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## **Narrative Theory, 1966–2006: A Narrative**

Focalization, prolepsis, analepsis homodiegetic, heterodiegetic, intradiegetic (are we having fun yet?) heteroglossia, the narrative audience, tensions and instabilities, disclosure functions, character zones, fuzzy temporality. Who else is ready to cry, “Hold, enough!”?

I begin with this eclectic and incomplete litany of terms introduced by narrative theorists over the last forty years in order, first, to indicate that narrative theory has been advancing on a number of fronts, and, second, to acknowledge that the large Terminological Beastie looming over the field is likely to be intimidating to the nonspecialist. My goal here is to do justice to the advances most relevant to *The Nature of Narrative*'s focus on literary narrative while keeping the Beastie at bay. Rather than proceeding through an inventory of narratological neologisms or even through an analysis of the interrelations between the history of critical theory and the study of narrative over the last forty years, I shall, in effect, construct a three-part narrative: a big picture account of major trends in the field, followed by a more detailed telling about work on elements of narrative, and then, finally, a brief look at the current scene. More specifically, Part One will (1) consider the expansion of narrative theory's focus over the past forty years—from literary narrative to narrative *tout court*—and the implications of that expansion for the study of literary narrative; and (2) describe three prominent general conceptions of narrative during this period: narrative as formal system, narrative as ideological instrument, and narrative as rhetoric. These conceptions authorize different theoretical and interpretive projects, though both the conceptions and the projects also overlap and influence each other at times. In a sense, this discussion will be an update of Scholes and Kellogg's chapter on Meaning. Part Two will then consider how these conceptions of narrative have influenced work on the three elements of narrative treated by Scholes and Kellogg: plot, character, and point of view—a topic I will modify to the broader category of narrative discourse. Part Three will briefly sketch some especially significant issues being addressed in current narrative theory.

Although this piece has minimal, or what Brian McHale might call “weak,” narrativity, I deliberately refer to it as a narrative because I want to call attention to what I hope is a productive tension in it. On the one hand, the conventions of the genre dictate that this survey of scholarship be told from a perspective of Godlike omniscience. On the other hand, any narrative theorist with even a smidgen of self-awareness could not undertake such a survey without being acutely aware of all the selection it entails and the yawning gap between his own limited perspective and God's. In order to reflect this tension without making it dominate my discussion, I will observe the conventions of the genre but punctuate that observance with occasional reminders that I am writing only one of the many plausible narratives about the relation between narrative and narrative theory since 1966.<sup>1</sup>

### **Part One: Four Protagonists and Many More Plots**

*I circulate endlessly throughout cultures and am invoked in countless claims—I explain experience; I frame beliefs, opinions, worldviews; I am central to*

*the concept of identity; I am This, I am That, and I am most certainly the Other. I have become, to use a word favored by one of the great modernist practitioners of my art, a veritable avatar of postmodern identity.*

### **Protagonist I: The Object of Study**

We are living in the age of the Narrative Turn, an era when narrative is widely celebrated and studied for its ubiquity and importance. Doctors, lawyers, psychologists, business men and women, politicians, and political pundits of all stripes are just a few of the groups who now regard narrative as the Queen of Discourses and an essential component of their work. These groups acknowledge narrative's power to capture certain truths and experiences in ways that other modes of explanation and analysis such as statistics, descriptions, summaries, and reasoning via conceptual abstractions cannot. Phrases such as "narrative explanation," "narrative understanding," "narrative as a way of thinking," and "narrative identity" have become common currency in conversations inside and outside the academy. To take just one prominent example, after the 2004 presidential election in the United States, Democratic politicians contended that their candidate John Kerry lost to George W. Bush because Kerry failed to articulate his vision for an improved America in a clear and persuasive narrative.

As a result of the Narrative Turn, narrative theory now takes as its objects of study narrative of all kinds occurring in all kinds of media throughout history: personal, political, historical, legal, and medical narratives, to name just a few—in their ancient, medieval, early modern, and postmodern guises, and in their oral, print, visual (film, sculpture, painting, performance), digital and multi-media formats. In this way, narrative theory has gone much further down the road that Scholes and Kellogg travelled in 1966. While they persuasively located the then dominant object of narrative study, the novel, within a much broader history and understanding of literary narrative, contemporary narrative theory now locates literary narrative within a much broader conception of narrative itself. This change has two main consequences for the study of literary narrative. (1) Theories derived from a focus on literary narrative, including theories about plot, character, and narrative discourse, have a potentially greater significance even as they are subject to a more rigorous scrutiny. Such theories can contribute substantially to the conversation about how and why narrative is such a distinctive and powerful mode for explaining experience and organizing knowledge. But such theories are also subject to the test of whether they apply only to the special case of literary narrative. (2) Theories developed in connection with other kinds of narrative can cast new light on literary narrative, whether by highlighting similarities, emphasizing differences, or leading to revised understandings of literary narrative itself.

### **Protagonist II: Narrative as Formal System**

*Rules rule, but sometimes I rue rules; they make me feel cabin'd, cribbed, confined—framed.*

Around the time that Scholes and Kellogg were completing the first edition, the rise of structuralism in France gave birth to the dream of a comprehensive description of narrative as a formal system on the model of a grammar. Although this dream never became a reality, structuralist narratology produced many valuable insights and fashioned many long-lasting tools for the study of narrative. In addition, structuralist narratology—now often called classical narratology—has provided a

starting point for much subsequent narrative theory, even when that theory seeks to go in directions the structuralists would neither have anticipated nor approved. In particular, today's vibrant and still developing approach of cognitive narratology, while often noting its differences from structuralist narratology, shares the same goal of developing a comprehensive formal account of the nature of narrative. While classical narratology took structural linguistics as its model and therefore conceived of its desired formal system as a grammar, cognitive narratology is a more multi-disciplinary endeavour, and it conceives of its formal system as the components of the mental models that narratives depend on in their production and consumption. The most substantial contribution of structuralist narratology has been to the study of narrative discourse, especially through Gérard Genette's book *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, which I will discuss in some detail in the section on narrative discourse. Here I will focus on the larger context of the structuralist movement and sketch some of the similarities and differences between structuralist and cognitivist conceptions of narrative as a formal system.

Structuralism's first principle is that meaning-making is a rule-governed activity. Consequently, it seeks to identify the underlying rules—the codes and conventions—of the various domains of meaning-making (e.g., literature, fashion, even a specific culture). Structuralism's second principles are that language is the prototype of all sign systems and that, therefore, its disciplinary model should be linguistics. More specifically, the structuralists' approach to narrative, which Tzvetan Todorov labelled *narratologie* in his 1969 *Grammaire du Décaméron* is founded primarily on the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and to a lesser extent on the work in poetics of the Russian Formalists.<sup>2</sup> Just as Saussure distinguished between the formal system of language (*langue*) and individual utterances (*parole*), so, too, the structuralists distinguish between identifying the formal system of narrative (its grammar or poetics) and the task of interpreting specific narratives. And just as Saussure's project was to analyze the components of the *langue* and the relationships among them, the main interest of the structuralists is to identify the basic elements of narrative and the relationships among them. Their goal in other words is a descriptive grammar of narrative not a method for interpreting individual narratives (though a descriptive poetics inevitably has implications for interpretation).

An influential precursor of structuralist narrative theory is Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), a study of the common elements of a large corpus of Russian folktales. Saussure, Propp, and the classical narratologists all rely in their different ways on Saussure's distinction between rules of selection (paradigmatic rules) and rules of combination (syntagmatic rules). Paradigmatic rules stipulate, for example, that to find a subject for a sentence, we must choose from the set of nouns or noun phrases in the lexicon of the language, and to find a predicate we must choose from the set of verbs or verb phrases in that lexicon. Syntagmatic rules then stipulate (a) that the combination of subjects and predicates make sentences and (b) which noun phrases can grammatically combine with which verb phrases. Thus, the sentence *the have is on the mat* does not form a grammatical sentence because it violates paradigmatic rules; the sentence *the mat the cat on sat ripped got up* does not form a grammatical sentence because it violates syntagmatic rules; and all the sentences in this edition of *The Nature of Narrative* (presumably) are grammatical because they observe both rules.

Propp's analysis of his corpus identifies the underlying paradigmatic and syntagmatic rules governing the Russian folktale. He finds that all the tales built out of a small number of underlying character roles (Hero, Helper, Donor, Villain, and so on) that are themselves elements in 31 basic events (e.g., the Hero discovers a lack; the Hero is tested). What's more, although not all 31 events are in every folktale, they always occur in the same order. Thus, each of the 31 events represents a paradigmatic class, and their invariant order is testimony to the syntagmatic rules for their combination.

