photo, consists only of a series of snapshots:

... a person, scattered in space and time, is no longer a woman but a series of events on which we can throw *no light*, a series of insoluble problems. (99–100; emphasis added)

The shift from the typically modernist preoccupation with epistemological uncertainty ("no light") to the ontological doubt that results when one radically thinks through what epistemological doubt entails ("is no longer a woman") announces postmodernism, and the philosophically rich phrase "scattered in time and space" articulates that shift. That "woman" as "other" falls prey to a true lunacy of the snapshot is, of course, no coincidence. This dissolution in visual, flat seriality is only aggravated as Marcel tries to counter it and "fix" Albertine by means of "light" thrown on her, and on paper. Thus she ends up *becoming* (ontology) the sheet on which the *images* (epistemology) of jealousy (psychology) are going to be fixed:

For I possessed in my memory only a series of Albertines, separate from one another, incomplete, a collection of profiles or snapshots, and so my jealousy was restricted to a discontinuous expression, at once fugitive and fixed ... (145–6)

With the word "memory" keeping the issue also on the level of epistemology, ontological "fugitivity" is presented here as a perversion of memory. The final words here – in French, "à la fois fugitive et fixée" – define quite precisely the nature of the series of snapshots and explain the specific use of this poetic in the novel. The importance of eroticism is crucial: the object of this fugitive fixing is the love object of whom the focalizing narrator is unable to assess with certainty the sexual orientation. Obviously, Albertine's "flatness" can in no way be considered a lack of "density." On the contrary, it is of essential importance for this "dense" novel that she be flat. I propose to generalize this. Both *fugitive* – as a being – and *fixed* – in the words of the novel that capture it – the

character is an effect that makes us believe in the human nature of a creature that is constantly resisting that humanity in favour of other important insights it has to offer. This is the game of make-believe in fiction – a game that is, according to the specific insights it produces, truer than truth.

7: Space

Together with character, few concepts deriving from the theory of narrative texts are as self-evident yet have remained so vague as the concept of space. The concept of space is sandwiched between that of focalization, of which the representation of space constitutes a special case, and that of place, a category of fabula elements. It is also, obviously, an important aspect of visuality in narrative.

There are also spatial descriptions generated by the travelling gaze of an external focalizer, who fails to receive recognizable embodiment but in fact anticipates or otherwise represents particular characters' visions. The result is the analogue not of a photograph but of a film; specifically, of that device of the travelling shot that so precisely incorporates the moving image in space. The description of Yonville in *Madame Bovary*, which follows the devastating ending of the first part already quoted, is a case in point. It constitutes the travelling gaze that generates it, or rather, the gaze of the travel guide. That gaze binds character to space.

The procedural description is a typical case of naturalizing mimesis as make-believe. As the character manipulates an object, the latter emerges for the viewer. The beginning of Zola's *L'assommoir* displays an entirely theatricalized fight between two women competing for the man who will bring the downfall of the winner. This is the occasion of the descriptive thrust that conjures up the women, the space of the public laundry pit, the extension of the space through the onlooking crowd, and the bone of contention that structures the fabula; the story can unfold after that. This is an example of how spatial arrangement in the story connects discourse to fabula, an arrangement that can be as artificial as it can be naturalizing. But the world that emerges appears, or is made to appear. In other words, between the naturalization of the fabula world and its theatrical, artificial *mise-en-scène* in the story, there is a fine line that fiction constantly transgresses, leaving it up to the reader to go along in one direction or another.

Places are linked to certain points of perception. These places seen in relation to their perception constitute the story's space. That point of

perception may be a character, which is situated in a space, observes it, and reacts to it. An anonymous point of perception can also dominate the presentation of certain places. The general question concerning the various points of perception, which lies at the root of every presentation, will be discussed later.

Space Perceived

In the story, where space is connected to the characters that live it, the primary aspect of space is the way characters bring their senses to bear on it. Three senses are especially involved in the perceptual representation of space: sight, hearing, and touch. All three participate in the presentation of a space in the story. Shapes, colours, and sizes are perceived visually, always from a particular perspective. Sounds contribute to the presentation of space. If a character hears a low murmuring, it is still at a certain distance from the speakers. If it can understand word for word what is being said, then it is situated much nearer, in the same room, for instance, or behind a thin screen. A church bell sounding in the distance increases the space; suddenly perceived whispering points to the proximity of the whisperer. Third, there is touch. Tactile perceptions usually have little spatial significance. Touch indicates proximity. If a character feels walls on all sides, then it is confined in a very small space. Tactile perception is often used in a story to indicate the material, the substance of objects. Smell can contribute to the characterization of space but less obviously to its experience *qua* space. Taste is rarely relevant in this context.

With the help of these three senses, two kinds of relations pertain between characters and space. First, the space in which the character is situated, or is precisely not situated, is regarded as the *frame*. Second, the way in which that space is filled can also be indicated. A character can be situated in a space it experiences as secure, while earlier on, outside that space, it felt unsafe.

- a For hours, he wandered through the dark forest. All of a sudden, he saw a light. He hurried towards the house and knocked on the door. With a sigh of relief, he shut the door behind him a moment later.

Both inner and outer space function, in this instance, as a frame. Their opposition gives both spaces their meaning.

These meanings are not fixed. An inner space is often also experienced as unsafe, but with a somewhat different meaning. The inner

space can, for instance, be experienced as confinement, while the outer space represents liberation and, consequently, security.

- b With a sigh of relief he presently closed the door behind himself.
Free at last!

In both examples, the frame has a highly symbolic function. Of course, this is far from always the case. But culturally, it often is, and the boundary that delimits the frame can be heavily invested with meaning. Narratives can endorse that meaning, reject or change it, or play on different ways in which characters are situated in relation to it. And narrative quite frequently feeds off the horror of the invasion of space that leads to destruction. Often, the rape of women is allegorically related to invasion and destruction of space. The more allegorical this fable, the more political becomes its moral.

The objects that can be found in space determine the filling in of that space. Objects have spatial status. They determine the spatial effect of the room by their shape, measurements, and colours. A cluttered room seems smaller, a sparsely furnished room bigger than in fact it is. The way in which objects are arranged in a space, the configuration of objects, also influences the perception of that space. In some stories, an object or objects are presented in detail. In other stories, space may be presented in a vague and implicit manner.

Content and Function

The semantic content of spatial aspects can be constructed in the same way as the semantic content of a character. Here, too, we find a preliminary combination of determination, repetition, accumulation, transformation, and the relations between various spaces.

Determination is again achieved on the basis of the reader's frame of reference. When a certain event is situated in Dublin, this will mean something different to the reader who is well acquainted with the city than to the reader who only knows that Dublin is a large city. The oppressive atmosphere of a dwelling in one of the poorer districts of Dublin is presented in a fairly detailed way in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Those who are already familiar with that atmosphere will immediately be able to visualize much more, in more precise images. On the other hand, the unknowing reader has the freedom to imagine, to construct the kitchen and parlour and test that construction against information provided as we read on.

Determination functions here too on the basis of the general application of characteristics. One big city has a number of characteristics in common with every other big city. This also applies to the countryside, a village, a street, a house, and every general category. The more precise the presentation of a space, the greater the number of specific qualities added to the general ones, which then become steadily less dominating. But general characteristics don't cease to function. Only by means of general characteristics is it possible to create an image at all.

Spaces function in a story in different ways. On the one hand, they are only frames, places of action. In this capacity a more or less detailed presentation will lead to a picture of that space. The space can also remain entirely in the background. In many cases, however, space is thematized: it becomes an object of presentation itself. Space thus becomes an acting place rather than the place of action. It influences the fabula, and the fabula becomes subordinate to the presentation of space. The fact that "this is happening here" is just as important as "the way it is here," which allows these events to happen. In both cases, where both frame-space and thematized space are concerned, space can function steadily or dynamically. A steady space is a fixed frame, thematized or not, within which the events take place. A dynamically functioning space is a factor that allows for the movement of characters. Characters walk, and therefore need a path. They travel, and so need a large space, countries, seas, and air. The hero of a fairy tale has to traverse a dark forest to prove his courage. So there is a forest.

Such a space is present not as a fixed frame but rather as a passage to be taken, and can vary greatly. From a fast train, the traveller does not see the trees separately, but rather as one long, blurred line. In Proust there are masterful passages that explore in detail how speed changes the vision of, and thereby the way of being in, space. Or the sound of a bird suddenly changes the space radically. Space is indicated exactly for this reason, as a space in which the traveller is moving. To put it differently, a traveller in narrative is in a sense always an allegory of the travel that narrative is.

Strategically, the movement of characters can constitute a transition from one space to another. Often, one space will be the other's opposite. A person is travelling, for instance, from a negative to a positive space – or vice versa. The space need not be the goal of that move. The latter may have quite a different aim, with space representing an important or an unimportant interim between departure and arrival, difficult or easy to traverse.

The character that is moving towards a goal need not always arrive in another space. In many travel stories, the movement is a goal in itself. It is expected to result in a change, liberation, introspection, wisdom, or knowledge. It tends to be gender-specific as well: in traditional genres, men travel, whereas women stay at home. As a result, the development of epic literature is bound up with men, that of lyric literature with women. This is not to say that narrative is a men's mode. There is no direct line from epic to the novel. On the contrary, the case can be made that the novel emerged as a women's genre. In this respect, recent revivals of epic emerging out of postcolonial recuperations of space offer a great challenge to any deterministic presuppositions about the development of genres. Epic tends to become bound up less with a glorious mythical past of conquest than with a resistance to such conquests and a renewed attempt of the former colonized to *take* place – that is, to provide the occupied space with a fabula that affirms their own belonging to it. Space then, becomes a site of memory.

If such an experiential aim is lacking, even implicitly, the movement, totally aimless, can function simply as a presentation of space. The move can be a circular one: the character returns to its point of departure. In this way, space is presented as a labyrinth, as unsafety, as confinement. The question of how space is experienced by the character in relation to whom it is presented is more important than generalizing answers.

The title of the novel *Migas de pan* (see above) alludes to the fairy tale of Tom Thumb, who tried to make a trail of bread crumbs to find his way back home but didn't think of the birds who would eat the crumbs. This allusion is more relevant than the difference in genre would suggest. The powerlessness of the child, the meagre bits of sustenance, and the birds as others who would take the last morsels of food from a dying man: all of this reprises the mode of tragedy in the novel of the twice-sequestered Josué. Even the repetition occurs in both stories – the first time Tom and his siblings were taken away into the forest to get lost, he used pebbles; then it happened again, and he used the crumbs, to no avail. In *Migas*, similarly, there is the repetition of, first, the concentration camp, which Josué survived, then the capture by *guerilleros*, from which the novel does not let him re-emerge.

I call on this novel again in this section because it is such an extreme instance of the deployment of space to build the story. Although we know quite early on that the story's present concerns the abduction of the father, the novel as a whole primarily tells of the family's waiting, especially the son's. Samuel is the principal character. Although he knew the events surrounding both his parents' experiences during the war, now that he is the man of the house, negotiating with the abductors

by phone and spending his time awaiting and dreading phone calls, the actual story is that of his relationship to the house, mediated by the father's occupation of its rooms for museifying purposes. One room is devoted to the theatre of time – I have quoted some passages from that chapter. Another room is a hospital for words. Josué perceived words as sick people, and he wanted this hospital to help heal words that had been damaged by lies, hatred, and violence. Since the book in which this strange story is presented also consists of words, the “hospital” and its doctor – Josué – must be taken seriously as a dramatization of a poetological vision translated into spatial sections, or galleries.

The children learned to wash their hands before entering – also their words. Josué had established the rules:

“Necesitamos pulir las palabras, desinfectarlas, porque ellas también se contaminan. Nos corresponde poner el pasado delante de nosotros, para comprenderlo y curarlo. Debemos situarnos en aquel lugar donde el futuro se convierte en presente” (We must clean and disinfect the words, because they, too, contaminate one another. We must place the past in front of us, in order to understand and cure it. We must place ourselves in that place where the future becomes the present. 171)

This vision of the father encompasses an attempt to “psychoanalyse” words – to use words in order to clean them of abuse.

Another room is devoted to objects. These too are in need of help, and again that help is a question of words. They are attached to words, and hence the same need for curing applies. This chapter, “Salón del Dorado” (The Room of Gold), evokes conversations among objects. Ashes need to talk (183), says Josué to his bemused children. In the chapter devoted to a space with a made-up name, “El *Memoratro* o el teatro de la memoria” (The *Memorater* or the Theatre of Memory), the stories of campmates are being told. Comparing his gallery to the Palace of the Inquisition in Cartagena where Josué once took his children on a holiday, he calls the latter space a “theatre of forgetting,” a space where a concerted effort is being made to erase the horrors. On the usefulness of the self-made word “*Memoratro*,” Samuel concludes, in a flash of insight into what mattered to his father and why:

Para Josué era importante tener una palabra, volver palpable la memoria y establecer un espacio para activarla. (For Josué it was

important to hold a word, to make palpable the memory and to establish a space to activate it; 217)

This relation to space and to words that lay dormant until they become new, active, cured of abuse, is what this novel stages.

Relations to Other Aspects

Relations between the various aspects on the story level arise because of the way in which they are combined and presented. The same holds for relations between aspects and the various elements of the fabula. The relations between space and event become clear when we think of well-known, stereotypical combinations: declarations of love by moonlight on a balcony, high-flown reveries on a mountain-top, a rendezvous at an inn, ghostly appearances among ruins, brawls in cafes. In medieval literature, love scenes frequently take place in a special space, appropriate to the occasion, the so-called *locus amoenus*, consisting of a meadow, a tree, a running stream. Such a fixed combination is called a *topos* – the Greek word for place. In the literature of later periods, too, certain combinations occur that are sometimes characteristic of a writer, sometimes of a movement, and sometimes even of a novel. But the expectation that a clearly marked space will function as the frame of a suitable event can also be frustrated.

The most obvious place to expect examples of the relations between space and character in modern literature would seem to be the naturalistic novel, since it claims to depict the influence of the environment on people. A person's living space is connected to his character, his way of life, and his possibilities. In this sense, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* can also be regarded as naturalistic, although the introspective nature of the narration tips it into modernism. Stephen Dedalus is obviously a product of impoverished circumstances. His way of life, his poor diet, his incessant scratching because of lice, his family's constant moves to ever-shabbier neighbourhoods are in complete accordance with the space in which he lives. The spatial position in which characters are situated at a certain moment often influences their mood. A space situated high up sometimes causes spirits to be high, so that the character is exalted (Stendhal). A highly situated space, where the character happens not to be, but that it is looking up to, or with which it is confronted in some other way, can depress the character by its very inaccessibility (Kafka, *The Castle*).

The relationship between time and space is important for the narrative rhythm. When a space is presented in great detail, an interruption of the time sequence is unavoidable, unless the perception of the space takes place gradually (in time) and can therefore be regarded as an event. When a character enters a church to sightsee and the interior of the church is presented during its tour, there is no interruption. Spatial indications are always durative (an extreme case of iteration). After all, a permanent object is always involved. In this sense too, the chronology is always disrupted by spatial indications. Moreover, information concerning space is often repeated, to emphasize the stability of the frame, as opposed to the transitory nature of the events that occur within it.