As we'll see below, Propp's study influenced structuralist ideas about both character and plot, but the structuralists also remain aware that the Russian folktale is a special rather than a paradigm case of narrative. More generally, their attention to the relation between paradigmatic and syntagmatic rules, to the Russian formalist distinction between *fabula* (the chronological order of a narrative's events) and *sjuzhet* (the order in which a narrative represents those events), and to a broader corpus of narratives than Propp's Russian folktales leads them to develop their most enduring insight: the distinction between the what and the how of narrative, which they labelled story (*récit*) and discourse (*discours*). In one sense the basic insight, though not articulated by the structuralists in this way, is that the Russian folktales are not typical but anomalous in presenting their events in an invariant order, because the rules for combining the selected events of a narrative turn out to be extraordinarily flexible. Genette's work on temporality, which I discuss below, can be understood as an account of the principles underlying these flexible combinations.

The story/discourse distinction is fundamental to narratology because it allows for (a) two distinct groupings of narrative elements with events, character, and setting (or alternatively, events and existents) under story and all the devices for presenting these elements under discourse; (b) a recognition that the relations between the elements of the two groups can vary widely from narrative to narrative; and (c) the comparison of versions of a single narrative across different media (what changes primarily in a narrative's move from one medium to another is discourse rather than story). In characterizing the story/discourse distinction as structuralism's most enduring insight, I do not mean to suggest that the distinction has never been questioned or contested. In fact, in the United States structuralism was followed so closely by post-structuralism that the move of deconstructing binary oppositions quickly became a habit.<sup>3</sup> Among the most intriguing such deconstructions of the story/discourse distinction is that proposed by Jonathan Culler. Culler argues that narrative has a double logic—a logic of action in the story and a logic of theme, genre, well-formedness in the discourse—and that attending to this double logic undoes the apparent priority of story over discourse. Do the lovers in romantic comedy get married because of their own actions or because the demands of thematic and generic coherence require them to? In Sophocles's *Oedipus*, Culler contends, Oedipus is considered guilty of killing Laius not because there is incontrovertible proof in the story but because the logic of the discourse requires that he be seen as fulfilling the prophecy that he would. In a historical rather than a deconstructive argument, Harry Shaw maintains that the absolute demarcation of story and discourse into separate spheres leads to a theory that is not able to describe adequately the role of narrators in the Victorian novel. In *Living to Tell About It* (2005) I argue that the distinction is better understood as a helpful heuristic than a rigid boundary between the elements of narrative. But none of these quarrels

dislodges the story/discourse distinction from its useful place in narrative theory, and, indeed, each one recognizes the value of the distinction as at least a starting point for thinking about narrative as a formal system.

Cognitive narratology takes classical narratology's fundamental question, what are the underlying rules of narrative's textual system?, and revises it to ask, what are the mental tools, processes, and activities that make possible our ability to construct and understand narrative? In addition, cognitive narratology focuses on narrative itself as a tool of understanding, that is, on how narrative contributes to human beings efforts to structure and make sense of their experiences. Thus, rather than taking structural linguistics as its disciplinary model, cognitive narratology draws on ideas from cognitive science, including (cognitive) linguistics, cognitive, evolutionary and social psychology, philosophy of mind, and other domains. In one of its variants, cognitive narratology emphasizes the importance of frames (or schemata) and scripts for both authors and audiences. Frames are general concepts that we employ as brackets or boundaries around experiences in order to be able to understand them better. Scripts are recurring patterns or sequences of action. Thus, frames refer to our knowledge of general domains of experience, while scripts refer to our knowledge of common scenarios or sequences of events within those domains. For example, when we enter a gourmet restaurant we employ a different frame from the one we employ when we enter a hardware store or even a fast food restaurant. We are able to order a meal in the gourmet restaurant and to purchase a tool in the hardware store because we know the relevant scripts. Frames provide conventional, default knowledge, which narratives can activate and then complicate by deviating from the standard models. As a relatively new field, cognitive narratology is still formulating and testing its proposals, but Monika Fludernik in *Towards a "Natural" Narratology* (1996) and David Herman in *Story Logic* (2002) present two valuable versions of cognitive narrative theory.

Fludernik argues for a broad theory of narrative that relies on the interrelations among three kinds of cognitive frames: (1) the ones we use for understanding conversational narrative, including our concern with their tellability and point; (2) the ones that follow from our experience of embodiedness in the natural world—what she calls experientiality; and (3) the ones that we use to “naturalize” or recuperate within a larger explanatory scheme initially puzzling textual data. Fludernik coins the terms “narrativize” and “narrativization” to refer to how readers naturalize texts by the use of narrative schemata. Among the many suggestive consequences of Fludernik's approach is its conception of narrativity (that which makes a text a narrative rather than something else) as grounded not in the presence of a teller and a sequence of events but rather in our embodied experience of the world, what she calls experientiality. Consequently, Fludernik puts greater emphasis on some standard elements of narrative and de-emphasizes others. Human protagonists who act and think are essential to narrative, but action sequences leading to a clear endpoint are not. The frame provided by our embodiedness makes acting and thinking crucial activities, while the frame of narrativization allows us to impose narrative schemata even on representations of consciousness that do not lead to any change in that consciousness or to any other traditional marker of narrativity. In this way, Fludernik moves away from a view of narrative as adequately grounded in the story/discourse distinction and toward one that emphasizes the importance of experientiality and the active role of the audience in framing a text as narrative.

In *Story Logic* Herman offers a different vision of a cognitively based narrative theory, one that emphasizes what he calls the storyworld. For Herman narrative analysis seeks to illuminate “the process by which interpreters reconstruct the storyworlds encoded in narratives” and by storyworlds he means “mental models of who did what to and with whom, when, where and why in what fashion in the world to which recipients relocate . . . as they work to comprehend a narrative” (5). He then divides his inquiry into detailed accounts of the principles underlying what he calls the “microdesigns” and the “macrodesigns” of storyworlds, by which he means the local and the global strategies of constructing and understanding such worlds. Microdesigns include our ability to sort textual data into states, events, and actions, our ability to apply scripts to action sequences, our ability to recognize the various roles that characters play in those sequences, and our ability to process dialogue. Macrodesigns include our ability to conceptualize narrative temporality, space, and perspective as well as to anchor the storyworld in a particular context. As even this brief summary suggests, Herman is more willing to work with the story/discourse distinction and its division of elements than Fludernik, but what emerges from Herman’s analysis is a revisionary account of just about every element in the standard inventory of a narrative’s parts. I will have more to say about some specifics of Fludernik’s and Herman’s theories when I turn to the elements of narrative.

### **Protagonist III: Narrative as Ideological Instrument**

*I am political and—or is it “because”?— personal. I reflect and transform the social order. I interpellate and inculcate, resist and challenge. I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed; I am the thorns of life, I cut.*

After the post-1960s breakdown of the New Critical orthodoxy with its insistence on the autonomy of the literary text and its celebration of what W.K. Wimsatt called the Verbal Icon, criticism in the West began to focus on the interconnections between literature and society, and especially the role of literature (and, in some cases, literary theory) in inculcating, reinforcing, challenging or transforming cultural beliefs and value systems. In narrative studies, this development is evident in a range of projects, many of which themselves overlap: (a) work by feminist and critical race theorists emphasizing the difference that race, gender, and class make in the writing, reading, and theorizing of narrative; (b) work influenced by Michel Foucault about the novel’s role in the disciplining of its readers; (c) work such as that of Fredric Jameson based in Marxist theory that reads literary narrative in light of the larger economic and class system existing at the time of its production; (d) queer theory’s efforts to dislodge assumptions about normative heterosexuality that tacitly guide many interpretations of individual narratives and some understandings of character and plot; (e) postcolonial theory’s various analyses of the way the condition of postcoloniality influences the construction and reception of narrative; (f) new historicism’s approach to literary narrative as part of the larger network of cultural discourses at the time of its production, and, thus, inevitably influenced by and influencing that network.

Work in this mode is noticeably different from work that approaches narrative as a formal system because of its emphasis on politics and because the political commitments of the critic often provide the lens through which the critic views the object of study. Initially, theorists working on narrative as a formal system and those working on it as an ideological instrument worked along parallel tracks and even

regarded each other with some suspicion. But over time, the tracks have intersected and the mutual suspicions have abated, as critics interested in both form and politics have demonstrated not only that there is no necessary opposition between those interests but also that they can be mutually reinforcing. Scholes's *Textual Power* (1986) was one of several mid-1980s studies to show how the study of a text's formal features could be linked with the study of texts as ideological instruments. Scholes identifies three main steps in a serious encounter with a text: (1) reading, which is especially concerned with identifying the binary oppositions upon which the text is built; (2) interpretation, which links the textual binaries to broader cultural codes, specifies the text's view of the relation between those binaries (e.g., does the text privilege one of the codes?), and determines its attitudes toward that relation (e.g., does it lament or celebrate the privileging?); and (3) criticism, which evaluates the text's attitudes toward those codes. The step of interpretation, with its linking of textual details to broader cultural codes, recognizes the text as an ideological instrument. But the particular way the instrument cuts depends on its selection and combination of specific binary oppositions. To put the point another way, since Scholes regards interpretation as grounded in reading, his approach contains no opposition between its interest in formal features of texts and its interest in texts as ideological instruments. At the same time, Scholes's approach insists that the reader not be a passive recipient of the text's ideological message but instead an active evaluator of that message. So much for the text as verbal icon whose formal perfection we admire. If there is a problem with the approach, it resides in the assumption that texts are built primarily on binary oppositions.<sup>4</sup>

Two other approaches that link form and ideology have been especially important to the ongoing development of narrative theory, and they will serve as my main illustrations of work that views narrative as an ideological instrument: Mikhail Bakhtin's focus on the novel as dialogic discourse and that branch of feminist criticism and theory known as feminist narratology. Bakhtin was part of a circle of Russian intellectuals who met between 1918 and 1929, a group that also included Pavel Medvedev and Valentin Voloshinov, two scholars whose books are sometimes attributed to Bakhtin. Bakhtin's work was not widely noticed in the West until the early 1980s when new translations of *The Dialogic Imagination* and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* appeared. Bakhtin's approach to narrative is radically different from the one taken by classical narratology because he has a radically different conception of language itself.