Information

As I have said before, space is always implicitly necessary for every activity performed by a character. If a character is cycling, we know it is outside and is riding on a path or a road. We assume that it sleeps in a bed. And if the information is added that it is sleeping soundly, then we assume that the bed is warm and comfortable.

There are various ways to explicitly present information about space. Sometimes a very short indication, without details, is sufficient:

c At home, John puts down the shopping-bag, with a sigh.

d As soon as he had shut the door, John placed the shopping bag underneath the coat rack.

In c the indication of space is minimal; we only know that John is again inside, in his own home. Earlier presentations of that house will determine whether we are able to visualize in a more or less detailed way what the space is like in which he is situated. In d we know more, even if this indication is also quite brief. We know that, in the context of Western European floor plans, he is in the hall and that he has not, for instance, walked straight through to the kitchen. So he came in through the front door. When separate segments of narrative are devoted to the presentation of information about space alone, we have descriptions. The space is then not simply indicated in passing, but is an explicit object of presentation.

Finally, a space is sometimes indicated explicitly, not because of an action taking place in it, but because of an action performed with it. An expression like "we crashed into a tree" belongs to this category

of indications. People do walk into walls, literally and figuratively, if a space is too small, confined. Other examples are to scale a fence, to escape from prison, to lock someone in, to hide something, to clear a path through the jungle, to ascend to heaven, to go to hell. The effect of information about space is not determined solely by the way in which it is conveyed. The distance from which the space is presented also affects the image that emerges. If a space is presented from far away, an overview of the whole is usually given, without details. Conversely, a space that is presented from nearby will be described in a detailed way, but the overview will be missing.

Finally, both the image of a character and the image of a space offered to the reader are determined by the way in which the character and the space are seen. The question "Who is seeing?" is therefore an important aspect. This has already been noted several times. Now, finally, we can consider the key aspect of the story: focalization.

8: Focalization

Background

Whenever events are presented, it is from within a certain vision. A point of view is chosen, a certain way of seeing or otherwise perceiving things, a certain angle, whether real historical facts or fictitious events are concerned. Storytelling is inevitably slanted or subjective in nature, and to deny this constitutes a dubious political act, for it means denying narrative responsibility. It is of course possible to attempt to give an objective picture of the facts. Objectivity is an attempt to present only what is perceived: all comment is shunned, and implicit interpretation is avoided. Perception, however, is a psychosomatic process that is strongly dependent on the position of the perceiving body; a small child sees things in a totally different way from an adult, if only as far as scale is concerned, but also due to the knowledge and experience that inform understanding. The degree to which one is familiar with what one sees also influences perception.

Perception depends on so many factors that aiming for objectivity is pointless. To mention only a few factors: one's position with respect to the perceived object, the angle of the light, the distance, previous knowledge, psychological attitude towards the object – all these things and more affect the picture one forms and passes on to others. Storytelling is one form of such passing on. In a story, elements of the fabula are

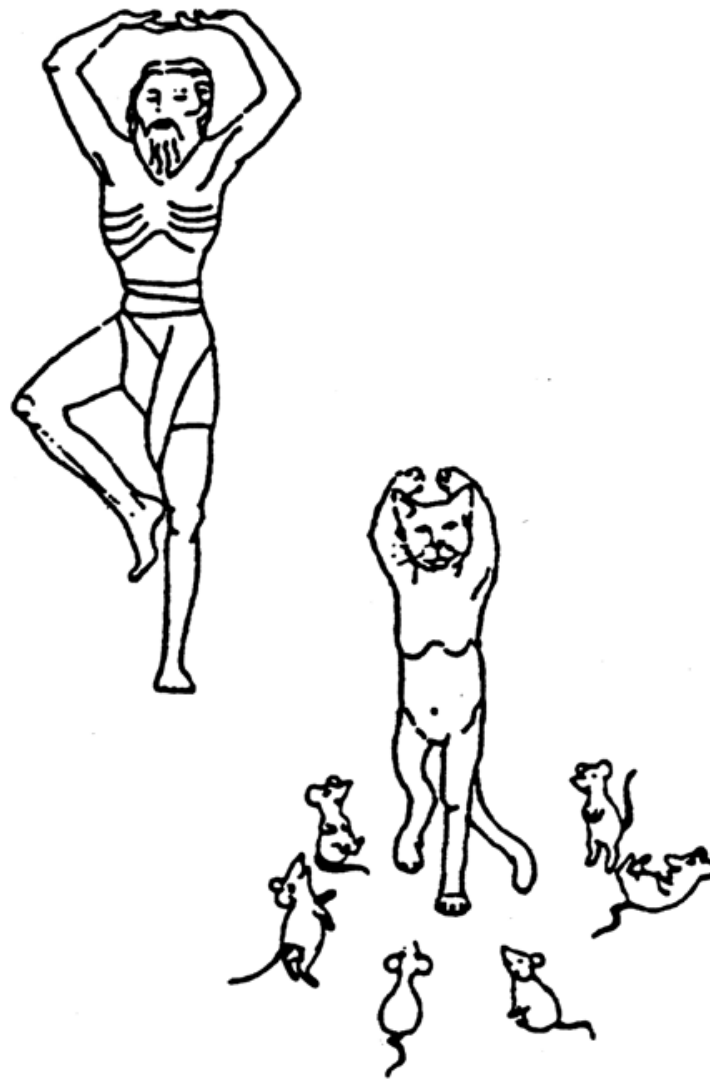
therefore necessarily presented in a certain way. Through the mediation of the text we are confronted with a vision of the fabula. What is this vision like, and where does it come from? These are the questions that will be discussed in what follows. I will refer to the relations between the elements presented and the vision through which they are presented as *focalization*. Focalization is, then, the relation between the vision and what is seen, perceived.

The Focalizer

One visual example will clarify the concept at stake in this section. In southern India, at Mahaballipuram, is what is said to be the largest bas-relief in the world, the seventh-century *Arjuna's Penance*. At the upper left, the wise man Arjuna is depicted in a yoga position. At the bottom right stands a cat. Around the cat are a number of mice. The mice are laughing. It is a strange image, consisting of disconnected elements – that is, until the spectator interprets the signs. The interpretation runs as follows. Arjuna is in a yoga position and is meditating to win Lord Siva's favour. The cat, impressed by the beauty of absolute calm, imitates Arjuna. Now the mice realize they are safe. They laugh. Without this interpretation, there is no relation between the parts of the relief. Within this interpretation, the parts form a meaningful narrative.

The carving is quite funny – an effect evoked by the narrativity of the picture. The spectator sees the relief as a whole. Its contents include a succession in time. First, Arjuna assumes the yoga position; then the cat imitates him; then the mice start laughing. These three successive events are logically related in a causal chain. According to every definition I know, that means this is a fabula.

But there is more. The events are chronologically in succession and logically in a causal relation. Furthermore, they can only occur through the semiotic activity of the actors. And the comical effect can only be explained when this particular mediation is analysed. We laugh because we can identify with the mice. Seeing what they see, we realize with them that a meditating cat is a contradiction; cats hunt, and only wise men meditate. Following the chain of events in reverse, we also arrive at the next one by perceptual identification: the cat has brought about the event for which he is responsible because he has seen Arjuna do something. This chain of perceptions also runs in time, sequentially: the wise man sees nothing, since he is totally absorbed in his meditation; the cat has seen Arjuna and now sees nothing more of this world;



(drawing: Fransje van Zoest)

the mice see the cat and Arjuna, and that is why they know they are safe. Another interpretation is that the cat is pretending, but not really absorbed in meditation; this doesn't weaken my statements but only adds an element of suspense to the fabula. Indeed, the mice are laughing because of that very fact, finding the imitation a ridiculous enterprise. The spectator sees more. She sees the mice, the cat, and the wise man. She laughs at the cat, and she laughs sympathetically with the mice, whose pleasure is comparable to that felt by a successful scoundrel.

This example illustrates quite clearly the theory of focalization. Incidentally, it also suggests that, and how, narratological concepts are relevant for the analysis of visual narrative. We can view the bas-relief as a (visual) sign. The elements of this sign – the standing Arjuna, the standing cat, the laughing mice – only have spatial relations to one another. The elements of the fabula – Arjuna assumes a yoga position, the cat assumes a yoga position, the mice laugh – do not form a coherent significance as such. The relations between the sign, the relief, and its contents – the fabula – can only be established through the mediation of an interjacent layer, the *vision* of the events. The cat sees Arjuna. The mice see the cat. The spectator sees the mice who see the cat who has seen Arjuna. And the spectator sees that the mice are right. Every verb of perception – to see – in this report indicates an activity of focalization. Every verb of action indicates an event.

Focalization is the relationship between the vision, the agent that sees, and that which is seen. This relationship is a component of the content of the narrative text: A says that B sees what C is doing. Sometimes that difference is void – for example, when the reader is presented with a vision as directly as possible. The different agents then cannot be isolated; they coincide. That is a form of “stream of consciousness.” But the speech act of narrating is still different from the vision, the memories, the sense perceptions, and the thoughts that are being told. And that vision cannot be conflated with the events they focus, orient, interpret. Consequently, focalization belongs in the story, in the layer between the linguistic text and the fabula. Because the definition of focalization refers to a relationship, each pole of that relationship, the subject and the object of focalization, must be studied separately. The subject of focalization, the focalizer, is the point from which the elements are viewed. That point can lie within a character (i.e., it can be an element of the fabula) or outside it.

If the focalizer coincides with the character, that character will have an advantage over the other characters. The reader watches with the character’s eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character. Such a character-bound focalizer –which we could label, for convenience’s sake, CF – brings about bias and limitation. In Henry James’s *What Maisie Knew* from 1897, the focalization, whenever it is character-bound, lays almost entirely with Maisie, a little girl who understands little about the problematic relations transpiring around her. Consequently, the reader is shown the events through the limited vision of the girl and only gradually realizes what is actually

going on. But the reader is not a little girl. He does more with the information he receives than Maisie does; he interprets it differently. Where Maisie sees only a strange gesture, the reader knows he is dealing with an erotic one. The difference between the childish vision of the events and the interpretation the adult reader gives them determines the novel's special effect. But the narrator is not a child any more than the reader is. In his time, James was perhaps the most radical of experimenters, whose project was to demonstrate that, in the terminology of this book, narrator and focalizer are not to be conflated.

CF can vary. It can shift from one character to another, even if the narrator remains constant. In such cases, we may be given a good picture of the origins of a conflict. We are shown how differently the various characters view the same facts. This technique can result in neutrality towards all the characters. Nevertheless, there usually is no doubt in our minds which character should receive the most attention and sympathy.

When focalization lies with one character that participates in the fabula as an actor, we can refer to *internal focalization*. We can then indicate by means of the term *external focalization* that an anonymous agent, situated outside the fabula, is functioning as focalizer. Such an external, non-character-bound focalizer is abbreviated EF. In the following fragment from the opening of Doris Lessing's *The Summer Before the Dark* we see the focalization move from EF to CF.

b A woman stood on her back step, arms folded, waiting.

Thinking? She would not have said so. She was trying to catch hold of something, or to lay it bare so that she could look and define; for some time now she had been "trying on" ideas like so many dresses off a rack. She was letting words and phrases as worn as nursery rhymes slide around her tongue: for towards the crucial experiences custom allots certain attitudes, and they are pretty stereotyped. *Ah yes, first love! ... Growing up is bound to be painful! ... My first child, you know ... But I was in love! ... Marriage is a compromise ... I am not as young as I once was.*

From sentence 2 onwards the contents of what the character experiences are given. A switch thus occurs from an external focalizer (EF) to an internal one (CF). An alternation between external and internal focalizers, between EF and CF, is visible in many stories. Also, a number of characters can alternate as CF focalizer; in such cases, it can be useful to indicate the various characters in the analysis by their initials, so that one can retain a clear overview of the division of focalization. *Of Old People* is

an example of a story in which a great many characters act as focalizers. However, the characters do not carry an equal load; some focalize often, others only a little, some do not focalize at all. It is also possible for an entire story to be focalized by an EF. The narrative can then appear objective, because the events are not presented from the point of view of the characters. In such cases the focalizer's bias is not absent, since there is no such thing as objectivity in storytelling, but it remains implicit.

The Focalized Object

In *Of Old People* Harold is usually the focalizer when the events in the Indies are being focalized; Lot often focalizes his mother, mama Ottilie, and it is mainly because of this that we receive a fairly likeable image of her despite her unfriendly behaviour. The combination of a focalizer and a focalized object can be constant to a large degree (Harold–Indies; Lot–mama Ottilie), or it can vary greatly. Analysis of such fixed or loose combinations matters because the focalizer shapes the image we receive of the object. Conversely, the image a focalizer presents of an object says something about the focalizer itself. Where focalization is concerned, the following questions are relevant.

- 1 What does the character focalize: what is it aimed at?
- 2 How does it do this: with what attitude does it view things?
- 3 Who focalizes it: whose focalized object is it?

What is focalized by a character F? It need not be a character. Objects, landscapes, events, in short all of the elements are focalized, either by an EF or by a CF. Because of this fact alone, we are presented with a certain interpretation of the elements that is far from neutral or innocent. The degree to which a presentation includes an opinion can, of course, vary: the degree to which the focalizer points out its interpretative activities and makes them explicit also varies. Compare, for instance, the following descriptions of place, both from Dutch 1960s novels:

- c Behind the round and spiny forms around us in the depth endless coconut plantations stretch far into the hazy blue distance where mountain ranges ascend ghostlike. Closer, at my side, a ridged and ribbed violet grey mountainside stretches upward with a saw-tooth silhouette combing the white cloudy sky. Dark shadows of the clouds lie at random on the slopes as if capricious dark-grey pieces

of cloth have been dropped on them. Close by, in a temple niche, Buddha sits meditating in an arched window of shadow. A dressing-jacket of white exudation of bird-droppings on his shoulders. Sunshine on his hands which lie together perfectly at rest.

Jan Wolkers, *The Kiss*

d Then we must first describe heaven, of course. Then the hundreds of rows of angels are clad in glorious shiny white garments. Every one of them has long, slightly curly fair hair and blue eyes. There are no men here. "How strange that all angels should be women." There are no dirty angels with seductive panties, garterbelts and stockings, not to mention bras. I always pictured an angel as a woman who presents her breasts as if on saucers, with heavily made-up eyes, and a bright red mouth, full of desire, eager to please, in short, everything a woman should be. (Formerly, when I was still a student, I wanted to transform Eve into a real whore. I bought her everything necessary, but she did not want to wear the stuff.)

J.M.A. Biesheuvel, "Faust," *The Way to the Light*

In both cases, a CF is clearly involved; both focalizers may be localized in the character "L." In c, the spatial position of the CF ("I") is especially striking. It is situated on a high elevation, considering the wide prospect it has. The words "around us," combined with "in the depth," stress that high position. The proximity of the niche with the Buddha statue makes clear that CF ("I") is situated in an Eastern temple (the Burubudur, in fact), so that "the round and spiny form" (must) refer to the temple roof. The presentation of the whole – temple roof and landscape – seems fairly impersonal. If the CF ("I") had not been identified by the use of *deixis*, through the first-person pronouns in "at my side" and "around us," this would have seemed, on the face of it, an objective description, perhaps taken from a pamphlet or geography book.

On closer analysis, this is not the case. Whether the CF ("I") is explicitly named or not, the internal position of the focalizer is, in fact, already established by expressions such as "close by," "closer," and "at my side," which underline the proximity of the place to the perceiver. "Behind" and "far into" indicate a specification of the spatial perspective in the pictorial sense. But more happens here. Without appearing to do so, this presentation interprets. This is clear from the use of metaphors, which points to the fact that the CF ("I") is attempting to reduce the objects it sees, which impress it a good deal, to human,

everyday proportions. In this way, the CF ("I") is undoubtedly trying to fit the object into its own realm of experience. Images like "sawtooth," "combing," and "capricious dark-grey pieces of cloth," and clichés like "mountain ranges," bear this out. "Dressing-jacket of white exudation of bird-droppings" is the clearest example. The image also exhibits an association mechanism. With the word "dressing-jacket," the Buddha's statue becomes human, and as soon as it is human, the white layer on its head could easily be dandruff, a possibility suggested by the word "exudation." The realistic nature of the presentation – CF ("I") does see the landscape – is restored immediately afterwards by the information about the real nature of the white layer: it is bird droppings. Thus, what we have here is the presentation of a landscape that is realistic, reflecting what is actually perceived and at the same time interpreting the view in a specific way so that the character can assimilate it.

Example d shows to a certain extent the same characteristics. Here too an impressive space is humanized. However, the CF ("I") observes the object less and interprets it more. This passage concerns a fantasy object with which the CF ("I") is sketchily familiar from religious literature and painting, but which it can adapt as much as it wishes, to its own taste. This is what it does, and its taste is clear, and clearly specific, bound to gender. Here too an association mechanism is visible. From the traditional image of angels implied in the second or third sentence, the CF ("I") moves to the assumption that angels are women. Against the traditional image of asexual male angels, the CF ("I") sets up, in contrast, its own female image.

And even before the reader grasps that a link is thus being forged with another tradition – that of the opposition angel-whore, in which "angel" is used in a figurative sense – the word "whore" itself appears in the text. Here the interpretive mode of the description manifests itself clearly. The solemn "we" of the beginning contrasts sharply with the personal turn the description takes. The humour here is based on the contrast between the solemn-impersonal and the personal-everyday. Humour may make one uncomfortable if one is not happy with what is being laughed at or feels excluded, but it is still humour. This suggests a distinction between "inclusive" and "exclusive" humour. The former includes the reader; the latter excludes her. More precisely, the inclusion or exclusion also concerns the focalizer. If this agent appeals to group formation, the reader has the power to accept or reject belonging to the group thus formed.

The interpretive focalization is emphasized in several ways. The sentence in quotation marks is presented as a reaction to the sentence preceding it.

Here, the interpreting focalizer makes an explicit entrance. Later this is stressed again: “not to mention” is a colloquial expression and points at a personal subject, expressing an opinion. “I always pictured an angel as ...” accentuates even more strongly that a personal opinion is involved.

The way in which an object is presented gives information about the object itself as well as about the focalizer. These two descriptions give even more information about the CF (“I”) than about the objects – more about the way they experience nature (c) or women (d), respectively, than about the Burubudur temple and heaven. In this respect, it doesn’t matter whether the object actually exists or is part of a fictitious fabula, or whether it is a fantasy created by the character and so a doubly fictitious object. In both fragments the comparison with the object referred to served only to motivate the interpretation by the CF (“I”). The internal structure of the descriptions provides in itself sufficient clues about the degree to which one CF (“I”) showed a similarity to and differed from the other.

These two examples indicate yet another distinction. In c the object of the focalization is perceptible. The CF (“I”) sees something that is outside itself. This is not always the case. An object can also be visible only within the head, mind, or feelings of the CF – all terms that project human features and reactions onto a paper person. And only those who have access to that character’s inside can perceive anything. This perceiver cannot be another character, at least not according to the classical rules of the narrative genre, but it might possibly be an EF. Such a non-perceptible object occurs in cases where, for instance, the contents of a character’s dream are presented. Concerning the heaven in d, we can only learn whether that object is perceptible or not perceptible when we know how the fragment fits into its context. If the “I,” together with another person – a devil, for instance – is on a journey to heaven, then we will have to accept the first part of the description, until the sentence in quotation marks, as perceptible.

Thus, our criterion is that within the fabula another character should also be able to perceive the object; if such objects are the dreams, fantasies, thoughts, or feelings of a character, then these objects can be part of the category of non-perceptible objects. This distinction can be indicated by adding to the notation of the focalizer a “p” or a “np.” For b we end up with CF (woman)–np; for c, CF (“I”)–p, and, for d, CF (“I”)–np. This distinction too gives insight into the power structure between the characters. When in a conflict situation one character is allotted both CF–p and CF–np, and the other exclusively CF–p, then the first character has the advantage as a party in the conflict. It can give the reader

insight into its feelings and thoughts, while the other character cannot communicate anything.

Moreover, the other character will not have the insight that the reader receives, so that it cannot react to the feelings of the other (which it does not know), cannot adapt itself to them or oppose them. Such an inequality in position between characters is obvious in so-called first-person novels; in other kinds this inequality is not always as clear to the reader. Yet the latter is manipulated by it in forming an opinion about the various characters. Consequently, the focalization has a strongly manipulative effect. Colette's 1933 novel *The Cat*, already mentioned, provides a strong case: the reader is manipulated, practically by this device alone, into taking the man's side against his wife.

In this respect, the point is to keep sight of the difference between the spoken and unspoken words of the characters. Spoken words are audible to others and thus are perceptible when the focalization lies with someone else. Unspoken words – thoughts, internal monologues – no matter how extensive, are not perceptible to other characters. Here too lies a possibility for manipulation, which is often used. Readers are given elaborate information about the thoughts of a character, which the other characters do not hear. When these thoughts are placed between sections of dialogue, readers often do not realize how much less the other character knows than they do. An analysis of the perceptibility of the focalized objects supplies insight into these objects' relationships.

Levels of Focalization

Compare the following sentences:

- e Mary participates in the rally.
- f I saw that Mary participated in the rally.
- g Michele saw that Mary participated in the rally.

In all three sentences it is stated that Mary participated in the rally. That is a clearly perceptible fact. We assume that there is an agent which is doing the perceiving and whose perceptions are being presented to the reader. In f this is an "I," in g it is Michele. In e no party is indicated. Consequently, we assume that there is an external focalizer situated outside the fabula. This could be an EF or a CF ("I"), which remains

implicit in this sentence but manifests itself elsewhere. We can thus analyse:

e EF–p

f CF("I")–p

g CF (Michele)–p

The dash indicates the relation between the subject and the object of focalization. However, the difference between these sentences has not yet been expressed completely. Sentences f and g are complex sentences. The focalization, too, is complex. The analysis, as it is given here, only applies to the subordinate clause. In f it is stated that "I" saw, and in g that Michele saw. Who focalized that section? Either an EF or a CF. We can only conclude that from the rest of the story. For f the possibilities are:

- 1 EF–[np CF ("I")–p]: an external focalizer focalizes the CF ("I"), which sees. Seeing is a non-perceptible action, in contrast to looking, so the complex focalized object is np. That object consists itself of a focalizer, CF ("I"), which sees something that is perceptible.
- 2 CF ("I")–[np CF ("I")–p]: a so-called "first person narrative," in which the external focalizer remembers afterwards that at a certain moment in the fabula, it saw Mary participating in a rally.

The first possibility exists in theory but will not easily occur, unless the sentence is in direct speech and the CF ("I") can be identified as one of the persons speaking (temporarily). In g only the first formula is possible: EF–[np CF (Michele)–p]. This is easy to see once we realize that a personal focalizer cannot perceive a non-perceptible object, unless it is part of that object, is the same "person."

Two conclusions can be drawn from this. First, it appears that various focalization levels can be distinguished; second, where the focalization level is concerned, there is no fundamental difference between a "first-person narrative" and a "third-person narrative." When EF appears to yield focalization to a CF, what is really happening is that the vision of the CF is being given within the all-encompassing vision of the EF. In fact, the latter always keeps the focalization, in which the focalization of a CF may be embedded as object. This too is understandable in terms of the general principles of narratology. When we try to reflect someone

else's point of view, we can only do so insofar as we know and understand that point of view. That is why there is no difference in focalization between a "first-person narrative" and a "third-person narrative." In a "first-person narrative" too an external focalizer – usually the "I" grown older – gives its vision of a fabula in which it participated earlier as an actor, from the outside. At some moments it can present the vision of its younger alter ego, so that a CF is focalizing on the second level.

If we wish to include the question of levels in the analysis, we can use an elaborate system of notation, as I have done here. That is useful if we wish to know what the relationship between the various focalizers is like: Who allows whom to watch whom? If, however, we are only concerned with the relationship between the subject and the object of the focalization – for instance, in f between CF ("I") and Mary, or in g between CF (Michele) and Mary – then it is easier to remind ourselves that we are dealing with an embedded focalization, because at any moment the narrative may return to the first level. In that case, it is simple to indicate the level with a number following the F. For f this would be CF₂ ("I")–p and for g CF₂ (Michele)–p.

Briefly, there is always one sentence that differs from the other two. Thus e differs from f and g in focalization level. Consequently, focalization in e is singular and in f and g it is complex. And e and f differ from g as far as "person" is concerned. In both cases it can be an EF or a CF ("I"). Finally, e and g differ from f because in f an EF cannot simply be assumed without doubt. This is only possible if the sentence is in direct speech.

We assume, therefore, a first level of focalization (F₁) at which the focalizer is external. This external focalizer delegates focalization to an internal focalizer, the focalizer on the second level (F₂). In principle, more levels are possible. In these sample sentences it is clear where the focalization is transferred from the first to the second level. The verb form "saw" indicates that. Such markers of shifts in level we call *attributive signs*. These are signs that indicate the shift from one level to another. These signs can remain implicit. Sometimes we can only deduce them from other, less clear information. In example c, the description of the view on and from the Burubudur, we needed the preceding passage to find the sign with which the shift was indicated explicitly. In d a whole sentence – "Then we must first describe heaven of course" – is used to indicate that the internal CF is now going to give its own vision of heaven. Verbs like "see" and "hear," in short all verbs that communicate perception, can function as explicit attributive signs.

There is yet another possibility. The external EF can also watch along with a person, without leaving focalization entirely to a CF. This happens when an object (that a character can perceive) is focalized but nothing clearly indicates whether it is actually perceived. This procedure is comparable to free indirect speech, in which the narrating party approximates as closely as possible the character's own words without letting it speak directly. An example of such a free indirect focalization – or rather, ambiguous focalization – is the beginning of Chekhov's story "Lady with Lapdog":

h 1 The appearance on the front of a new arrival – a lady with a lapdog – became the topic of general conversation. 2 Dmitri Dmitrich Gurov, who had been a fortnight in Yalta and got used to its ways, was also interested in new arrivals. 3 One day, sitting on the terrace of Vernet's restaurant, he saw a young woman walking along the promenade; she was fair, not very tall, and wore a toque; behind her trotted a white pomeranian. 4 Later he came across her in the park and in the square several times a day. 5 She was always alone, always wearing the same toque, followed by the white pomeranian, no one knew who she was, and she became known simply as the lady with the lapdog.

This fragment as a whole is focalized by an external EF. In the third sentence a shift of level takes place, indicated by the verb "to see." In sentence 4, level 1 has been restored. But in sentence 5 it is ambiguous. This sentence follows the one that states that Dmitri meets the lady regularly.

According to our expectation, the description of the lady that follows would have to be focalized by that character: cF2 (Dmitri)–p; but there is no indication signalling that change of level. In the second part of the sentence, focalization clearly rests again with EF1. The first part of sentence 5 is focalized both by EF1 and by CF2. Such a double focalization, in which EF "looks over the shoulder" of CF, we may indicate with the double notation EF1/CF2. Such a part of the story might be called a *hinge*, a fragment with a double or at any rate ambiguous focalization in between two levels. It is also possible to distinguish between *double focalization*, which can be represented as EF1+CF2, and *ambiguous focalization*, in which it is hard to decide who focalizes: EF1/CF2. In h this difference cannot be established. In view of the development of the rest of the story, EF1+CF2 seems most likely.

A special case of focalization, and perhaps the best justification for the distinction I am making, is memory. Memory is an act of “vision” of the past, but as an act, it is situated in the present of the memory. It is often a narrative act: loose elements come to cohere into a story, so that they can be remembered and eventually told. But as is well known, memories are unreliable – in relation to the fabula – and when put into words, they are rhetorically overworked so that they can connect to an audience – for example, a therapist, a judge, a political gathering. Hence, the story the person remembers is not identical to the one she experienced. This discrepancy becomes dramatic and indeed incapacitating in the case of trauma. Traumatic events disrupt the capacity to comprehend and experience them at the time of their occurrence. As a result, the traumatized person cannot remember them; instead, they recur in bits and pieces, in nightmares, and cannot be “worked through.” The incapability that paralyses the traumatized person can be situated on both story and text levels.

Memory is also the joint between time and space. In stories set in former colonies, memory evokes a past in which people were dislodged from their space by colonizers who occupied it, but also a past in which they did not yield. Going back – in retroversion – to the time in which the place was a different kind of space is a way of countering the effects of colonizing acts of focalization – a process that can be called mapping. Mastering, looking from above, dividing up and controlling is an approach to space that ignores time as well as the density of its lived-in quality. In opposition to such ways of seeing space, providing a landscape with a history is a way of spatializing memory that undoes the killing of space as lived.

In *Texaco*, Patrick Chamoiseau’s fictional or allegorical recuperation of Martinique, the narrator has his converted urban planner say, when he gives up destroying the city to build the road “Pénétrante Ouest”:

Razing Texaco, as I was asked to do, would amount to amputating the city from one part of its future, and especially from the irreplaceable richness of memory. The Creole city, which has so few monuments, becomes a monument itself by virtue of the care it puts into the sites of its memory. The monument, here as in all of America, does not rise up monumentally: it irradiates. 369

Marginal as the site is, it must be preserved, the former urban planner concludes, because it is the site of memory of the slaves’ art of survival on which this space now bases its future.