As noted above, one of the key distinctions in Saussurean linguistics is that between *langue* and *parole*, between, that is, the formal, abstract system of language, and language in use. For Saussure, *langue* makes *parole* possible, and *parole* leads to diachronic change in *langue*. Saussure was primarily interested in describing the elements and structure of *langue*, just as the structuralist narratologists were interested in writing the grammar of narrative. Bakhtin by contrast is primarily interested in *parole*, and, indeed, from his perspective, *parole* is so diverse that any attempt to capture *langue* in a comprehensive way is doomed to fail. Furthermore, the diversity of *parole* is a function not just of the range of semantic forms and syntactic structures used by speakers but also of the inseparable connection between language and ideology. The social nature of language means that different social groups develop characteristic patterns of diction and syntax and those patterns come to carry the ideological values of those groups. Thus, every utterance conveys both a semantic and an ideological meaning, because every utterance carries both a content and a set of values associated with its characteristic

diction and syntax. No one speaker fully owns his or her utterance because the words of the utterance have been used by others and carry with them the marks of their previous uses. Consequently, Bakhtin regards any one language, say, English, as composed of an almost countless number of social dialects or mini-languages (or, in one meaning of the term, registers), each one shot through with ideology. For example, we could identify the language of the law, the language of the street, the language of the academy, the language of the popular media, and so on. Furthermore, a given society will often establish a hierarchy among its social dialects, with some more officially sanctioned and, thus, more authoritative than others. For Bakhtin, the task of establishing oneself as a mature speaker involves establishing one's relation to existing authoritative discourses by adopting what he calls internally persuasive discourses, ones which the individual values regardless of their place in the societal hierarchy.

Bakhtin argues that the novel is the highest form of literary art because it most effectively puts the multiple dialects of a society in dialogue with each other. This dialogue may occur through a sequential juxtaposition of dialects or through what Bakhtin calls 'double-voiced discourse', the use of more than one dialect within a single utterance. Some novels will orchestrate what Bakhtin calls the heteroglossia or the polyphony of these dialects so that one emerges as superior to the others. Other novels, such as those of Dostoevsky, which Bakhtin values above all others, orchestrate the polyphony so that no single dialect, and, thus, no single ideological position, emerges triumphant.

Bakhtin's influence on the study of narrative discourse has been extensive. His analyses of double-voiced discourse in Dickens and Turgenev in *The Dialogic Imagination* and of polyphony in *Dostoevsky's Poetics* provide models that have been widely followed. In addition, his ideas about the link between language and ideology have been taken up by just about every other mode of ideological criticism. I will include some Bakhtinian analysis of a passage from Ian McEwan's *Atonement* in the section on narrative discourse below.

Throughout 1970s and into the mid-1980s, feminist theory and criticism produced valuable studies of the difference gender makes in the production and consumption of narrative at particular historical junctures. During this same period structuralist narratology gradually fell on hard times as post-structuralist theory, with its skepticism about the possibility and desirability of descriptive poetics, became the new orthodoxy. Then in 1986, Susan Lanser proposed joining the analytical precision of structuralist narratology with the political concerns of feminism as a way to contribute to the projects of both approaches. Although some narratologists initially felt that the study of form and the study of politics were incompatible projects and some feminist critics thought narratology to be an empty formalism, work by Lanser and others has now established feminist narratology as a significant movement within narrative theory. Its key theoretical principle is that gender—of authors, narrators, characters, and readers—is not just relevant to the study of narrative but something intrinsic to its form. Consequently, in this view, descriptions of narrative as a formal system that exclude gender are inadequate. At the same time, work in feminist narratology has also shown the importance of historicizing the interconnection between form and gender: while the connection itself is something that persists throughout the history of narrative, the precise nature of that connection is something that changes over time. Feminist narratology raises questions about all the elements of narrative, but its main contributions to date have been to the study of narrative discourse, and I will discuss those contributions in more detail below.



### Protagonist IV: Narrative as Rhetoric

*I am multi-layered, purposive, ethical. Or flat, univocal, and didactic.*

In general terms, rhetorical approaches differ from structuralist, cognitive, and ideological approaches because they attend to the role of all three points of the rhetorical triangle—author, text, and reader—in the production of narrative meaning, and because they are less concerned with invariant rules or a priori political commitments. The three approaches I single out here put special emphasis on the reader's share in the production of meaning even as they retain a strong interest in the textual signals that guide the reader's role and acknowledge the author as the constructive agent of the text. In the first two of these approaches, gaps in the text are of special importance. Wolfgang Iser, who draws upon the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Roman Ingarden, views the relation among author, reader, and text as a dynamic one in which readers first follow the author's prestructured textual signals but then inevitably encounter gaps in those signals. Different readers then fill in those gaps in different ways, thus giving different concrete realizations to the potential meaning of the narrative text. This Ingarden-Iser model is one of the influences on Meir Sternberg's innovative approach to three interlocking kinds of narrative interest: suspense, which involves the reader's interest in what will be told; curiosity, which involves the reader's interest in gaps in what has been told; and surprise, which involves the reader's activity of recognition when gaps are filled in unexpected ways. In Sternberg's view, narrative is the mode of discourse in which the interplay among these three kinds of interests dominates.<sup>5</sup> The third approach is the one that I will give the most space to because it has made greater contributions to Scholes and Kellogg's categories of plot, character, and narrative discourse than the other two. This approach derives from Wayne C. Booth's revision of Chicago School neo-Aristotelian poetics into a rhetoric of narrative.

This approach conceives of narrative as purposive act of communication about characters and events: somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened. Given the emphasis on communicative action, the approach pays special attention to the relations among tellers, audiences, and the something that has happened. Furthermore, the focus on purpose(s) includes a recognition that narrative is a multi-layered communication, one in which tellers seek to engage and influence their audiences' cognition, emotions, and values. This approach also stipulates that, in telling what happened, narrators tell about characters whose interactions with each other have an ethical dimension and that the acts of telling and receiving these accounts of characters and their actions also have an ethical dimension. Consequently, the approach attends to both an ethics of the told and an ethics of the telling.

The approach has its roots in Aristotle's *Poetics* with its definition of tragedy as the imitation of an action arousing pity and fear and leading to the purgation of those emotions. This definition makes rhetoric part of poetics by linking tragedy to its effect on its audience. The first generation neo-Aristotelian critics at the University of Chicago, who published their manifesto in 1953, also made rhetoric part of poetics in much the same way. R.S. Crane's seminal essay on "The Concept of Plot and the Plot of *Tom Jones*" assumes that the key to the form of Fielding's novel is its emotive effect, specifically, the pleasure the audience experiences in seeing Tom brought to the brink of fulfilling the prophecy that he was born to be hanged only to escape from

the noose and be happily married to Sophia Western. Crane reasons back from this emotive effect to its causes in Fielding's specific choices about the sequence of the events and about his disclosures of who has the true knowledge of Tom's parentage. Crane's analysis of those choices, in turn, provides the basis for his definition of plot as a synthesis of character, action, and thought designed to affect the audience's emotions in a particular way.

Booth, a student of Crane's, inverts the relation between poetics and rhetoric in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), and in so doing paves the way for a broader rhetorical approach to narrative. *The Rhetoric of Fiction* starts out as a defense of certain narrative techniques that had fallen out of favor in the mid-twentieth century, particularly the use of overt authorial commentary such as that employed by Fielding, Dickens, Eliot and other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novelists. Booth does not assume that such commentary is always effective but instead argues that any judgment of effectiveness should depend on the relation between the commentary and the novel's overall purpose of affecting its audience in a particular way. If the commentary advances the purpose, it is effective; if it detracts from the purpose, it is ineffective.

In developing this case, Booth argues that any technique will produce some effects on its audience rather than others and that, therefore, any technique is fundamentally rhetorical. Consequently, Booth's case about overt authorial commentary becomes just one part of his larger argument about the relation between rhetoric and fiction. The choice for the novelist is not *whether* to use rhetoric but rather about *which kind* to use—that associated with overt commentary or with the withholding of commentary, with the presentation of dramatic scenes or summaries of events, and so on.

This conception of narrative as fundamentally rhetorical influenced Booth's attention to the relations among authors, narrators, and audiences. The most important relation is that between the author, or to use the term Booth coined, "the implied author," the narrator, and the author's intended audience. (By the implied author, Booth means the version of himself or herself the author constructs in writing the narrative.) The implied author's communication can be direct or indirect, depending on the kind of narrator employed. Reliable narration, in which the narrator's reports and evaluations are endorsed by the implied author, is direct communication to the author's audience. Unreliable narration, in which the narrator's reports and evaluations are not endorsed by the implied author, is indirect. I will offer a fuller discussion of reliable and unreliable narration in the section on narrative discourse.

Booth's attention to the rhetorical exchanges among authors, narrators, and readers leads him at the end of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* to make an early foray into ethical criticism. He explores the ethical consequences of what he calls "impersonal narration," when employed in the representation of ethically reprehensible characters. By "impersonal narration" Booth means both narration by a character (first-person narration, or, as we will see below, what Genette more precisely labels homodiegetic narration) and center of consciousness narration. Booth notes that the very act of following a character's inner life typically generates at least some sympathy for that character, and he worries that such sympathy may override authorial signals about a character's ethical deficiencies. This portion of Booth's argument received the most resistance from his own audience in the 1960s—see, for example, the comments of Scholes and Kellogg on p. 278—and, as Booth notes in his Afterword to the second

edition (1983), he himself soon felt that it was inadequate. Nevertheless, Booth maintained his conviction that ethics is an integral component of rhetoric, and in 1988, he returned to this general thesis in *The Company We Keep*. He argues there that because the rhetorical construction of a narrative invites its audience to follow a certain trajectory of desire, narrative inevitably has designs on its audience's values, if only to influence us to desire some things rather than others. More generally, Booth develops his concern with the complex exchanges between author and audience into the metaphor of books as friends—friends who can be either beneficial or harmful.

Booth's work has been revised and extended in many ways so that today it is possible to identify three key principles of the rhetorical approach in addition to its conception of narrative as a purposive communicative act. (I) It postulates a recursive relationship among authorial agency, textual phenomena (including intertextual relations), and reader response. Texts are designed by authors in order to affect readers in particular ways; those designs are conveyed through the words, techniques, structures, forms, and intertextual relations of texts; and reader responses are a function of and, thus, a guide to how authorial designs are created through textual phenomena.

(II) The approach recognizes multiple audiences in narrative communication. Peter J. Rabinowitz has persuasively argued for the existence of four distinct audiences in fictional narrative. In *Narrative as Rhetoric* (1996) I suggest one modification to Rabinowitz's model in order to differentiate his concept of the narrative audience from Gerald Prince's structuralist insight that the presence of a narrator implies a presence of a narratee. That modification leaves us with five audiences:

1. The flesh and blood or actual reader: each of us with our glorious (or not so glorious) individuality and common human endowments.
2. The authorial audience: the author's ideal reader. The rhetorical model assumes that the flesh and blood reader seeks to enter the authorial audience in order to understand the invitations for engagement that the narrative offers.
3. The narrative audience: the observer position within the narrative world that the flesh and blood reader assumes. In fiction, we are in this observer position when we respond to characters as if they were real people. Our ability to enter the narrative audience is one important reason why we respond affectively to fictional narratives.
4. The narratee: the audience addressed by the narrator, who may or may not be characterized.
5. The ideal narrative audience: the narrator's hypothetical perfect audience, the one he expects to understand every nuance of his communication. The ideal narrative audience may or may not coincide with the actual narratee, and it may or may not be an important part of a rhetorical interpretation.

(III) The rhetorical approach also notes that individual narratives explicitly or implicitly establish their own ethical standards and, therefore, it moves from the way those standards influence the authorial audience's judgments to its own assessment of both those ethical standards and the way they are deployed in the narrative. In this way, the rhetorical critic does ethical criticism from the inside out rather than the outside in. That is, rather than applying a pre-existing ethical system to the narrative, she seeks to discover the implicit value system of the text and how the author uses it to accomplish the communicative purposes of the narrative. Then, in a final step, the critic brings her own values into play as she evaluates the text's system and its use.

By working from the inside out rather than the outside in, the rhetorical critic remains open to having her own values challenged and ultimately altered by the experience of reading.

### **Plot's Progress**

*Yes, oh dear, yes—you bet your life, yes—I have a plot. I never go anywhere without at least one.*

"Quality of mind (as expressed in the language of characterization, motivation, description, and commentary), not plot is the soul of narrative. Plot is only the indispensable skeleton which, fleshed out with character and incident, provides the necessary clay into which life may be breathed." (*The Nature of Narrative*, 239)

These concluding sentences of the 1966 chapter on plot reflect a common attitude of that time, an attitude whose roots can be found in E.M. Forster's preference for character over plot, in Henry James's Prefaces with their attention to technique as the most important element of "the craft" of fiction, and in the then prevalent New Critical orthodoxy which viewed literature as a special use of language. Over the past forty years plot has moved from this position as the Rodney Dangerfield of narrative theory to one where it commands much more respect. This change in its fortunes is accompanied by an expansion of its reference: where Scholes and Kellogg defined plot as "a more specific term" than story "intended to refer to action alone, with the minimal possible reference to character" (208), most contemporary narrative theorists use plot as a more encompassing term. In *Reading for the Plot* (1984), Peter Brooks sees it, in the words of his subtitle, as the key to narrative's "design and intention." Hayden White sees "emplotment," the transformation of a series of events into a coherent whole that expresses a larger view of those events, as a fundamental task of writing history. Paul Ricoeur uses the same term to refer to the way narrative puts its various elements into meaningful relationships to one another and to the larger point of the narrative. Building on R.S. Crane's conception of plot, I propose in *Reading People, Reading Plots* (1989) a substitute term, narrative progression, in order to refer to the synthesis of the text's movement from beginning to end and the authorial audience's developing response to that movement, and I argue that progression is a key to narrative form. I will elaborate on Brooks's view and my own shortly but first I want to look at how plot fares when narrative is conceived as a formal system.

Structuralism's interest in the patterns underlying narrative and its privileging of descriptive poetics over interpretation significantly influence its approach to plot. Rather than using the story/discourse distinction as the basis for studies of plot as the transformation of story through discourse, structuralist studies of plot follow Propp's lead and seek to identify the deep structure of events beneath the various surface structures of individual narratives or recognizable genres. One of the most insightful analyses in this line is Tzvetan Todorov's analysis of the classic detective story in *The Poetics of Prose* (1977) as having two stories that need not even touch: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. Furthermore, because the story of the crime is not immediately present and because the detective is immune from serious harm, the story of the investigation serves as a mediator between the reader and the story of the crime.

The most extreme example of the structuralist approach to plot is found in the structural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss's mythic analysis of Sophocles's *Oedipus*. Levi-Strauss sees myth as a means by which cultures acknowledge and sometimes work through their underlying conflicts. He advances the view that the deep structure plot of Sophocles's *Oedipus* is built on four "mythemes" (beliefs central to a given culture): the overrating of blood relations (Oedipus's incest with his mother Jocasta); the underrating of blood relations (Oedipus's killing of his father Laius); the denial of our autochthonous roots (Oedipus's killing of the Sphinx) and the affirmation of those roots (Oedipus's swollen foot). Levi-Strauss's analysis, whatever else one might think of it, does support Peter Brooks' contention in *Reading for the Plot* that the structuralist approach tends to spatialize plot. More positively, Levi-Strauss's contention that myths are tools that help people deal with contradictory elements of their culture is a forerunner of cognitive narratology's understanding of narrative as a resource for structuring and comprehending the world.

We have seen above how Monika Fludernik's cognitive approach de-emphasizes plot while emphasizing experientiality and narrativization but other branches of cognitive narratology place more emphasis upon it. Following structuralist narratology's effort to find recurring patterns of events, Patrick Colm Hogan in *The Mind and Its Stories: Narrative Universals and Human Emotions* (2003) proposes that there are three story structures that are employed across cultures and that therefore deserve to be called universal: the romantic, the heroic, and the sacrificial. The romantic structure is about the relationships of lovers, especially their separations and coming together. The heroic is about conflicts over authority and their resolution within a particular group and about the group's defense from unwanted incursions by an external group. The sacrificial is about major injuries to the community and the healing of the community through acts of sacrifice by one or more of its members. Hogan does not claim that these recurring "story structures" are themselves plots or that all plots have at least one of these structures underlying them. He claims instead that these structures typically inform the plots of narratives that are frequently told, even as individual plots may invoke one or more of the structures only to deviate from them.