In this passage, “rising up” in monumentality, just as much as the allegorically named road “Pénétrante Ouest,” embodies the result of a focalization that is destructive of the past and hence of the future. Irradiation is the alternative way of being of the space that is focalized from within. As Edouard Glissant, a theorist who influenced Chamoiseau’s writing, argued: “the landscape in the work ceases to be merely a decor or a confidant in order to inscribe itself as constitutive of being” (199). This idea of a historically meaningful, heavily political investment of space can help us interpret stories in which a narratological analysis reveals the intricate relationship between characters, time, and space.

The complexities of narrative depend for their understanding and appreciation on the readers’ ability to sense whose vision it is they are being presented with. This is why distinguishing between levels of focalization is the tool *par excellence* for generating the literary experience of narratives. By discerning those levels, we sensitize ourselves – get “literate” in – the subtleties of the space between individual and collective experiences, visions, and memories. In Bibliowicz’s *Migas de pan*, it is of course crucial to distinguish Samuel’s anguished reflections about his father, sequestered in the present, from those transmitted to him by secondary memorization or “postmemory,” through the stories told or withheld by Josué when Samuel was growing up in a house transformed into a museum. But such subtle transitions are not the sole preserve of the postmodern novel. The classical realist novel of the second half of the nineteenth century also excelled in the creation of such complex structures.

Boleslaw Prus’s 1890 novel *Lalka* (The Doll) is generally considered the greatest Polish novel of the century. It is sometimes compared to *Madame Bovary*. If this comparison is justified, it is despite a reversal: here it is the man who suffers from love and the woman who is cold, callous, and indifferent. What makes the two novels comparable is the mixture of emotional and commercial interests – what we have called, in our updated film based on Flaubert’s novel, “emotional capitalism,” in the wake of Eva Illouz’s sociological studies (2008; 2012). The main character is a successful businessman, Stanislaw Wokulski, who is madly in love with an impoverished woman of noble descent. For seven hundred dense pages these two characters circle each other. The woman, Izabela, is looking to marry both money and status; Stanislaw, who is well regarded in noble circles but remains “only” a businessman, is simply obsessed with Izabela. Many characters of both groups surround him, the “new man of finance,” and her, “the embattled aristocrat” (to recycle

the terminology of the cover blurb). They are not shy about applying ethnic, class, and national stereotypes, and women are still seen as weak, fickle, and hysterical. Consider this: “Wokulski, who had never seen a fat peasant ...” (409). From Balzac and Dickens to Flaubert and Tolstoy, recognizable scenes succeed one another, with reflections on the temporality of storytelling helping us appreciate the broad tableau.

In this context, shifts in levels of focalization help us see how the one man whose musings, emotions, and doubts constantly assault him is embedded in a social circle where he stands out as different, yet is just as subject to common views as the others. When an old Baron of his acquaintance who calls Stanislaw his “best friend” (404) introduces him to his fiancée, a young and beautiful girl, Stanislaw seems to see the situation as a comically reversed mirror of his own. Here is a brief sample of the shift from present to retrospective focalization:

“An amusing story, upon my word,” Wokulski muttered when the Baron had gone, [right after the Baron’s story of his engagement with the woman he calls a “child”] “that old man is really up to his neck in it.”

And he could not dispel the figure of the Baron, who had looked like a shadow against the amaranthine background of the carriage seat. So he observed the lean face, on which brick-red flushed glowed, his hair which seemed powdered with flour, his large sunken eyes in which an unhealthy gleam flickered. His outburst of passion had made a droll yet mournful impression in a man who kept covering up his throat, checking that the window was tightly shut and continually changed his seat in the compartment for fear of draughts. (400)

Wokulski’s reflection occurs right after the story has been told to him. The first sentence evaluates the story itself as “amusing” and judges the Baron’s situation. But the next sentences describe not quite the Baron so much as the memory of him. The focalizer seems to still see him, but in a memory. It is phrased in the past tense – “who *had* looked like a shadow” – but also in spectral terms, as if to account for memory itself. Then we shift back to the present and the concrete reality, just past: here we read that “he observed” and then follows the description of what Wokulski had seen – or rather, how he had seen it. The final part of the passage expresses the restlessness that Wokulski attributes to the Baron’s old age, but to which his own restlessness seamlessly coheres.

In a preceding scene set in Paris, where Wolkulski travelled, first thinking Izabela would also go there, and then, when she didn't, to distract himself from her, our hero has some amazing adventures in the course of which people show him tricks as well as miraculous inventions. In the middle of a mad carrousel of sensations, he muses:

It seemed to him he could see an immense factory, from which emerged new suns, new planets, new species, new nations – but in which there were people and hearts which the Furies were tearing apart – love, hope and pain. (385)

But the external focalizer warns us beforehand that he is the victim of illusions; all his grandiose dreams of new inventions come to naught when his astounding discoveries mingle with his emotional turmoil (“It *seemed* to him he *could* see”). And true enough, soon after this moment “[a]ll this made him feel that the moment for a decisive battle between intellect and heart was approaching.” Between the magicians and the alchemists, the tricksters and the scientists, he is enthusiastic – until he is invited to a party that Izabela also attends. As these few passages suggest, this long novel depicts a man incapable of deciding, in a society incapable of letting go of its outdated boundaries.

Suspense

Suspense is a frequent fact of experience, yet difficult to analyse. If we consider suspense as a narrative rhetoric, and define it as the effect of the procedures by which either the reader or the character is made to ask questions that are only answered later, it is possible to achieve some grasp of the various kinds of suspense in terms of focalization.

It is possible that some questions are solved fairly quickly, while others are shelved. If suspense is to develop, then the questions must be recalled repeatedly and the answers postponed. In the paragraphs dealing with order, I pointed out that suspense can be generated by the announcement of something that will occur later, or by temporary silence concerning information that is needed. In both cases, the image presented to the reader is manipulated. The focalizer presents that image. In principle, that image coincides with the image the focalizer itself has; for this reason, the latter can be compared to a camera.

But the focalizer's image can be limited. This is the case when the characters know more than the focalizer. That “knowing more” must,

of course, appear later. It is also possible for the focalizer to falsify an image – for instance, by leaving out certain elements, hiding them from the reader. In such a case, the characters also know more than the reader. The focalizer can also be in possession of information that the characters do not know – for instance, about the origins of events. Then the reader, along with the focalizer, knows more than the character. The reader can thus receive an image that is just as complete or incomplete, more complete or less complete than the image the characters have of themselves. The focalizer determines that. If we now attempt to analyse suspense according to the knowledge of reader and character on the basis of information provided through the focalizer, four possibilities emerge.

When a question is raised (Who did it? What happened? How will it end?), it is possible that neither the reader nor the character can answer it. This is the opening situation of almost every detective novel. It is also possible that the reader does know the answer but that the character does not. The tension, in this case, is different. The question is not what the answer will be but whether the character will discover it for itself in time. This is the suspense that lies at the root of a threat. A character makes a mistake. Will it realize this in time? There is someone standing behind it with an axe. Will it turn around in time? Conversely, it can also be the case that the reader does not know the answer and the characters do, as in *Of Old People*. The answer can then be gradually revealed, in various phases and by means of various focalizers (Harold, the old people themselves, and the others, each one according to its own knowledge), or in the form of a puzzle, if the information is revealed but is not marked as data, as in a detective novel. When, finally, reader and character are both informed of the answer, there is no suspense.

Hence, when a question is evoked, the possibilities that the answer is known are thus:

- reader – character – (riddle, detective story, search)
- reader + character – (threat)
- reader – character + (secret, for instance *Of Old People*)
- reader + character + (no suspense)

In each of these forms of suspense one might analyse in turn, if necessary, which character knows the answer and through which channel of focalization (EF₁ or CF₂) the reader learns the answer.

Remarks and Sources

Most of the topics that have been discussed in this chapter are part of the traditional "theory of the novel." That term is deceptive for two reasons. First, the novel is probably the most heavily researched textual form. The concepts and distinctions that have emerged from this research usually have a more general scope. Insofar as genre distinctions are taken into account, the novel is in these studies contrasted sometimes with drama, sometimes with poetry, and sometimes with the novella or short story. By using the term "theory of the novel" to indicate sometimes (but not always) a much larger area of narratology, critics have obscured the precise position of the novel with respect to other genres and types of text. So it is sometimes difficult to see to which area distinctions apply.

Second, the term "theory of the novel" is deceptive because there can be no system as is presupposed by the term "theory." We have already seen that Müller and his disciples concerned themselves with the temporal relationships in the novel. In Anglo-Saxon countries, work was done at another time, primarily on "point of view" theories. Müller worked with technical, quantitative criteria. The "point of view" theories were based mainly on psychological criteria. It seems difficult to imagine that these two groups of investigators were working on the same theory. Before reference could be made to a theory, all of those different distinctions and concepts had to be brought together in one system.

One attempt to bring all of the traditional narratological distinctions together within one systematic, theoretical framework was Genette's "Discours du récit," the larger part of his *Figures III* (1972). Here, the author brought together the different time aspects and focalization within one frame, in which he also placed the narrative text. The highly different origins of the various aspects made it difficult to allot them all a place in a systematic theory of the story level, which Genette did not distinguish from the text level. I have tried to solve this problem by retaining a clear point of departure: the question of how information about the fabula is shaped and presented to the reader. The more technical aspects, such as various time aspects, could be placed within this framework, but so could aspects such as the image of a character and space. Here the questions are specified: What kind of information do we get? How do we get it? How do the various elements and aspects function in relation to one another?

That last question – How do the elements and aspects function? – is finally determined by focalization. Focalization has an overarching position with respect to the other aspects. The significance of certain aspects cannot be viewed unless it is linked to focalization. Moreover, focalization is, in my view, the most important, most penetrating, and subtlest means of manipulation. Analyses of newspaper reports that aim at revealing the hidden ideology embedded in such reports should involve focalization in their investigations, and not restrict themselves to so-called content analysis – that is, the semantic analysis of content.

Much of the content of this chapter is compatible with Herman (2002 and 2013). Herman affiliates himself with the school of so-called cognitive narratology (Herman, ed. 2003; Herman, Jahn, and Ryan, eds. 2005). While I am a bit weary of the scientific language, I find Herman's books clear, comprehensive, and rich in analyses. I am not always convinced by his distinctions, but I find that they contribute seriously to our more sophisticated understanding of narrative. I have similar doubts about the so-called psychological approach to narratology, where I have found less relevant proposals for analysis (Bortolussi and Dixon 2003).

I have made remarks here and there, and especially in this chapter, concerning the relationship between fiction and reality. I have not devoted a special section to this issue, because it is not narratological per se. Instead of seeing in every narrative a representation of reality – a reading posture than leads to flat, realistic judgments – I have insisted that this relationship is important as a tool for critique. I have used the concept of make-believe with reference to Kendall L. Walton's book on fictionality (1990). Walton's study is limited to representational art and thus tends to stay closer to questions of realism than I do. But within that self-chosen limitation, it is the most useful take on this issue that I know of.

The theory of anachrony has been further developed since Lämmert in 1955 first made an extensive study of it. The most systematic exposition of this subject, and of the other time aspects as well, has been Genette's, just mentioned. Genette considered every variation on a set pattern a (rhetorical) figure – an attitude reflected in the title of his book: *Figures III*. Within the framework of that theory, it is understandable that he sought to express such figures in terms that would fit into terminology derived from Greek rhetoric. Since such terms, which do indeed have advantages, appear rather cryptic and, consequently, tend to repel, I attempted to avoid them, and at most mentioned them in conjunction with English terms, unless no adequate English term could be found.

Actually, Genette's terms are not really as difficult as they appear, because they have been systematically constructed out of several prepositions and word stems. For those who wish to use them in further analysis, it is perhaps useful to know how they are structured. The prepositions are *ana* and *pro*, which mean, respectively, "towards/from the back" and "towards/in the front." *Para* means "to the side." The stem *-lips* means "leaving something out" and *-leps*, "adding something." Thus we end up with, for instance, *paralips* in the sense of "something is left out on the side (a missing side-track)," and *paraleps*: "something is added to the side." For Genette's complete time theory, I refer the reader to the English translation of his work (1980).

Barbara Herrnstein Smith long ago cautioned against the presupposition that the fabula pre-exists the story (1980). The paradox of the distinction has been further theorized by Culler (1981) in psychoanalysis and the mystery novel. Although I maintain the distinction, I fully agree with these analyses of the problem inherent in it.

An important book article by Hamon (1983), from which I have borrowed a great deal in this chapter, deals with characters. Hamon treats the most important aspects of the characters and places them in a semiotic framework. His division of the characters into signifier and signified I find a bit problematic.

Booth discusses the unreliable narrator (1961). The best-known study of space is still the philosophically and psychoanalytically tinted *Poetics of Space* by Bachelard (1957). Uspenskij (1973) broaches interesting aspects of this problem. Lodge (1977) discusses a series of location descriptions, which are, in his view, progressively more poetic.

An important philosophical study of space is Lefebvre (1991). De Lauretis (1983) offers a feminist critique of Lotman's (1977) semiotic interpretation of space. Many studies use the distinction between place and space in a sense that I have reversed here. The reason for my reversal is that place, in narrative, equals location, the topological specification of where things happen, whereas space fleshes out the specific look and feel of that place, like the setting of a film or theatre play. But the reverse is just as arguable. For important narratological analyses of space/place, see Hoving (2001). A wonderfully inspiring social-scientific view of space is offered by Michel de Certeau (1984).

Friedman's typology of narrative points of view (1955) is based on various criteria (amount of information, "perspective," identity and attitude of the narrator) and is, consequently, less systematic than could be wished. The same goes for Booth's well-known fifth chapter. Both

contain, however, a good many interesting insights. The distinction between narration and focalization was introduced by Genette (1972). For a critical discussion, and a theoretical justification of the ideas presented here, see Bal (1991). A good survey of narratology, one that is also based on a (somewhat different) distinction of three layers and that discusses focalization and character in interesting ways, is provided by Rimmon-Kenan (1983). A study that presents a thorough overview and analysis of many of the subjects of this chapter, albeit with a different terminology, was published by Fludernik (1996). Also different, but especially relevant for the historicizing aspect of focalization and narration, is Rimmon-Kenan (1996). For a clear exposition on memory and trauma in relation to narrative incapacitation, see Van Alphen (1997), especially chapter 2 and his contribution to Bal, Crewe, and Spitzer (1999), on the whole a useful collection. The term "postmemory" has been introduced by Marianne Hirsch and is widely used, although it easily lends itself to misunderstandings. For a discussion, see Van Alphen (2006) and Hirsch (2008).

Fabula: Elements

1: Preliminary Remarks

The fabulas of most narrative texts display some form of homology, both with sentence structure and with “real life.” Consequently, most fabulas can be said to be constructed according to the demands of human logic of events, provided that this concept is not too narrowly understood. This point of departure suggests that everything that can be said about the structure of fabulas also bears to some degree on extra-literary facts. Consequently, everything that is said in this chapter should also be applicable to other connected series of human actions as well as to elements in film, theatre, news reports, and social and individual events in the world. It helps to keep in mind that the theory of elements, even more generally than that of aspects, makes describable a segment of reality that is broader than that of narrative texts only.

The material that constitutes the fabula can be divided into stable and changeable elements – objects, on the one hand, and processes, on the other. *Elements* may be understood not only as the actors, who are more or less stable in most fabulas, but also as locations and things. *Processes* are the changes that occur in, with, through, and among the objects – in other words, the events. Both sorts of elements – objects and processes – are indispensable for the construction of a fabula. They cannot operate without each other. For reasons and in ways that will become clear, I maintain in this chapter a structuralist approach.

2: Events

Selection

In the Introduction I defined events as the transition from one state to another state, caused or experienced by actors. The word “transition” stresses that an event is a process, an alteration. Trying to establish which sentences in a text represent an event is the beginning of a fabula analysis. This appears an arid, technical endeavour, but it is already an interpretive step.

Many sentences refer to elements that may be considered processes. These same elements can often be objects as well as processes, depending on the context. Such a selection results in an enormously large number of elements, impossible to work with. I will discuss three criteria, each of which further limits the number of events to be investigated, and each of which further develops a different aspect of the definition of events given above.

Change

Compare these two sentences:

- a John is ill.
- b John falls ill.

The first sentence describes a condition, the second a change. The difference can be seen in the verb. So we can begin by examining the series of events in which sentence b might occur. Imagine that the preceding text segment read as follows:

- c John was cleaning his house.

John’s illness interrupts his activity and, as such, indicates a change. But in that case, sentence c can precede sentence a *or* sentence b equally well.

- d John was cleaning his house. John is ill.

Is just as intelligible as

- e John was cleaning his house. John fell ill.

In both cases the cleaning activities are interrupted, although in neither case is this explicitly stated. Sentences d and e differ in the same way from, for example, a text segment such as:

f John was cleaning his house. John fell ill and therefore had to stop cleaning.

The explicit relationship established in segment f is only implied in d and e. The relationship between c and a, or between c and b, is decisive for an analysis of the events; it is only in a series that events become meaningful for the further development of the fabula.

So it is pointless to consider whether or not an isolated fact is an event. The linguistic form in which the information is embodied can be an indication, but it is not always decisive. Furthermore, the general assumption that every event is indicated by a verb of action doesn't work either. It is, of course, possible to restate every event so that a verb of action appears in the sentence, as, for example, with the verb "stop" in sentence f. This provides a convenient means of making explicit any implicit relationships between facts, and can lead to a preliminary selection of events.

Choice

In a famous article Roland Barthes distinguished between functional and non-functional events. Functional events open a choice between two possibilities, realize this choice, or reveal the results of such a choice. Once a choice is made, it determines the subsequent course of events in the development of the fabula. Compare the following text segments:

g Liz leaves her house to go to work.
She turns left and walks straight ahead.
She arrives at eight-thirty.

h Liz leaves her house to go to work.
She walks straight ahead, and crosses the street.
Unconscious, she is carried into a hospital at eight-thirty.

Again, something is implied in both text segments: in g, that Liz successfully covered a certain distance; in h, that she was run down while crossing the street. If, soon after eight-thirty, something happens at work that influences the further development of the fabula, then the

statement “she turns left” may be considered an event: because the actor chose a certain route, she arrived in time to make the following event possible.

Should that not be the case, it does not mean that turning left has no significance. It can point to some particular characteristic of the actor in question. For example, it can indicate a punctual attitude towards work, a preference for a certain route, or leftish political views; this depends on the network of meaning in the text as a whole. However, for the purpose of the selection of functional events, this text segment doesn't matter. In segment h, something happens that most probably has consequences for the rest of the fabula. The actor is run down, something that would not have happened if she had chosen the other route. In turn, the accident presents a number of alternatives. Was Liz hit intentionally or not? If so, by an acquaintance or by a stranger?

Questions such as these could form the subject for a detective story. But even if the result of segment h is more spectacular than that of segment g, this does not imply that such an event as the one in segment h always satisfies the criterion. If this text segment is unrelated to the rest of the fabula and refers instead only to the world in which the fabula occurs – the accident can, for example, illustrate traffic congestion during the rush hour – then the choice in segment h between turning left and crossing the street is not a functional event. This is why the analogy with the sentence only goes so far; it is also why analogy with “real life” cannot determine the result of the analysis.

Confrontation

Two actors or groups of actors can be confronted to each other. Every phase of the fabula – every functional event – has three components: two actors and one action; stated in the logical terms, two arguments and one predicate; in yet another formulation, two objects and one process. Linguistically, it should be possible to formulate this unity as: two nominal components and one verbal component. The structure of the basis sentence would then be:

subject – predicate – (direct) object

in which both the subject and the (direct) object must be actors, agents of action.

According to this third criterion, only those segments of the text that can be presented by such a basic sentence constitute a functional event. Compare the following text segments:

- i Liz writes a letter.
- j John kills a fly.
- k John kills a woman.

According to the logical criterion, sentence i is lacking one component. There is a subject, a predicate, and a direct object, but this last component (a letter) is not an actor. The necessary confrontation is, then, impossible. But writing a letter is an activity that presupposes an addressee, just as hiding a secret presupposes someone from whom one is hiding it. The letter is written to someone. Although the second actor is not specifically named in this sentence, his or her existence is implied. Consequently, sentence i can be rewritten with the help of surrounding text segments: Liz writes (a letter to) John (or to the tax inspector, her employees, her friend). Because it is possible to rewrite the sentence in this manner, we may consider it relevant to the structure of the fabula.

This same possibility is not implied in segment j. Despite the numerous actions performed by John, and the lifestyle that they suggest to the reader, John remains an isolated agent of action. His actions are not considered to be functional events because they do not bring about any change in the relation between John and another (group of) actor(s). Rather than a lack, this is a (negative) sign of the life of people living in isolation.

Sentences j and k share a common subject and predicate; both sentences can provide just as much information about the character of the subject, but the difference between the two is clear. Here again, the nature of the direct object itself cannot provide a definite answer. Again, the answer as to whether either the fly or the woman may be considered an actor depends on the context. It is quite possible to imagine a fabula in which John is continually confronted by a fly, as in La Fontaine's fable "Le Coche et la Mouche," for example; on the other hand, a murder can serve to illustrate a character trait and have no influence whatsoever on the development of the fabula, as in the short story "The Man That Turned into a Statue" by Joyce Carol Oates. In this text, a woman who can in no way be considered an actor is murdered.

Relationships

According to the definition used here, a fabula is a series of logically and chronologically related events. Once we have decided which facts we wish to consider events, we can then describe the relationships that connect one event to the other: the structure of the series of events. Starting from Barthes's assumption that all fabulas are based on one model, we can begin to search for a model that is so abstract that it may be considered universal – until, that is, the model in question is either rejected or improved. This model is then laid upon the text investigated; in other words, we examine the way in which the concrete events can be placed in the basic model.

The purpose of this method is not to force the text into a general model and then to conclude that the text is indeed narrative. Such a procedure has given structuralist narratology a bad name. It could at best be useful for testing doubtful cases when trying to specify the corpus. Rather, a confrontation between a concrete fabula and a general model allows the description of the structure of the fabula of the text in question to be formulated more precisely, so that the specific structure is placed in relief and made visible. A perfect fit as well as any deviations from the model can influence the meaning of the text.

One model that makes ample provision for this possibility is the one suggested by Bremond. According to him, the narrated universal is regulated by the same rules as those which control human thought and action. These rules are determined by logical and conventional restrictions. A logical rule is, for example, that effect succeeds cause; thus, the hero dies after the bullet strikes him. A conventional restriction is, for example, that a worker is not rich. Conventional restrictions could be seen as the interpretation, by historically and culturally determined groups, of logical rules in concrete situations. Also included among the conventional restrictions are the traditional rules to which texts of specific genres must conform; for example, a classical tragedy takes place in the mythical upper-class circles of kings and gods. Conventional restrictions are based in ideological and political assumptions. This is more obvious for older texts, or texts from other cultures, than for what is close by, because what is normal for one reader need not be so for others. For example, the convention that was broken by Madame de Lafayette's heroine in *The Princess of Cleves*, who – unheard of! implausible! – told her husband

that she was in love with someone else, would hardly be felt by today's readers. "What's the fuss about?" could be the response of readers who are insensitive to the cultural differences between the seventeenth-century French upper classes and many segments of today's European societies.

It is a mistake to take conventional restrictions for universal rules. But at the same time, the opposite tendency – to shrug off those norms that one doesn't share – makes reading a very limited experience and makes reading texts from other cultures seem tedious. It is, therefore, even today (or perhaps *precisely* today), worthwhile to test one's own norms against what can be gleaned from different narrative artefacts, by asking the question of the model's fit. Like every model, Bremond's model is abstract. This implies that he presents terms that can represent a large number of events; the events from every distinct fabula can thus be translated into these abstract terms. In this way, the relations among the events can be made visible.

The Narrative Cycle

A fabula can be viewed as a specific grouping of series of events. The fabula as a whole constitutes a process, and every event can also be called a process or, at least, part of a process. Theories are sometimes old, indeed tenacious. According to Aristotle as well as Bremond, three phases can be distinguished in every fabula: the possibility (or virtuality), the event (or realization), and the result (or conclusion) of the process. None of these three phases is indispensable. A possibility can just as well be realized as not. And even if the event is realized, a successful conclusion is not always ensured. The following example illustrates these possibilities:

a Liz wants to earn a diploma.

The following alternatives are possible:

- 1 Liz wants to earn a diploma (a possibility)
- 2a She prepares for the exam (realization)
- 2b She does not prepare for the exam (no realization)

In b, the cycle is prematurely completed; in a, the third phase begins:

- 3a She passes the exam (conclusion)
- 3b She fails the exam (negative conclusion, which can lead to the recommencement of the cycle)

These phases cannot always be explicitly found in the text, as is demonstrated in example b:

- b John wants to offer his girlfriend a lovely dinner. The beef Stroganoff tastes delicious. (The butcher was closed so John serves a sandwich.) (The beef was excellent but, unfortunately, burnt.)

This is an elaboration of Barthes's criterion for selection. Bremond calls this first grouping an elementary series. These series are combined with one another. The combination of elementary series into complex series can assume a variety of forms. The processes can occur one after the other. In this case, the result of the first process is also the beginning (virtuality) of the new process.

- c John is tired (= he can rest)
 - He rests (= he feels fine again)
 - He feels fine (= he can work again) = John feels fine (= he can work)
 - He works (= he becomes tired)
 - He is tired (= he can rest), etc.

The processes can also be embedded in another process, as, for example, when one possibility opens another, or when one realization leads to another possibility.

- d John is tired (= he can fall asleep)
 - John falls asleep = John can forget about his exam
 - He forgets about his exam
 - He fails
 - John feels fine again

In this example, the *primary series* leads to an improvement in John's condition, and the *embedded series* leads to a deterioration. As is apparent from this example, the so-called primary series is not necessarily more important than the embedded series in order for the fabula to proceed; the embedded series is probably more important in this example. Such situations can characterize the *style* of a fabula.

When, for example, important events are continually embedded in everyday, banal events that are the cause of the important events, an effect of determinism is likely to occur. It can, for example, be read as an expression of fatalism, of the impotency of man against the world, or of an existential view of life. On the other hand, a minimalist fabula where the important events remain unstated but colour the seemingly unimportant, everyday events, tends to become pregnant with importance.

In d, a causal relationship can be indicated or implied between the primary series and the embedded series. This is not always the case. The embedded series often provides a specification of the primary series.

e Peter insults John

John is angry = John asks for an explanation

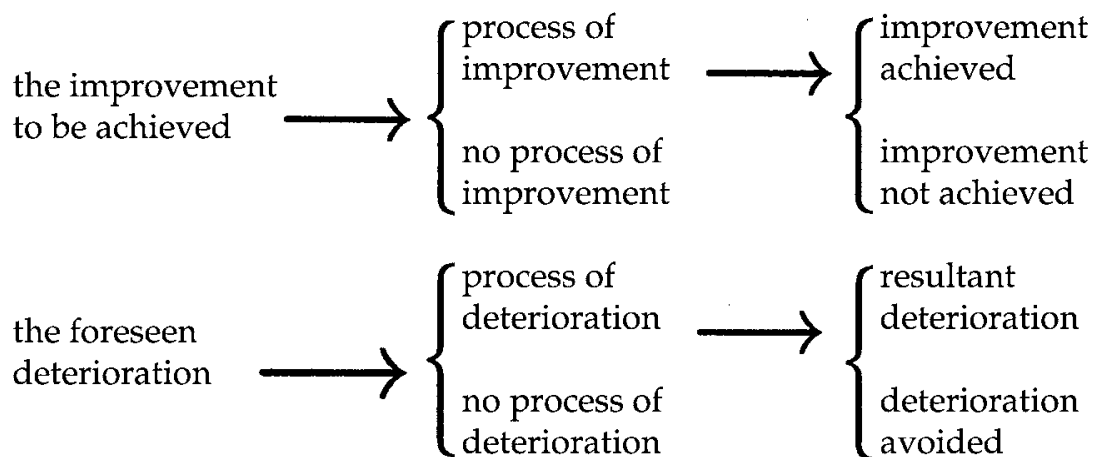
Peter explains

John is no longer angry = John understands

In this example, asking for an explanation is a specific form of being angry. It is also possible to express anger in another way, for example, by hitting someone; in this case, another embedded series with another specification of the primary series would evolve.

There are innumerable possibilities for succession and embedding, so that an infinite number of fabulas can be formed. Bremond's further structuring of these series is based on his definition of narrative texts: "A narrative consists of a language act by which a succession of events having human interest are integrated into the unity of this same act" (1973, 186). This definition differs from the definition given earlier in this book only by the addition of "human interest." Because this difference is actually a theoretical issue – and, in fact, one of reception – I will not discuss the issue further at this point. But it deserves some thought that so many narratives hold the reader's attention by precisely some form of human interest. One division based on human interest is that between processes of improvement and processes of deterioration. Both sorts are possible, both can be realized or not, and both can conclude successfully or not.

Example e represents a possible deterioration that is avoided by an embedded improvement. In example d, the process of improvement contains an embedded deterioration, while example c represents an improvement and a deterioration immediately following each other.



The various processes of improvement or deterioration, grouped in certain combinations, together constitute a *narrative cycle*. Each of the various processes has its own semantic contents. Applying a semantic label to an event makes it easier to compare the structures of different fabulas with one another. For example:

- the fulfilment of the task
- the intervention of allies
- the elimination of the opponent
- the negotiation
- the attack
- the satisfaction

It is quite easy to conceive of other possibilities at the same level of abstraction. When seen as the theoretical abstractions of concrete events, these possibilities can be found in many texts. Satisfaction, for example, can take the form of punishment, revenge, or reward, and these sorts of satisfaction can in turn be further specified.