Emma Kafalenos in *Narrative Causalities* (2006) combines a function-analysis derived from Propp with cognitive narratology's interest in the processing of texts. Kafalenos identifies a set of ten functions that underlie a narrative's system of causality (e.g., an equilibrium is disrupted, an actant decides to rectify the situation, the action takes action, equilibrium is restored) and the ways in which readers configure that system of causality. In addition to providing new insights into the structure of plots, Kafalenos's study reaffirms narrative's close connection with casual explanations.

David Herman's cognitive approach to plot follows from his ideas about the links among genres and preference rules. A preference rule has the form "prefer to see X as Y given a set of conditions Z," and Herman develops the sets of conditions that are associated with some broad generic distinctions. In other words, Herman's effort is to explain why a character performing such and such actions (X) in such and such a set of conditions (Z) will typically signal such and such a genre (Y). His cognitive orientation leads him to divide the sets of conditions into "process types" such as processes of doing, processes of sensing, and processes of being,

categories that cognitive theory posits we use to make sense of actions. He then looks at how different process types typically combine in different genres. To extract just two simple examples from Herman's detailed and fine-grained analysis: in the epic processes of doing are more important than processes of being, while in the psychological novel processes of sensing are more important than processes of doing.

In *Reading for the Plot*, Brooks develops a psychoanalytical approach that emphasizes plot's temporal dimension. In an effort to link the temporality of plot to the temporality of life, he analyzes reading for the plot in the terms of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and develops a model that describes narrative as a desire for the ending. Thus, he sees the beginning of plot as the introduction of desire, the middle as deferral and delay, largely through repetition in its satisfaction, and the end as the satisfactory discharge of the tension built up through that arousal and delay. Thus, for example, in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the plot begins by introducing a desire for the marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy and then the long middle defers the marriage through the complications of the plot and the repetitions with a difference of their various meetings and misunderstandings until, finally, the ending satisfies the desire with their engagement. While Brooks's model has been very influential, it has also been criticized, most notably by Susan Winnett, for its assumption that the trajectory of male sexual response is the underlying pattern of all plots.

In 1993, Susan Stanford Friedman proposed the concept of spatialization not as a way to revive structuralist approaches but as a way to complicate the idea of plot in another way. Her central point is that narrative has not only a horizontal movement through time but also a vertical dimension that brings back a spatial view of plot. The vertical dimension links the horizontal surface to literary, historical, and psychic intertexts. Literary intertexts include both generic patterns and specific prior narratives; historical intertexts involve the broader social order, including cultural narratives; and psychic intertexts involve the patterns of repression and return within the text itself as well as those involved in the author's relation to the material.

With *Pride and Prejudice*, then, Friedman would emphasize the way in which Austen's marriage plot interacts with previous marriage plots and makes Elizabeth both partly responsible for Darcy's reform and partly the fortunate beneficiary of his generosity of spirit. She would also emphasize the novel's commentary on the marriage market and the constrictions and restrictions that market places on female experience and choice. Charlotte Lucas's calculated decision to marry the vain and insensitive Mr. Collins rather than live her life as a single woman would figure prominently in a discussion of the historical intertext. Finally, Friedman would look for implied relations (both parallels and contrasts) between Austen's own experiences as a single woman and the horizontal unfolding of Elizabeth's fate.

Friedman's work on spatialization is one example of the ways in which feminist critics focus on the gender politics of plot patterns. Rachel Blau DuPlessis in *Writing beyond the Ending* (1985) succinctly articulates the assumption guiding much feminist work on plot: "ideology is coiled in narrative structure." Plots reveal their ideologies of gender through such matters as how they limit or bequeath agency to male and female characters, set up some kinds of conflicts and ignore others, and imagine possible outcomes to those conflicts. History, both social and literary, has privileged certain plots and, in so doing, linked them with certain cultural values. *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, is one version of the marriage plot, a plot given great prominence in Anglo-American social and literary history, a plot that privileges

heterosexuality, marriage, and the patriarchal order that sets up the rules of the marriage market, and defines women's proper place as in the domestic sphere. Experimentation with plot by women writers, gay and lesbian novelists, and novelists of color needs to be understood, as DuPlessis and many other feminist critics contend, as both formal innovation and political statement: breaking the sequence, as Virginia Woolf put it, is a way both to protest against the usual plot patterns and to find forms for experiences and values that those patterns have not attended to.

Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*, for example, can be profitably read as breaking the sequence of the marriage plot. It traces not the coming together of a single couple but rather the unnamed character-narrator's multiple experiences of love and loss. Where the traditional marriage plot confines sex to the couple's untold life after the novel ends, Winterson's protagonist has multiple sexual partners. Winterson moves in the direction of the marriage plot by representing the character-narrator's temporary union with a lover named Louise, but Winterson then turns away from that plot to focus on the loss of Louise and the character-narrator's effort to come to terms with that loss. Furthermore, where the marriage plot reinforces heterosexuality, Winterson challenges that taken-for-granted position, first, by showing that the character-narrator has sexual partners of both sexes, and, second, by refusing to identify the character-narrator's own sex. Meanwhile, as the title suggests, *Written on the Body* is also an allegory of reading, one that analogizes the relationship between the central lovers to that between author and narrator, on one side, and implied reader and flesh and blood reader, on the other. In this way, the formal choice not to identify the character-narrator's own sex has the political consequence of queering the experience of reading, of exposing the way desire in reading, like desire in general, cannot be readily confined to the clearly demarcated categories of gender and sexuality.

My rhetorical approach to plot, first proposed in *Reading People, Reading Plots* (1989) and recently elaborated through a fuller discussion of beginnings, middles, and endings in *Experiencing Fiction* (forthcoming), suggests, as I noted above, that we substitute the term progression for plot, with progression referring to the synthesis of the internal dynamics of the text's movement from beginning to end with the authorial audience's developing responses to that movement. The internal dynamics of the text are governed by the introduction, complication, and (often only partial) resolution of instabilities and tensions. Instabilities are unsettled matters involving elements of story, typically characters and their situations, while tensions are unsettled matters involving elements of discourse such as unequal knowledge among authors, narrators, and audiences (as in mysteries) or matters of different values and perceptions (as in narratives with unreliable narrators). As audiences follow the movement of instabilities and tensions, they develop three main kinds of interests: the mimetic, interests in the characters as possible people and their world as like our own; the thematic, interests in the narrative's ideas, values, world views; and the synthetic, interests in the narrative as an artificial construct. As audiences develop these interests through their following the internal dynamics of a narrative, they engage in many kinds of more specific responses: judging characters, developing hopes, desires, and expectations for them, and constructing tentative hypotheses about the overall shape and direction of the narrative. Indeed, *Experiencing Fiction* also explores the importance of the authorial audience's interpretive, ethical, and aesthetic judgments for narrative progressions.

An analysis of the progression of *Pride and Prejudice* would emphasize the interaction of Elizabeth's movement toward her happy union with Darcy and Austen's

thematizing of Elizabeth's situation as a single woman of little fortune so that our pleasure in the mimetic story is deepened and deeply contextualized by that thematizing. To take just one salient example of this relationship, Collins's proposals, first, to Elizabeth, who refuses him, and then to Charlotte Lucas, who accepts him, are more than just deferrals or anticipations of Darcy's later proposals to Elizabeth. Instead, they represent an alternate fate for Elizabeth, the awareness of which strengthens our desire and satisfaction in her marriage to Darcy, even as it emphasizes that Elizabeth's good fortune is just that.

The analysis would also focus on the difference between Elizabeth's developing understanding of her situation and that of Austen's audience, a difference evident in Austen's handling of a secondary event, Lydia's elopement with Wickham. Elizabeth learns of this event from Darcy during her visit to Pemberley, several months after she has rejected Darcy's initial proposal and several months after she has realized, through her reflections on his post-rejection letter to her, that she has thoroughly misjudged him and Wickham. During this visit, through her viewing of the grounds, hearing Mrs. Reynolds's testimony about Darcy's character, and spending some time in his company, Elizabeth's understanding of Darcy's character deepens and she begins to fall in love with him. When Jane's letter tells her of Lydia's flight, however, Elizabeth believes that nothing can come of her feelings, since, to her mind, the disgrace Lydia has brought on the family must strengthen Darcy's negative judgment of it.