The same applies to processes of deterioration. Bremond cites:

- the misstep
- the creation of an obligation
- the sacrifice
- the endured attack
- the endured punishment

A misstep can, for example, take the form of a mistake, an error, a social blunder or moral lapse, or a crime – and applying any of these terms to it is an interpretive step of consequence. And these variations can then assume other concrete forms. The initial situation in a fabula will always be a state of deficiency in which one or more actors want to introduce changes. The development of the fabula reveals that, according to certain patterns, the process of change involves an improvement or deterioration with regard to the initial situation.

Other Principles of Structure

The events selected can be related to one another in a variety of ways. Bremond's model can be used as a basis, but it can also be left out of consideration, not because it would be invalid but because we can foresee that the results would not be very relevant to the fabula in question. The following suggestions are presented only in order to give an idea of the multitude of possibilities, and, in so doing, to make clear that structures are formed by the investigating subject on the basis of selected events combined with other data. The relationship between the data and what is done with those data is convincing only if it is made explicit and has some degree of relevance. The weather in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* is often cold and raw; even so, it does not seem relevant to contrast the events that occur in cold weather with those that occur in good or neutral weather in order to establish a principle of structure.

First, the events can be grouped on the basis of the identity of the actors involved. If the chronological order is maintained or reconstructed, the fabula is segmented into phases. For example: actor A is the subject from event 1 through 6, actor B is the subject from event 7 through 15, and so on. The same can be done on the basis of the object, the actor who experiences the action. The events in which the two most important actors are confronted by each other can be contrasted with events in which only one of these two actors is involved with another, secondary, actor, and so on.

Second, classification is possible on the basis of the nature of the confrontation. Is there verbal (spoken), mental (via thoughts, feelings, observations), or bodily contact? Do these contacts succeed, do they fail, or is this impossible to determine? Such data can help us understand difficult modern texts. If, for example, the contact between the two most important actors is predominantly mental and unsuccessful, we can surmise that the theme is alienation, a pre-eminently twentieth-century theme. The relationship between bodily and mental contact can suggest another theme.

Third, the events can be placed against time. Some events can occur at the same time, others succeed one another. These latter form a linked series, sometimes interrupted by a span of time in which nothing occurs – at least nothing that is narrated. Fourth, the locations where events occur can also lead to the formation of a structure. Different oppositions can be relevant: inside–outside, above–below, city–country, here–there, and so on (Lotman 1977, 330; for a feminist critique, see De Lauretis 1983). These possibilities can be combined with one another. We might foresee, for example, that actor A is always the subject when the events occur inside, and actor S when the scene shifts to the outside; or that the contact always or almost always fails in one case while it succeeds in another; or that A especially desires verbal contact and S mental contact. Thus we can make an intuitive choice – necessitated by the simple fact that we cannot investigate everything – explicit by means of our analysis. This has the advantage of allowing us to pursue our own interests to a great extent while keeping to the same intersubjectively understandable model of analysis.

3: Actors

In defining the concept of event I have used the term actors. In the selection of events and the formation of sequences, actors are always important elements. So in what follows, actors will be regarded in terms of their relation to the sequences of events that they cause or undergo.

Selection

In order to begin to analyse this, it helps first to select which actors must be taken into consideration and which ones need not be. In some fabulas there are actors who have no functional part in the structures of that fabula because they do not cause or undergo functional events. Actors of this type may be left out of consideration. What I said earlier also applies here: the initial disregard of an actor does not mean that this actor lacks significance. It only means that it does not form part of the functional category and therefore need not be taken into consideration. Well-known examples are the porters and maids who open the front doors in many nineteenth-century novels. Such actors act, by opening the door, and thus they fit the definition of actors, but their action does not belong to the category of functional events. Therefore, they fall outside the scope of this analysis. Which, not so incidentally, marks their cultural position more devastatingly than their full participation ever could.

This is not to say that they cannot be meaningful as an indication of a certain social stratification; and in that case they contribute to the representation of bourgeois society given in such a novel. They can also serve as an indication of a specific use of space; they guard the boundary between inside and outside and demonstrate that boundary's permeability. In order to limit the actors to the category of functional actors, one may rely on an earlier analysis of events. If this analysis has been skipped, an intuitive summary of the event provides a preliminary starting point that might be tested later, for instance by drawing selective samples. This procedure, however, entails a vicious circle when one makes the summary with a certain subdivision of the actors already in mind. A middle-of-the-road solution might be to ask several people to write a summary, and to use the elements they have in common. In the practice of teaching this is a helpful way to engage students in the collective analysis.

Classes of Actors

Taking as a basis the presupposition that human thinking and action are directed towards an aim, structuralists such as Greimas have constructed a model that represents the relations to the aim. This model claims universal validity for its operative principle and is not limited to invented fabulas. As such, it offers a good opportunity for reflection on the relations between fiction, reality, and truth. This is not a specifically narratological concern.

As mentioned earlier, the model starts from a teleological relation between the elements of the story. The actors have an intention; they aspire towards an aim. That aspiration is the achievement of something pleasant, agreeable, or favourable, or the evasion of something unpleasant, disagreeable, or unfavourable. The verbs *to wish* and *to fear* indicate this teleological relation and are, therefore, used as abstractions of the intentional connections between elements.

In this model, the classes of actors are called *actants*. An actant is a class of actors who share a certain characteristic quality. That shared characteristic is related to the teleology of the fabula as a whole. An actant is therefore a class of actors whose members have an identical relation to the aspect of *telos* that constitutes the principle of the fabula. That relation we call the function. This is a typically structuralist model: it is conceived in terms of fixed relations between classes of phenomena, which is a standard definition of structure.

Subject and Object

The first and most important relation is between the actor who pursues an aim and the aim itself. That relation may be compared to the one between subject and direct object in a sentence. The first two classes of actors to be distinguished, therefore, are subject and object: actor x aspires towards goal Y; x is a subject-actant, Y an object-actant. For instance, in a typical love story the slots may be filled as follows: John – wants to marry – Mary. John is subject, Mary object, and the element of intention of the fabula takes the form of wanting to marry.

The object is not always a person. The subject may also aspire towards reaching a certain state. In Stendhal's 1830 novel *The Red and the Black*, for instance, one might see the following scheme: Julien – wants to acquire – power; or Julien – aspires towards – becoming a powerful man. Other objects of intention found in fabulas are riches, possessions, wisdom, love, happiness, a place in heaven, a bed to die in, an increase in salary, a just society. Thus the actant, and also its concrete embodiment, the actor, are, in theory, disconnected from the embodiment in a person. This is implied in our structural approach. However, since the principle of the fabula resides in its aspect of intention, the practical result is that the subject is usually a person or a personified animal (in animal fables), not an object.

The following examples give an impression of the multiplicity of possibilities that can be translated into this basic structural scheme:

<i>actor/actant-subject</i>	<i>function</i>	<i>actor/actant-object</i>
a John	wants to marry	Mary
b Anna Wulf	wants to become	an independent woman
c The old people	want to prevent	the discovery of their crime
d Kinsey Millhone	wants to know	the identity of the murderer
e The killer	wants to avoid	Millhone's discovery
f Marxists	want to bring about	a classless society
g Tom Thumb	wants to have	a safe return
h Scheherazade	wants to prevent	the king's killing her

The reader has undoubtedly recognized in this series a number of well-known fabulas or types of fabulas.

The examples have been chosen from very different types of texts: an epistolary novel (a); a feminist novel (b); a nineteenth-century novel (c); a modern detective novel (d and e); a work of social philosophy (f); a fairy tale (g); a story sequence from folk literature (h). I will return to these examples.

It is indeed likely that in very many if not all fabulas, a similar scheme can be pointed to. Which is not yet to say that it helps much to do so.

Power and Receiver

The intention of the subject is in itself not sufficient to reach the object. There are always powers that either allow it to reach its aim or prevent it from doing so. This relation might be seen as a form of communication, and we can, consequently, distinguish a class of actors – consisting of those who support the subject in the realization of its intention, supply the object, or allow it to be supplied or given – whom we shall call the power. The person to whom the object is given is the receiver. The French terms used by Greimas are *destinateur* and *destinataire*, and sender and receiver are their most literal translation. However, sender suggests an active intervention or active participation, and this does not always apply; that is why *power* is perhaps a better term.

Often the power is not a person but an abstraction – for example, society, fate, time, human self-centredness, or cleverness. The receiver may also be embodied in a person. Thus a typology of fabulas might be related to the concretization of this actant: in fairy tales the sender or power is generally a person, such as a king who under certain conditions gives his daughter in marriage to the aspiring subject. In psychological novels, a character trait of the subject itself is often the power that either facilitates or blocks the achievement of the aim. In many nineteenth-century realist novels the class structure of bourgeois society is decisive – one is determined for life by one's social background. It is also possible for several powers to be in play at the same time. A combination of a character trait (ambition) and a social power (the division into rich and poor) may conflict as positive and negative power.

The receiver is often the same person as the subject. S/he desires something or somebody for him- or herself. But, since this is not always the case, it is necessary to specify this class of actors. In principle the subject and the power predominate more, or are more active in a grammatical sense, than the object and the receiver, because they are the agents, or the (grammatical) subject, of the function of either intention/evasion or giving/receiving.

I have already mentioned the possibility of the coalescence of two actants in one actor, or the reverse – the concretization of one actant, the power, in several specific powers. This makes us realize that the basis of our model is the principle of numerical inequality; and that this

principle, however problematic it may seem, is at once the model's justification. In principle all actants are represented in each fabula: without actants no relations, without relations no process, without process no fabula. But the number of actors is unlimited. It may happen that in one fabula we find only one actor, a heroine who, for instance, is at war with herself, her passions, her madness, and so on. On the other hand, it is also possible that large numbers of actors, whole crowds, armies, or university groups, form together one actant. An example of the coalescence of four distinct actants into two actors is, again, the conventional love story, in which the receiver is the longing lover himself and the power coalesces with the object: she "gives" herself.

He: subject + receiver

She: object + power

The conventional nature of this plot becomes clear when we try to reverse it and fill both versions out further.

On the basis of this analysis, one gains insight into the relations between the powers that form the foundation of the unreversed, conventional version. Seen grammatically, the active subject is passive in his role of receiver: he must wait and see whether he will receive the desired object. On the other hand, the passive object is also subject, and therefore more autonomous, in the role of power. The apparently passive object actant is, as power, the decisive factor in the background. The forces have been equally divided over the two actors. An inversion of roles would, therefore, not mean an inversion of power and would give no reason for the "he" to panic. But the plot changes as soon as the actant "power" is placed elsewhere. The symmetry is gone, and the development of the plot depends on the collusion or lack of it between subject and power.

The examples of the previous sections may now be expanded:

<i>actor/actant-subject</i>	<i>function</i>	<i>actor/actant object</i>
a John	wants to marry	Mary
b Anna Wulf	wants to become	an independent woman
c the old people	want to prevent	the discovery of their crime
d Kinsey Millhone	wants to know	the identity of the murderer
e the killer	wants to avoid	Millhone's discovery
f Marxists	want to bring about	a classless society
g Tom Thumb	wants to have	a safe return
h Scheherazade	wants to prevent	the king's killing her

<i>power</i>	<i>function</i>	<i>receiver</i>
a Mary	is prepared	John
b the existing social structure	makes it impossible	for her(self)
c fate/time	make it impossible	from themselves
	to hide their disgrace	and Ottilie
d her psychological insight	allows her to do so	to the benefit of
		herself, the police,
		and society
e his obsession and Millhone's insight	make it impossible	for the killer
f history	makes it impossible	for mankind
g his cleverness	brings that about	for himself and his brothers
h her powers of narrative	have that effect	to her own benefit

Helper and Opponent

The categories discussed so far are directly geared to the object, which is object both of desire and of communication. Both relations are necessary for the development of a fabula. But a fabula based on merely these two relations would end very soon: the subject wants something and either gets it or not. Usually the process is not so simple. The aim is difficult to achieve. The subject meets with resistance on the way and receives help. Thus the model distinguishes a third relation that determines the circumstances under which the enterprise is brought to an end.

In analogy with the structure of the sentence, these two actants might be regarded as adverbial adjuncts. They are related to the object not by means of a verb, but rather through such things as prepositions (e.g., *owing to*, *notwithstanding*), to the function that connects subject with object. These actants are in many respects different from the others. They are in direct relation not to the object but to the function that connects subject with object. At first sight they do not appear necessary to the action. In practice, however, they are often rather numerous. They determine the various adventures of the subject, who must sometimes overcome great opposition before s/he can reach his or her goal.

It is often difficult to agree on the difference between power and helper. The following points of difference may help to solve this difficulty:

power

Has power over the whole enterprise
 Is often abstract
 Often remains in the background
 Usually only one

helper

Can give only incidental aid
 Is mostly concrete
 Often comes to the fore
 Usually multiple

The same points of difference can be pointed to between a negative power (i.e., a power who prevents the subject from reaching the object) and an opponent.

Another issue concerns the reader's sympathy or antipathy, since the relations between actants are not the same as those between actants and reader. The helper is not always the person who acts to bring about the ending desired by the reader. When the subject seems unsympathetic to the reader, the helper will, most likely, be so too; and the reader's sympathy will go towards the opponent of the subject. When one confuses these two areas of relationship, one easily mistakes the division of forces. This is not to imply that sympathy must be eliminated from the reading experience, or from the analysis for that matter. On the contrary; it is, again, in the difference between actantial roles and reader's response that the specific effect of the narrative's fabula acquires relief and visibility.

The examples may now be expanded. I provide only a sample of the many possibilities. In a, for instance, Mary's father might be an opponent if he opposed the marriage; John's good job, Mary's determination, and an interceding aunt could be helpers. In b, several of Anna's friends, social prejudice, her employer might be opponents; her best friend tries to give help, but this is not sufficient to reach her aim. In c, the several children, their curiosity, and the memories of Harold are opponents; the doctor and those among the children who keep silent, are helpers. In d and e, helpers of one are the opponents of the other: witnesses, meetings, circumstances that help bring about the solution, a button left on the scene of the murder, the murderer's alcoholism, a talkative concierge, and more. In f, the proletariat is the helper and the bourgeoisie is the opponent. In g, the giant's wife and boots are helpers; the nightfall, the birds who eat the crumbs, and the giant's power of smell, which tell him that prey is near, are opponents. In h, every story Scheherazade tells is a helper, and the unremitting suspicion and jealousy of her husband are opponents.

From these examples it becomes clear that each helper forms a necessary but in itself insufficient condition to reach the aim. Opponents must be overcome one by one, but such an act of overcoming does not guarantee a

favourable ending: any moment a new opponent may loom. It is the presence of helpers and opponents that makes a fabula suspenseful and readable.

Further Specification

This model describes a structure – the relations between different kinds of phenomena – and not, primarily, the phenomena themselves. As we saw earlier, this model results in a numerical inequality of actors and actants. It is not surprising that one class of actors comprises more than one actor. The reverse, the fact that one actor stands for several classes, can only be understood if one disconnects the concept of actor from that of person: this is the reason why the term “person” is avoided when discussing actants and actors.