Austen, however, has given her audience a different set of expectations by establishing a pattern in which she provides enough knowledge of Darcy's character for us to judge the engagement as desirable and in which the threats to Elizabeth's happiness always dissipate. Elizabeth's successful refusal of Collins's marriage proposal despite the objections of her mother is the most salient example of this part of the pattern, though Jane's illness and subsequent return to good health, and Elizabeth's own progress after Darcy's proposal, are also parts of it. Consequently, Austen's audience judges Lydia's behavior as a significant but temporary obstacle to Elizabeth's eventual happiness, even as we are invested in discovering how the obstacle will be overcome. Austen's genius is to use the obstacle as a means for demonstrating how Darcy has changed, thus leading us to even stronger positive ethical judgments of him. Rather than shunning the Bennets, Darcy takes it upon himself to deal with Wickham and make the best of the bad situation. When Elizabeth expresses her gratitude for his actions, Darcy feels emboldened to make his second, successful proposal. Austen's audience feels great satisfaction in the engagement precisely because we judge it to be the appropriate culmination of the growth of the two characters

### **The Character of Character**

*Am I person, idea, or word? All of these? None? If all, then what part of me is story? If none, then who or what is speaking these words?*

“To suggest that one order of characterization is better than another is folly. To recognize that differences exist is the beginning of wisdom.” (*The Nature of Narrative*, 161)



Narrative theory's approach to character over the past forty years has not always followed this wisdom—though the reasons for its deviations are various. Structuralist narratology with its concern for underlying rules tries to get beyond orders of characterization in the surface structure of narratives and identify what all characters have in common. Again Propp's work on the Russian folktale provides an influential model, as he focuses on the roles that characters play in the deep structure plot. Just as he identifies 31 events, he identifies 7 recurring roles: hero, false hero, villain, sought-for person and her mentor, dispatcher, donor, helper. The structuralists follow Propp's approach along two different, though compatible, tracks. One follows in a direct line from Propp: A. J. Greimas has engaged in an ongoing effort to develop a general taxonomy of roles performed by what calls "actants." At one point in his thinking, Greimas proposes a six-item taxonomy: Subject, Object, Sender, Helper, Receiver, Opponent. (Greimas later revised the model by relabeling Helper and Opponents positive and negative "auxiliants" but this revision is not actually an improvement.)

The second track shares Propp's interest in getting at underlying constituents of character, but it sees those constituents as fundamentally linguistic. Just as a particular semantic signifier, say, *man* can be broken down into underlying semantic markers such as +animate, +human, and +male, so too can character be broken down into a set of predicates associated with a proper name. The two tracks are ultimately compatible because both strip individuality away from character and because predicates grouped under a proper name can be further identified by the Proppian or Greimasian general roles they perform.

Cognitive narratologists also move in two directions. David Herman revises Greimas's account of actants by drawing on recent linguistic theory about the intersection of syntax and semantics. This theory emphasizes that in order to give an adequate account of a sentence's meaning the grammatical roles specified by syntax (noun phrase links with verb phrase) need to be supplemented by thematic roles or participant roles embedded in semantics (such as Agent, Patient, Instrument, Goal). Although the grammatical roles of the nouns in "The dog ate my homework" and "My homework was eaten by the dog" are different, their participant roles are the same (dog is Agent, homework is Patient). To take another example, the grammatical roles of "the dog" in "The dog ate my homework" and "The dog died" are the same, but their participant roles are different (Agent in the first, Patient in the second). In applying this work to cognitive narratology, Herman shifts from the term actants to the term "participants," deploys a taxonomy of ten different participant or thematic roles, and recognizes that the same participant can play multiple thematic roles in the course of a narrative just as different participants can share the same role. Furthermore, since, as we have seen above, Herman's cognitive perspective leads him to view stories as a means by which people conceptualize the world as involving various processes, he contends that characters will take on different roles as they participate in different kinds of processes. He then draws on the functional linguistics of M. A. K. Halliday to propose a taxonomy of process types, specifically material (e.g., I put the ball in the basket again), mental (e.g. I pondered my options), relational (e.g., I am the walrus), behavioral (e.g., I cried), verbal (I repeated my advice), and existential (e.g., your car is in the driveway), and uses this taxonomy as a way to identify participant roles.

Fludernik's emphasis on human consciousness and experientiality leads her to see *personhood* as not only essential to narrativity but also as a crucial frame that readers bring to narratives. This frame is a valuable aid in readers' efforts to narrativize texts, allowing us to deal with texts with minimal sequences of action or narrators who don't fall neatly into standard categories. We may not know, for example, the gender of the character narrator in *Written on the Body*, but we have no doubt about that figure's personhood. At the same time, the concept of personhood is not endlessly elastic. Narrations that continually revise the information they offer about characters or that use multiple, incompatible pronouns to refer to them go beyond what we understand to fall within the frame of personhood and therefore resist narrativization.

Under the rubric of narrative as ideological instrument, Bakhtin's theory has the potential for the most radical view of character. His preference for unresolved dialogue points to his underlying assumption that dialogism constitutes the essence of the novel, and that assumption in turn informs his view of both character and of plot. In effect, Bakhtin's emphasis on dialogism inverts the apparent logic of the story/discourse distinction. That logic, as noted above, suggests that characters and events have a kind of independence from their representation in discourse, but Bakhtin's approach makes both of these elements significant largely for their role in the author's orchestration of the dialogues. Consequently, characters are important less for their personalities than for their alignments with one or more of the novel's dialects and the ideological positions reflected in them. Similarly, plots are important less for their ordering of events into a larger design than for the way in which they trace the trajectory and resolution (or lack of resolution) of the dialogue among the dialects. Although Bakhtin has been a kind of universal donor among literary critics—that is, his ideas have been appropriated in the service of just about every major critical approach—his views of character and plot as subordinate to discourse have not been adopted by most narrative theorists.

Other ideological critics are typically concerned with how the representation of a character functions in relation to an individual narrative's ideological import. Thus, feminists such as Judith Fetterley in *The Resisting Reader* (1978) focus on (a) the relations between a given character's traits and the cultural assumptions about gender at the historical moment in which the narrative is constructed and (b) the specific roles in the plot performed by male and female characters and what those roles reveal about ideologies of gender. In her analysis of these relations, Fetterley argues that classic American fiction by men invites women readers to identify against themselves, and, therefore, she argues that women should resist those readerly positions.

Alex Woloch in *The One vs. The Many* (2003) offers another way to approach character within the larger perspective of narrative as an ideological instrument. Woloch starts with a helpful contribution to a formal theory of character, acknowledging first that there is often a tension between character as "reference" (that is, character as an imitation of a person) and character as "structure" (character as an element in a narrative design), and then introducing two related concepts, character-space and character-system. Character-space, the amount of textual space given to any character, is the result of the encounter between character as reference and character as structure: character as reference moves toward

expansion but character as structure curtails that movement. Character-system is the arrangement of all the character-spaces in a narrative in a larger structure. These concepts provide the basis for Woloch to address the structural relations among protagonists and other characters, and he argues that in the realistic novel, especially in the European realistic novel of the nineteenth century, these structural relations are conflicted. In Woloch's view, giving due justice to characters as imagined human beings entails recognizing that minor characters have the potential to take up more space, and even become major, and that they are therefore sacrificed so that the protagonist may occupy center stage. Woloch then invokes the Marxist principle that narrative literature reflects the socioeconomic realities in which it is written and sees the sacrifice of the minor characters in the nineteenth-century novel as reflecting the processes of social stratification that follow from capitalism. Thus, when Woloch claims that "*minor characters are the proletariat of the novel*" (27, his emphasis), he is not employing a fanciful metaphor but asserting a strong connection between novelistic form and socioeconomic process.

In *Reading People, Reading Plots* (1989), I suggest a different conception of character and a different relationship between what Woloch calls character as reference and character as structure. In my view, character has three components that correspond to the three main kinds of interest audiences develop in narrative progressions: mimetic (character as possible person, what Woloch refers to as reference), thematic (character as representative of a larger class or an embodiment of a set of ideas), and synthetic (character as artificial construct, what Woloch refers to as structure). Furthermore, different narrative progressions establish different relations among these components by guiding our developing interests in particular ways. In realist narrative, progressions typically foreground the mimetic and thematic components of character with the synthetic remaining in the background. In nonrealist modes, the mimetic tends either to go to the background or to be present through its violation; in either case, the synthetic then gets foregrounded. Like Scholes and Kellogg, I contend that the multiple possible relationships among the three components do not fall neatly into a hierarchy of aesthetic value.

### **Discourse about Narrative Discourse**

*I am the only reliable narrator I have ever known.*

"In the relationship between the teller and the tale, and in that other relationship, between the teller and the audience, lies the essence of narrative art." (*The Nature of Narrative*, 240)

Perhaps because narrative theory has continued to subscribe to Scholes and Kellogg's dictum, its greatest advances in the past forty years have been in the study of narrative discourse. My discussions of Bakhtin and Booth have already indicated many of their contributions, so here I will focus on Genette, the feminist narratologists, and some revisions and extensions of Booth. I will then do an illustrative analysis of a passage from a post-1966 narrative, Ian McEwan's *Atonement*.