I have already indicated some causes of the numerical inequality between actors and actants. The relationship between subject and object is the most important; it is the motor of the fabula. It can be aimed at the appropriation of someone, something, or, on the other hand, a quality in oneself. In the first case the object is a separate actor, in the second it is not. In the first case the relationship is objective, aimed at an outside object; in the second case the subject aims at (an aspect of) the subject itself; the relationship is subjective. In some cases, this entails the further splitting or merging of actors and actants. The merging of the power with the object and the receiver with the subject occurs with frequency. Power merges with subject when a character trait of the subject is of overriding importance. Perhaps we may take it as a rule of thumb that the greater the fabula’s orientation towards the actual outside world, the greater the number of actors; to the degree that the fabula is subjective, oriented towards the subject, the number of actors decreases.

Doubling

Some fabulas have different subjects who are in opposition: a subject and an anti-subject. An anti-subject is not an opponent. An opponent opposes the subject at certain moments of the pursuit of his or her aim. It is this incidental opposition that determines the structural position. An anti-subject pursues his or her own object, and this pursuit is, at a certain moment, at cross-purposes with that of the first subject. When an actant has his or her own program, his or her own aims, and acts to achieve these aims, s/he is an autonomous subject. It is also possible that a fabula has a second subject that does not come into opposition with the program of the first subject, but is entirely independent from it, or s/he may, consciously or not, give

incidental aid or opposition to the achievement of the first subject's aim. In that case there are moments in the fabula when the different lines touch or cross. The appearance of a separate subject indicates the existence of a sub-fabula. In Couperus's *Of Old People*, for instance, we might regard some of the children and grandchildren as autonomous subjects. In his struggle to become an artist, Lot needs self-analysis as a helper. This helper proves an opponent when Lot gains insight into the emotional predisposition of his heritage, and when his aims begin to conflict with those of the old people.

It also happens that the power consists of two actants, one positive and the other negative. In naturalistic novels we often note the opposition of a personal willpower to social structure or heredity. It is likely that an extensive analysis of a number of naturalistic novels would give us as a characteristic result the opposition of two powers as a form of fabula intermediate between the subjective and the objective, between the one oriented towards the individual and the one directed towards the outside world.

Competence

If the process of the fabula can be seen as the execution of a program, then each execution presupposes the possibility of the subject to proceed. This possibility of the subject to act, the competence, may be of different kinds, which leads to further specification. Greimas subdivides competence into the determination or will of the subject to proceed to action, the power or possibility, and the knowledge or skill necessary to execute the aim. On this basis some critics have distinguished three different kinds of subjects. It makes sense to distinguish the phase of the fabula in which the virtual subject begins to desire the execution of the program; this phase might be seen as the introduction to the fabula. The distinction between power/possibility and knowledge/skill is a second principle of differentiation.

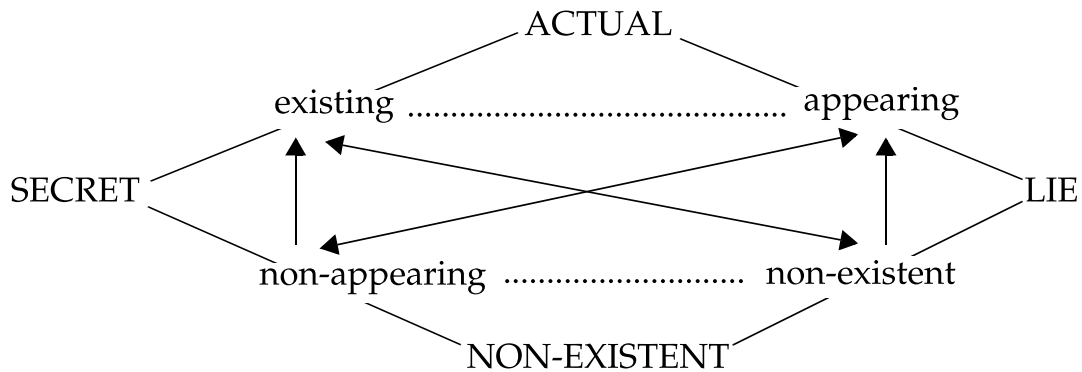
The giants, witches, and wolves of the fairy tale are actants of the first category, Tom Thumb of the second one. It may have struck the reader that in the analysis of example g, the one of Tom Thumb, I have paid little attention to the giant. I have only mentioned his power of smell. It is evident, however, that the giant plays an important role in the fabula, more important than, for instance, his wife or Tom's brothers. Merely classifying him as an opponent would be insufficient as a definition. He has his own program. He wants to find children and eat them. He reaches that goal in part: he finds children and eats them because he has the power to do so, owing to his physical force and size.

Still, he does not fully reach his goal: he eats the wrong children. His program is at cross-purposes with that of Tom Thumb, who aims at a safe return

home. The giant does not catch Tom Thumb and his brothers, because Tom Thumb possesses the second kind of competence, knowledge and skill in the form of cleverness. It would appear that in this example the specification coincides with the opposition between good and evil powers. In fairy tales this is certainly often the case. It also seems to apply to the classic detective story. Nevertheless, there is an important difference, especially in this respect. Examples d and e show that Kinsey Millhone and the murderer are in opposition. Millhone's competence is one of skill and knowledge. However, so is that of the murderer; and it is in this respect that the detective story differs from the fairy tale. What characterizes the detective story is that the murderer fails in his or her competence: he makes a mistake. The detective novel has attempted to break through the opposition of good and evil, as for instance in the novels of the Swedish team of writers Sjöwall and Wahlöö. It is striking that, especially in those novels, the hitherto fixed division of competence should be broken. The detective often reaches his or her goal by accident or sometimes not at all, as in *The Closed Room*. The power then is not the detective's insight, but fate or serendipity. In other instances, the detective reaches the aim through the manipulation of power. If, owing to his or her social position, the culprit is forced into such a tight corner that she is ripe and ready to give herself up to the detective, the latter only needs to dispose of the power to mobilize the police in order to reach his or her aim.

Truth Value

The final factor leading to further specification of actants is truth value. By truth value I mean the reality of the actants within the actantial structure. This specification is important not only with regard to the subject but also with regard to the helpers and opponents. Often they are only in appearance what they seem to be; in reality they prove the opposite. A traitor has the appearance of a helper but reveals him- or herself in the course of the story as an opponent. In the reverse case there are secret helpers: actors who help the subject, who believes s/he is dealing with an opponent; or an actor who seems to help the subject while the latter does not realize that this actor is not at all related to his or her own enterprise. Regarding this specification, certain categories of actors stand out: liars, master figures, false heroes, invisible fairies, but also seducers, truth-tellers, false clues, sudden moments of inspiration or misgiving that instigate the subject to take wrong decisions, and so on. The several possibilities are outlined in the following figure:



- implication
 opposition
 ↔ contradiction

This figure shows the similarities and differences between the possible positions of actors with regard to fabula-internal truth. "Truth" consists in the coincidence of existence and appearance, of the identity and qualities of an actor on the one hand and the impression she makes, her claims, on the other. When an actor is what she appears, she is true. When she does not put up an appearance, or in other words hides who she is, this identity is secret. When he neither is nor puts up an appearance, he cannot exist as an actor; when he appears to be what he is not, this identity is a lie.

Not only actants but also complete actantial schemes may be qualified as "true" or "false." The frequent situation of the subject aspiring towards an illusory goal and finally realizing it might be accounted for in this way.

To this aspect of actantial analysis we might also try to relate a typology. Fabulas that show the predominating influence of a secret in their actantial structure (e.g., certain fairy tales and myths) might be opposed as a separate category to fabulas in which a lie determines structure. *Of Old People* hinges on the structural principle of the secret. So do detective stories. In spy novels the concept of the lie predominates. This division into classes of actors helps us to interpret, to establish typologies to sharpen our definitions of literary movements, and to contrast fabulas that appear rather similar at first sight but prove different at vital points; it also allows us to compare the actantial structures of apparently widely different fabulas. An analysis of this type may show unexpected aspects of meanings.

As with the analysis of events, there are many other possibilities for approaching the matter, which may or may not combine with our model. I briefly list a few below.

Other Divisions into Classes

In whatever way one regards literature, whether one values books as autonomous works of art, as products of an individual or group, as objects of communication, or as a specific form of a sign system, one can never escape the obvious fact that works of art and literature are made by, for, and (usually) about people. Relations between people themselves and between people and the world will therefore almost always be important in fabulas. It is possible to describe in every fabula at least one type of relation between actors that is of a psychological or ideological nature, or of both simultaneously. Each of these relations may give a specific content to the relation between subject and power, between subject and anti-subject, but they may also be studied separately from the actantial model. On the basis of the information about the actors contained in the text, one may group them according to those principles that seem important in the frame of reference of the fabula or groups of fabulas under analysis.

First, psychological relations are of overriding importance in psychologically or psychoanalytically oriented criticism and determine the specification of actors into "psychic instances." What does it mean when we say that one actor relates to another as daughter to mother, as father to son, or son to mother? Attempts have even been made to account for the difference between tragedy and comedy and their effects on the reader: in tragedy the son is guilty about the father, whom he unconsciously desires to replace; in comedy the father is guilty about the son and is consequently punished and replaced by the latter. In other cases, the relationship between man and wife, or between child and adult, or between strong and weak personalities attracts attention.

Second, ideological relations occur, in addition to psychological relationships, in almost all fabulas. Whether it is the opposition between feudalism and liberalism, liberalism and socialism, patriarchy and feminism, colonialism and emancipation, or more specific oppositions, actors must always deal with the ideological oppositions of the world in which they move. The opposition between the individual and the collective, or between the individual and the representatives of power, is often of importance both in medieval romances and in

nineteenth-century realist novels. In Kafka's allegorical, modernist novels this opposition is even the primary thematic centre. Other oppositions, those of groups, result in ideological relationships: black against white, men against women, employers against employees, "haves" against "have-nots," conformists against individualists, the "normal" against the "insane." These oppositions demonstrate that not the categories as such but the categorization; not the differences but the structure of opposition itself is the ideological trap.

Third, all kinds of different oppositions may become important on the basis of data that at first glance have no psychological or ideological foundation; on further consideration, it may become apparent that such data are linked to psychological or ideological oppositions. On the basis of physical appearance, groups may take shape, for example, fair versus dark or red-haired. In works of ideological fiction, such oppositions seem to coincide with the one between good and evil, thus conveying a racist ideology, or its parallel, the one between good-but-boring and exciting-but-evil. On the basis of past experience, heritage, possessions, relationships to third parties, age, and lifestyle, other groups may take shape that are often also related to psychological or ideological relationships.

4: Time

Events have been defined as processes. A process is a change, a development, and presupposes therefore a succession in time or a chronology. The events themselves happen during a certain period of time, and they occur in a certain order. Some narratives make their point primarily by means of duration.

Duration

The fabula of "Tom Thumb" occupies a span of some three days. The first event, the overhearing of the parents' intention to rid themselves of their expensive children, takes place at night. So does the gathering of pebbles. The expedition to the wood and the return journey occupy the day following that night. The next night – or, in some versions, a following night – at some indeterminate time, Tom Thumb again overhears his parents, and again tries to collect pebbles, but finds himself prevented from leaving the house. The night after that the children get lost and wander into the giant's den. That night the giant eats his own children by mistake.

The next day Tom Thumb and his brothers return home safely in possession of the seven-mile boots, which guarantee a fixed income that will preclude a repetition of the fabula in the future. The time span of this fabula forms one continuous whole, possibly with the exception of the first night, which may be regarded as a prelude to the fabula proper. In three days the family's life changes substantially, from desperate poverty to happy prosperity. In "Little Red Riding Hood" the whole fabula occupies only half a day. The principle narrative of the *Arabian Nights* presents a fabula that takes one season; that of *War and Peace* takes many years. The fabula of the Old Testament lasts many centuries. The investigations of Kinsey Millhone, in Sue Grafton's series, are, as a rule, finished in a few days, while Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple tend to take longer. Classical tragedy even has *rules* about time. The time span of its fabula, which should not extend beyond one day and one night, thus functions as an aesthetic criterion or, at least, as a differential criterion with regard to genre.

This unity of time as a generic requirement remains restricted to classical tragedy. Time span is also significant in the fabulas of narrative texts. A first, general distinction might be the one between crisis and development: the first term indicates a short span of time into which events have been compressed, the second a longer period of time that shows a development. Neither of these two forms in itself has clear advantages over the other. It has sometimes been said that development is more realistic, more in accord with the experience of real life. This seems doubtful, to say the least. In reality too, moments of crisis present themselves, moments during which, in a brief instant of time, the life of a person or an entire nation takes a decisive turn. Furthermore, much depends on one's personal taste in literature: some of us prefer greater verisimilitude than others. It does seem likely, however, that a preference for one of these forms entails a certain vision of the fabula and, often, of reality. It is likely, therefore, that such a form is meaningful in itself.

Certain types of fabulas are specifically appropriate for one of the two types of duration and may even depend on a particular type. (Auto)biographies, *Bildungsromane*, war novels, frame narratives (*Arabian Nights*, *Decameron*), and travel histories require a fairly long time span – in these, the most important topic presented is precisely the passing of time. Other narrative texts, however, require a brief period of time, especially when a moment of crisis is being described. Many modern and contemporary novels and stories have been written in the

crisis form. *La modification* by Michel Butor and *Seize the Day* by Saul Bellow, two well-known representatives of new developments in the postwar novel, have in this respect been compared to classical tragedy. The fabula of Henry James's *The Ambassadors* covers a period not of twenty-four hours but of several months, but one may see it as a crisis nevertheless.

The distinction between crisis and development is relative: one form blends into the other. A fabula tends to a greater or lesser degree towards either one of the two forms. So it is often possible to distinguish both forms within one type of text. Sometimes, when this is the case, they can be considered characteristic of a certain sub-form or author, or developmental phase of the type. Earlier I suggested a difference between the detective novels of Sue Grafton and Agatha Christie. True, a more systematic analysis of their entire oeuvre would be needed to confirm the impression gained from a relatively small number of their novels. However, the preference for either crisis or development does not merely imply a certain vision of reality or a choice of a certain type of texts. Once selected, the two forms have implications for the construction of the fabula.

- 1a A development may present, in historical order, as much material as seems fit. It is not by accident that these novels are usually rather long.
- 1b The selection of the crisis form implies a restriction: only brief periods from the life of the actor are presented. In narrative painting the crisis is a privileged form for the obvious reason that a still image can accommodate only a limited number of events. What art historians call "the pregnant moment" is the pictorial equivalent of a crisis. Such paintings represent a single moment, but one that can only be understood as following the past and announcing the future.
- 2a In a development, the global significance is built up slowly from strings of events. The insights of the actors, and their relationships, take shape through the quality of events.
- 2b In a crisis, the significance is central and informs what we might call the surrounding elements. The crisis is representative – that is, characteristic of the actors and their relationships.
- 3a But a development, too, requires selection. It is not an entire lifetime that is presented, but parts from it; parts are skipped, abbreviated, summarized. From one novel to another we find great differences in this representation of the development.