One reason for the enduring power of the story/discourse distinction is that Genette demonstrates its great utility in *Narrative Discourse* as he unpacks many of

the complexities of the how of narrative. Genette subtitles his book “An Essay in Method” because he self-consciously conducts an unusual critical inquiry, one that is simultaneously theoretical and interpretive. His focus throughout is on both Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu* and the principles of narrative discourse; he deploys the principles to illuminate Proust, even as he uses Proust to uncover new principles of narrative discourse or new powers and limits of existing ones. The most important contributions of Genette’s rich study are his analyses of temporality and of voice and vision.

Genette’s work on temporality treats it as a function of the relationships between the what and the how, more specifically between the events of the story and the way in which they are presented in discourse. Genette organizes his discussion of these relationships into three parts: order, duration, and frequency. Order refers to the relation between the actual chronological sequence of events and their sequence in the discourse. Narratives typically establish a primary temporal NOW. When the order of the discourse follows the chronological order of events, then the temporal NOW of the discourse follows the temporal NOW of the events. When the discourse narrates something that occurred prior to the temporal NOW, we have an analepsis (or flashback). Some narratives such as Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* rely heavily on analepsis: as the homodiegetic narrator Stevens recounts the details of his journey by automobile in the temporal NOW, he invariably leaves that narration and reports on events from his past. When the discourse narrates something that will occur after the temporal NOW, we have a prolepsis (or flashforward). In McEwan’s *Atonement*, for example, the narrator reports about the protagonist Briony that “Six decades later she would describe how at the age of thirteen she had written her way through a whole history of literature, beginning with stories derived from the European tradition of folktales, through drama with simple moral intent, to arrive at an impartial psychological realism which she had discovered for herself, one special morning during a heat wave in 1935” (38). Since there are few examples of prolepsis in the novel, this one stands out.

Duration refers to the relationship between the amount of time an event or a series of events takes to happen and the amount of time it takes to read about that event (thus, duration is, in a sense, a matter of the relation between time and space—the temporal extent of the event and the space given to it in the narrative text). Henry Fielding’s narrator in *Tom Jones* uses five paragraphs in Chapter 1 of Book III to set up his narration of twelve years of Tom’s life in a single sentence, a narration that comically invites his sagacious readers to fill in the events of those twelve years. In *Missing*, Michelle Herman uses twenty pages to represent the event of her elderly protagonist Rivke Vasilevsky taking a bath. Frequency refers to the relation between the number of times an event occurs and the number of times it is narrated. Thus, the default frequency relation is one-to-one, and such narration is called singulative. But some events can happen many times and be narrated only once in what is called iterative narration. The opening to Proust’s novel is a famous example: “Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure” (For a long time I used to go to bed early). And some events can happen only once but be narrated many times in what is called repeated narration. For example, in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, the event of Sethe’s murdering her child rather than having her go back into slavery is narrated three times.

Genette's work on temporality has been usefully supplemented by David Herman's concept of fuzzy temporality, which he develops as part of his analysis of the "when" of the storyworld. Herman notes that Genette's approach assumes that we can always discern the underlying temporality of the story—the order, duration and frequency of its events—but many narratives, especially ones dealing with trauma, do not allow such clear perceptions. Narratives with such fuzzy temporality are not necessarily ill-formed; such a judgment has to be deferred until after an examination of whether the fuzziness adds to or detracts from the narrative's effectiveness.

The key insight in Genette's approach to voice and vision is that the term "point of view" is inadequate because it conflates the two distinct elements of narrative discourse: who speaks (voice) and who sees or, more broadly, who perceives (vision or what Genette calls focalization). Distinguishing the two allows us to get further insight into each. With voice, Genette points out that the traditional taxonomy of first person and third person (along with such refinements as first person observer, first person protagonist, third person omniscient, and third person limited) is inadequate because all individual narrators can—and often do—say "I." What the traditional taxonomy wants to capture, Genette notes, is the relation of the voice to the plane of the primary story events, what he calls the diegetic level of the narrative. Narrators traditionally called first person, whether protagonists or observers (e.g., Huck Finn and Nick Carraway), exist at that level and can interact or, depending on the time of the narration, could have once interacted with the other characters. Narrators traditionally called third person exist at another level within the storyworld, one from which they typically do not interact directly with the characters (for example, Fielding's narrator in *Tom Jones*, or George Eliot's narrator in *Middlemarch*). Thus, Genette proposes to replace the taxonomy based on grammatical person with one based on diegetic level: narrators such as Huck and Nick are homodiegetic; narrators such as those Fielding and Eliot employ are heterodiegetic. Genette does not give much attention to so-called second person narration, a matter I will return to at the end of this essay.

Genette's attention to the diegetic levels at which voices are located also allows him to mark "intradiegetic" and "extradiegetic" ones. Intradiegetic voices are those whose narration is embedded within the primary level of the action. Thus, for example, both Marlow's narration in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and the governess's narration in James's *The Turn of the Screw* are intradiegetic because they are contained within the narration of another voice, that of the frame narrator. Heterodiegetic narrators exemplify one kind of extradiegetic voice, but they are not the only kind: voices beyond the diegesis are also heard in titles (including chapter titles) and epigraphs.

With vision, Genette proposes a new term, focalization, and a taxonomy of three different kinds. Strikingly Genette does not make this taxonomy parallel with the one based on voice. That is, he does not base it on the identity of the perceiver (character, narrator, hypothetical observer, etc.), but bases it instead on the ratio of knowledge between the narrator and the characters. In what he calls zero focalization (later helpfully amended to free focalization by William Nelles), the narrator knows more than the characters and exercises the privilege of moving freely about the story world to comment first on this scene and this character and then on that scene and

that character. George Eliot has her narrator in *Middlemarch* call attention to her free focalization at the beginning Chapter 29 by saying “One morning, some weeks after her arrival at Lowick, Dorothea— but why always Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to this marriage?” and then by moving to comment on Casaubon. In what Genette calls external focalization the character knows more than the narrator because the narrator is restricted to reporting the character’s observable behaviour. Genette’s example is Dashiell Hammett’s *The Maltese Falcon*; Hammett’s narrator describes what Sam Spade looks like and what he does but he never adopts Spade’s own perspective and never shows what Spade is thinking. In internal focalization, the narrator’s knowledge and the character’s knowledge are equal because the narrator is restricted to the character’s perspective. Henry James’s novels are perhaps the most celebrated examples of internal focalization, but it is a technique that, as Scholes and Kellogg’s discussion of the interior monologue shows, can be found throughout the history of narrative going all the way back to the narratives of ancient Greece.

While Genette’s distinction between voice and vision (or focalization) has been almost universally accepted, his specific proposals about focalization have been the source of considerable debate among narratologists. Those such as Seymour Chatman who are concerned with a strict division between story and discourse contend that heterodiegetic narrators (and even retrospective homodiegetic narrators) cannot be focalizers because they are not part of the story world and consequently their reports are of a different order from the perceptions of characters. Others such as Mieke Bal, however, argue that any verbal narration entails focalization because any narration entails not only speaking or writing (and thus a voice) but also speaking or writing from some perspective. As one especially interested in the experience of reading narrative, I find Bal’s view to be more persuasive: the similarities in the perceptual activities of a narrator and a character are more significant for a reader’s understanding of the distinction between voice and vision than the principle of keeping story and discourse neatly separated.

More recently, Manfred Jahn, who also subscribes to the “no-narration-without-focalization” position, has refined the concept of focalization further by approaching it from a cognitivist perspective and applying the metaphor of “windows” to it. Focalization opens one window and not another (e.g., a character’s window rather than a narrator’s) into the narrative world and thus leads readers to perceive some aspects of that world and not others. Furthermore, the windows may be more or less clearly located in relation to both the reader and the narrative world and may yield more or less sharp perceptions of that world. Jahn traces a continuum from “strict focalization” where the focalizer is in a clearly defined spatio-temporal position to “ambient focalization,” where events or characters are perceived from more than one angle, to “weak focalization” where the spatio-temporal location cannot be specified to zero (or free) focalization where the perspective cannot be pinned down.

Another valuable revision of Genette’s work on vision and voice from a cognitivist perspective can be found in Alan Palmer’s work on fictional minds. Palmer argues that the structuralists’ approach to the report of characters’ speech and thought—as direct, indirect, or free indirect—is too piecemeal to offer an adequate account of the representation of thought in fiction. Palmer introduces the concept of a continuing consciousness frame as way to recognize the inadequacy of sentence-by-

sentence tracings of shifts from reports of action to reports of thought (and the concomitant shiftings in vision and voice between narrators and character). As we'll see below, Palmer's concept allows us to recognize that such small fluctuations often do not alter the narration's basic frame of representing a character's mental activity.

Palmer's work also links up with the concept from cognitive psychology of Theory of Mind (ToM). ToM is another frame, the one we employ whenever we infer mental states behind physical actions. It is ToM that allows us to understand gestures as signifying others' mental intentions: to use an example from Lisa Zunshine's *Why We Read Fiction* (2006), teachers recognize a student's raising his hand as an expression of a desire to be called on rather than a sign that he has a pain in his armpit. A little reflection reveals that literary narrative relies heavily on ToM both because its characters must continually infer the mental states of other characters by observing their behavior and because readers must often do the same.