- 3b The crisis, too, hardly ever occurs in its ideal form. Corneille met with the reproach that his *Le Cid* was too crowded with events for a twenty-four-hour span; the fight against the Moors, in addition to all the other events, could not possibly have taken place in so brief a time. In narrative the basic form is more easily varied and diverged from. In a crisis this happens not primarily through summary, selection, or highlighting but rather through asides. Thus we find recollections. In this way the time span of *Of Old People* is extended from one season to sixty years. Or we encounter references to past and future: at the end of most fairy tales ("Tom Thumb" is no exception), the future of the protagonist(s) is briefly alluded to. There is another kind of diversion that can also serve to extend the time span of the crisis form: a minor actor can become the protagonist in his own fabula; in this way a sub-fabula is created. These possibilities for extending the compass of the crisis and compressing the development are closely linked with the other aspect mentioned: that of chronology.

Chronology: Interruption and Parallelism

Techniques for varying the time sequence by means of elimination, or of condensation of duration, or of parallel development of several strands of the fabula, have a bearing on the chronology. Elimination causes gaps in the sequence of chronology. A period of time is skipped, often without being noticed by the reader. What has been eliminated? This is, of course, a nonsensical question. The fabula is, after all, nothing but the series of events that are mentioned. No one is likely to wonder what Tom Thumb's profession will be or at what age he started to walk. Still, omitted events are often brought to the fore in other parts of the text. In this way ellipsis – the omission of an element that belongs in a series – gains its power of signification. Robbe-Grillet's *Voyeur* is, perhaps, the most spectacular example. In this novel an event that, according to further information given by the fabula, must certainly have taken place, is omitted. It would even seem the most important event of the entire fabula: the sadistic murder of a young girl by the protagonist. Throughout the fabula this actor, Mattias, labours to fill this gap in time, establishing an "innocent" chronology. Until the very end it is not clearly evident that Mattias is the murderer. Consequently, the fabula cannot be fully described.

Although it is not as central as in *Le voyeur*, in other narrative texts ellipsis often has a significant function. The sentence "When they left

Tostes, Madame Bovary was pregnant," which is so characteristic of Flaubert's narrative style, indicates by the ease with which it passes over the event that the getting, and later having, of children is of very slight importance to Emma Bovary, and the moment at which the child is conceived is of none at all. Indeed, the sexual relationship between Emma and Charles is, through the ellipsis of the event, fully represented as poor.

The elaboration of parallel strings of one fabula makes it difficult to recognize one single chronological sequence in that fabula. Several events happen at the same time. It is not always possible to decide whether the coincidence in time is partial or complete. The vagueness of the chronology is, at times, just as significant as its painstaking representation. In Reve's *The Evenings*, events happen exactly chronologically and this chronology is indicated with such accuracy that the suggestion arises of an obsession caused by a surplus of time.

In García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* the strict sequence of events is undercut from the inside, and readers who want to keep track of the course of the fabula find themselves powerless in the face of the ever-multiplying story lines, which make one hundred years into an eternity. Insofar as this effect is caused by changes, reversals in chronology, this problem belongs to chapter 2. What concerns me here is that incomplete information, which is never filled out, leaves gaps in the constructed fabula and thus blurs our impression of it. Also important here is the occurrence of parallelism, and the fact that achronicity, the impossibility of establishing a precise chronology, can be the result of the criss-crossing of several lines.

Logical Sequence

Sequence is a logical concept. It is a matter of logic to suppose that someone who arrives must first have departed; that old age follows youth; reconciliation, quarrel; awakening, sleep. On the basis of the information offered in the text, it is possible to find the chronology of the fabula even if the order is not sequential. What is the point of doing so? Chronological sequences are to be distinguished from other logical sequences. It is a frequent misconception that chronological and causal connections are always interrelated. It is true, of course, that one can only kill, hate, or despise one's father after having been engendered, although films like *Back to the Future* suggest otherwise. Another ruling misconception is that what happens first is therefore better. For some people this has been a reason to proclaim the superiority of men over women, on the basis of the account of creation in Genesis 2; for others, on the basis of the

same fragment, it has been a reason to denounce the account of creation as sexist. Both parties implicitly base their contention on the assumption that chronological priority entails a qualitative priority.

But the Bible's poetics do not at all encourage such an interpretation. The sequence of events in it mirrors the process of creation as an ongoing splitting and specifying, much like cells in the human body. Therefore, the first creation of "man" is rather the creation of an undivided, still elementary proto-human being, subsequently split into female – in fact mentioned first there – and male. Limiting the analysis to chronological connections helps us expose such misconceptions. This is the gain of structuralist analysis.

The time span can be compared and contrasted with chronology. A brief event – for example, a meeting – succeeds a long event – for example, a process of estrangement between two actors. In this order the meeting has or might have another significance and other consequences than it would have had if the order had been inverted. When one orders the events in chronological sequence, one forms an impression of the difference between fabula and story. The interventions in chronology that become manifest can be significant for the vision of the fabula which they imply.

5: Location

Events happen somewhere. The locations where things happen may in principle be deduced. When we read

- a John was pushing his shopping cart when he suddenly saw his hated neighbour at the checkout counter

we may assume that the meeting place is the supermarket.

- b Elizabeth crossed the street

indicates a street, whether narrow or wide, long or short.

- c Sighing with pleasure, he sank back into the pillows as she bent over him.

This sentence, too, leaves little doubt about the location of action. When the location has not been indicated, readers will simply supply one. *They* will imagine the scene, and in order to do so, they have to situate

it somewhere, however vague the imaginary place may be. The Russian semiotician Lotman has explained this by pointing out the predominance of the dimension of space in the human imagination. In support of his contention he lists a number of convincing examples of spatial terms we use to indicate abstract concepts, such as “infinite” for an “immeasurably” large quantity, and “distance” for a deficient relationship between people. Incidentally, even the word “relation” itself would seem to support Lotman’s contention.

If spatial thinking is indeed a general human tendency, then it is not surprising that spatial elements play an important role in fabulas. It is, for instance, possible to make a note of the place of each fabula and then to see whether a connection exists between the kind of events, the identity of the actors, and the location. The subdivision of locations into groups is a means to gain insight into the relations between elements. A contrast between inside and outside is often relevant: inside may carry the suggestion of protection, and outside that of danger. These meanings are not indissolubly tied to these oppositions; it is equally possible for inside to suggest close confinement, and outside freedom, or for us to see a combination of these meanings, or a development from one to the other. Thus in Colette’s novel *Cheri*, Lea’s bedroom is, at first, a safe haven for Cheri, but towards the end this place becomes a prison from which he escapes with barely concealed relief. The expectation that the home provides safety is a powerful trigger of suspense when the opposite is the case. And sadly, the issue of the sexual abuse of children has revealed how often the home is precisely the place of danger.

Another opposition – a related one – is between the centrally located square, which functions as the meeting place where actors confront one another, and the surrounding world, where each actor has to fend for her- or himself. City and country are contrasted in many romantic and realistic novels. Emma Bovary’s idealization of the city, projected onto Paris, becomes the measure of her involvement, then disappointment, with a lover in Rouen, the only city to which she has access.

The opposition between city and country can take on different meanings. Sometimes the former is the site of iniquity in contrast to the countryside’s idyllic innocence; or the former is a place to magically acquire riches, in contrast to the drudgery of farm labour; or the former is the seat of power over powerless country people. This contrast, too, may reverse itself when it becomes clear that the riches of the city are limited to a few and that the common man in the urban slums is worse off

than the farmer, who can, at least, eat his own crops. Or, conversely, the city can be presented as a maddening place ruled by paranoia, in contrast to the peaceful, wholesome countryside. In the British TV series *Upstairs Downstairs* the contrast between kitchen and drawing-room represents the radical difference between masters and servants. A public meeting place such as a pub may serve as neutral ground, lending it a social function: a meeting place for companions in adversity who may gain courage from sympathy and solidarity. But it may also be a place where one takes refuge in alcohol, leading to complete destruction, as in Zola's *L'Assommoir*.

Spatial oppositions can be much more abstract than the examples mentioned here. When several places, ordered in groups, can be related to psychological, ideological, and moral oppositions, location may function as an important principle of structure. For instance, high–low, related to favourable–unfavourable, fortunate–unfortunate, is an opposition that Western literature has inherited from the late biblical vision of heaven and hell, and also from Latin and Greek mythology. Far–near, open–closed, and finite–infinite, together with familiar–strange, safe–unsafe, and accessible–inaccessible are oppositions often encountered.

As I suggested in chapter 2, a special role is played by the boundary between two opposed locations. Just as in Christian mythology purgatory mediates the opposition between heaven and hell, so the front door may connote a crucial barrier for one intending to penetrate certain circles. The shop as a transitory place between outside and inside, the sea between society and solitude, the beach between land and sea, gardens between city and country, all function as mediators. It is possible to be trapped in such places.

Many events are set in vehicles of transportation, such as trains, boats, carriages, and airplanes. Such events – murder in Agatha Christie, sex in Flaubert, meetings, quarrels, hold-ups – temporarily suspend the clarity and safe predictability of the social order. This structuring potential of places of transition nourishes the narrative potential of the road “Pénétrante Ouest” in Chamoiseau's *Texaco*. This road launches the fabula, yet in the end, it is never built. Rather than a connection, it would have been merely a “penetration” of the land. Its destructive capacity – for its construction, the entire site of Texaco would have had to be erased – makes it, and the fabula of appropriation it represented, unacceptable. The woman founder of the community of Texaco, Marie-Sophie, abducts the road: she tells the story that converts the urban

planner and makes him give up on constructing the road and instead monumentalize the place as a site of memory.

Oppositions are constructions; it is important to remember that so as not to naturalize them. As deconstructive criticism has amply demonstrated, oppositions are invariably flawed in their attempted logic. And that is very fortunate. If this chapter has relied more than the previous ones on the idea of opposition, this is not because oppositions have a privileged status in reality or art. Structuring often takes the route of opposition as a handy simplification of complex content. The oppositions we expect to function in fabulas can be traps as well as tools. This is the major problem of ideological and political criticism. The very ideological structure – binary opposition – that we use for our critical readings is simultaneously the object of those readings, their main target. The point is not to notice, confirm, or denounce oppositions but to confront the oppositions we notice with those we hold ourselves, and to use the differences between them as a tool to break their tyranny. When such an approach is taken, criticism need not prejudge the politics of great literature, or of popular culture, as happens so often. Instead, it helps us realize that criticism is always also, to a certain extent, self-criticism.

Remarks and Sources

In this chapter I have outlined objects and processes as the most important elements of the fabula. First events were discussed, then actors. I contend that these two categories are the most relevant elements. In both cases I first discussed criteria for selection on the basis of which a large quantity of subject matter might be restricted on explicit grounds. Subsequently the relationship between the remaining elements was considered. Events were always seen in relation to the actors forming part of them, and the actors in relation to the events they initiated or suffered. With regard to events I paid special attention to different criteria of selection, while in discussing the actors I was primarily engaged in classification. This difference relates to the order in which both subjects were discussed; it was not necessary to discuss again the several criteria for selection when that had been done in the previous subsection, albeit with regard to a different subject. Finally, time and location have been given only summary attention. They were discussed at greater length in the previous chapter, for these elements are primarily interesting because of the way in which they are ordered and specified in the story.

The different subsections of this chapter show a clear resemblance. In every case I tried to describe the elements in their relationship to one another, and not as isolated units. This approach is structuralist: it assumes that fixed relations between classes of phenomena form the basis of the narrative system of the fabula. I chose this approach because it offers, among other advantages, that of coherence. The different elements may thus be seen within the framework of one theoretical approach. Objections may be raised against this approach. The one mentioned most often is that it is reductive. This is inevitable: every choice is a limitation. But if that limitation is a starting point, not an endpoint, it can be turned against itself and help us grasp what the ideological distributions of elements are and do. Instead of an ideological foundation, structural analysis then becomes a tool for critique.

When dealing with determined relationships between classes of phenomena, the ordering principles that form the basis of these classes must be made explicit. Classification, however, is not a self-serving aim for the literary scholar. Its use is instrumental: only when classification helps achieve greater insight into the phenomena constituting the classes is it meaningful in describing the text. Then significance may be derived from the fact that a phenomenon belongs to a certain class. The specific characteristics of one object may be described in terms of the class to which they belong – or to which, against our expectation, they possibly do not belong. It is to emphasize that aspect of the approach that I have, in my examples, selected typological aspects just as often as specific texts. Typologies, however, are often handled implicitly: when one says that a text shows an original vision of society, one implicitly assumes that a certain outlook on society forms the basis of the class of texts to which that particular one belongs.

On the resemblance or homology between fabulas and reality, the literature is vast. Suffice it here to refer to the classical study by Erich Auerbach (1953) that inaugurated a flurry of interest in this subject. A good later study is Prendergast (1986). Although it is not systematic enough to serve my purposes here, Peter Brooks's *Reading for the Plot* (1984) offers a meaningful supplement to the structural models presented here.

The criteria for selecting events have been derived from Barthes (1975) and Hendricks (1973). The relations between events have been discussed according to the proposals of Bremond (1973). For a sophisticated application, see Bremond and Pavel (1998). Bremond distinguishes a third possibility for the combination of elementary series: juxtaposition. I have not included this possibility because to me it seems not of

the same order as succession and embedding. Juxtaposition does not result in a complete series of events, but in several visions of one and the same event. This issue was dealt with in chapter 2. The actantial model as it is presented here is derived from Greimas (1966). While I find the demonstration of his model useful, I have not adopted his later proposal (e.g., 1976) to replace *opponent* and *helper* with the concepts *anti-actant* and *co-actant*; the distinction between anti-subjects – autonomous subjects whose intentions are at cross-purposes with those of the first subject – and incidental opponents would be lost. I prefer to regard the duplication of the principal actant as a possibility and to maintain the original sixfold model. Most structural models have, to a greater or lesser degree, been inspired by Propp, whose work only became widely known during the 1960s. Lotman's remarks on location are published in Lotman (1973). I already mentioned De Lauretis's (1983) feminist critique of this view. Fludernik (1996) offers a thorough discussion of the issues in this book, including the topics of this chapter, which motivated students might find interesting. For what can be considered a "postcolonial" reflection that bears on the way I propose to use narratological models, see Melas (2007). The example of the biblical creation story was treated extensively in my book *Lethal Love* (1987). Another example of the use of narratology for anthropology is Elsbee (1982).

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Index of Concepts

This book is largely about concepts and their usage. Many concepts recur throughout this book. Listing all the locations of each concept would make this index useless. To increase its usefulness, I only indexed concepts that are not specifically narratological, but that do have relevance for narratological analysis. Page references indicate only those pages where concepts are defined, discussed, or used in a specific theoretical sense that extends their definition. I stopped listing a concept when the occurrences mentioned, constitute an implicit theory of it. I have not listed concepts that are the subject of entire sections, as these are listed in the Table of Contents.

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