Feminist narratologists have productively built on structuralist analysis of narrative discourse by showing how that analysis can be tied to their concerns with gender politics. Robyn Warhol in her 1989 *Gendered Interventions* analyzes direct address to the narratee (the narrator's hypothetical audience) in the Victorian novels with heterodiegetic narrators and discovers that male and female writers typically employ different kinds. Victorian women writers most often use what Warhol calls "engaging" strategies in their addresses to the narratee, devices that bridge the distance between the narrator and the narratee, on the one hand, and the narratee and the actual reader on the other. Male authors, by contrast, typically have their narrators employ distancing strategies, devices that emphasize the gap between narrator and narratee and narratee and real reader. In her more recent book, *Having a Good Cry* (2003), Warhol looks more broadly at the interactions between narrative form, including narrative discourse, and cultural ideas about gender. She analyzes narrative discourse, formulaic plots, and bodily responses to reading narrative and explores their connections to cultural ideas about masculinity, femininity, and a third term which crosses the gender divide, effeminacy. The result is a provocative study of the connections between reading narrative and the development of gendered subjectivity.

Susan Lanser's 1992 *Fictions of Authority* focuses on voice as the element of narrative discourse in which women writers of fictional narrative confront the problem of claiming and establishing authority. Lanser's concept of authority illustrates the kind of connection feminist narratologists make between form and ideology: "the authority of a given voice . . . is produced from a conjunction of social and rhetorical properties" (6). The social properties come from the voice's relation to hierarchies of power that exist at the moment of its speaking (e.g., in nineteenth-century America white men's voices had more authority than white women's and both white men and women had more authority than black men). The rhetorical properties of voice come from the skill with which the speaker employs specific textual strategies, which exist independently of the social hierarchies. Lanser postulates that, despite any individual woman writer's feeling of ambivalence about authority, the very act of writing itself signifies an implicit claim—or at least quest—for authority. She posits a basic formal distinction between public and private voices in fiction: narrators who address narratees external to the fictional world have public voices, while those who address narratees internal to the fictional world have private voices. She then identifies three main kinds of voice: the authorial, the personal, and the communal. Authorial voices

are public; they are also heterodiegetic and may be self-referential. Personal voices may be public or private, but they belong to autodiegetic narrators self-consciously telling their own stories. A communal voice can belong to an individual who acts as a spokesperson for a community or to a group that narrates in the first-person plural or sequentially in mutually reinforcing ways.

Lanser does not herself set up a political or aesthetic ranking of the three kinds of voice but rather points out the claims and risks of each. Authorial voices claim the greatest authority but that claim is also likely to encounter the greatest resistance because women have traditionally been in the lower ranks of the social hierarchy. This point helps explain why throughout the history of the novel many women writers who employed authorial voices took male pseudonyms. Personal voices claim a more limited authority, which makes them more inviting to those without pre-existing social authority. Nevertheless, even this more limited claim can meet with resistance, if either the narrator or the character “transgresses the boundaries of the acceptably feminine” (19). Communal voices get their authority through their connection with the communities they represent even as they implicitly challenge the dominant paradigm in the Western novel that associates authority with a single voice.

Alison Case in a study that looks at the intersection of narration and plot called *Plotting Women* (1999) identifies and analyzes a kind of narrative discourse she calls feminine narration. Feminine narration comes from a narrator who is too naïve or inept to actively fashion the events into a coherent narrative with a set of thematic points. Case argues that in the eighteenth century such narration got marked as feminine, and this marking continued through the end of the nineteenth century. Whereas Warhol’s and Lanser’s ultimate concerns are with the gender of authors, Case’s study makes the important move of separating the gender-linked technique from the gender of the author. As her definition indicates, it is not the gender of the author but the performance of the narrator (and cultural stereotypes about gender) that puts the feminine into feminine narration. Thus, both male and female authors employ feminine narration and both male and female narrators could be feminine.

Turning to rhetorical models, I noted above that for Booth reliable narration is a means of direct communication from implied author to authorial audience, and unreliable narration a means of indirect communication. But it is important to recognize that there are multiple kinds of unreliability and that narrators can be reliable in some ways and unreliable in others. In *Living to Tell about It* (2005), I suggest that narrators perform three main functions, which can be described as occurring along three different axes of communication: they report (along the axis of facts, characters, and events), they read or interpret (along the axis of perception/interpretation), and they make ethical judgments (along the axis of ethics/evaluation). Thus, they can be reliable or unreliable reporters, interpreters, or evaluators. Furthermore, they can be unreliable either by offering distorted reports, interpretations, and evaluations or by underperforming their functions (reporting less than they observe; offering only partially correct interpretations of what they report; stopping too soon in their evaluations). These considerations lead to a taxonomy of two kinds of unreliability on each axis for a total of six kinds: misreporting, misreading (or misinterpreting), and misregarding (or misevaluating); underreporting, underreading (or underinterpreting), and underregarding (or underevaluating). This analysis suggests that the art of unreliable narration is an art of indirection: the author needs to make one text appropriate for two audiences and two purposes (narrator’s



and author's). My focus in *Living to Tell about It* is on how this art of indirection works in character narration, and I note that the single text actually communicates along two different tracks, that between narrator and narratee (the track of narrator functions) and that between author and authorial audience (the track of disclosure functions). Not surprisingly, sometimes authors cannot let a segment of the single text fully serve both purposes, and, in these cases, I suggest, disclosure functions typically trump narrator functions.

I also noted above that the rhetorical approach attends to both an ethics of the told and an ethics of the telling. More generally, the approach sees the ethical dimension of narrative as arising through the dynamic interplay of four distinct ethical positions: that of the characters in relation to each other; that of the narrator in relation to the characters and the narratee; that of the implied author in relation to the narrator, the characters, the narratee, and the authorial audience, and that of the flesh and blood audience in relation to the first three positions. Thus, the ethics of the told is found in the relation between the first and the fourth positions, while the ethics of the telling is found in the relations among the second, third, and fourth positions.

In order to show the interpretive consequences of this theoretical work on narrative discourse, I turn now to a close reading of a particular passage. Without denying the differences among the theorists I have just discussed, I will emphasize here the ways in which their different insights can complement each other. The passage is from Part One of Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001), and it describes the first physical union of two central characters, Cecelia Tallis and Robbie Turner. Cecilia is the elder daughter of the wealthy Tallis family and Robbie is the son of their charwoman. They have known each other all their young lives but have just realized their mutual love—and begun to act on it. The scene takes place in the library in Cecilia's house.

Supported against the corner by his weight, she once again clasped her hands behind his neck, and rested her elbows on his shoulder and continued to kiss his face. The moment itself was easy. They held their breath before the membrane parted, and when it did, she turned away quickly but made no sound—it seemed to be a point of pride. They moved closer, deeper and then, for seconds on end everything stopped. Instead of an ecstatic frenzy there was stillness. They were stilled not by the astonishing fact of arrival but by an awed sense of return—they were face to face in the gloom staring into what little they could see of each other's eyes, and now it was the impersonal that dropped away. Of course there was nothing abstract about a face. The son of Grace and Ernest Turner, the daughter of Emily and Jack Tallis, the childhood friends, the university acquaintances, in a state of expansive, tranquil joy confronted the momentous change they had achieved. The closeness of a familiar face was not ludicrous, it was wondrous. Robbie stared at the woman, the girl he had always known, thinking that the change was entirely in himself, and was as fundamental, as fundamentally biological, as birth. Nothing as singular or as important had happened since the day of his birth. She returned his gaze, struck by the sense of her own transformation and overwhelmed by the beauty in a face which a lifetime's habit had taught her to ignore. She whispered his

name with the deliberation of a child trying out the distinct sounds. When he replied with her name, it sounded like a new word—the syllables remained the same, but the meaning was different. Finally he spoke the three simple words that no amount of bad art or bad faith can ever quite cheapen. She repeated them, with exactly the same slight emphasis on the second word, as though she had been the one to say them first. He had no religious belief, but it was impossible not to think of an invisible presence or witness in the room, and that these words spoken aloud were like signatures on an unseen contract. (128-29)

Let us start with temporality. Part One loosely follows the chronological order of the events on a hot June day in 1935. I say “loosely follows” because the narration does employ analepses that function to provide context for our understanding of the events of that day and there is the prolepsis that I quoted above. In addition, within the temporal boundaries of this June day, there are some temporal shifts that accompany spatial shifts: the narration will follow one or more characters in one spatial location for a while, and then, when the spatial location shifts, move back in time and pick up the actions of another character. Within the passage itself, however, Robbie’s and Cecilia’s thoughts shift from present to past and back again, as they register how the vitality and wonder of the present is dependent on that past. The sentence “The son of Grace and Ernest Turner, the daughter of Emily and Jack Tallis, the childhood friends, the university acquaintances, in a state of expansive, tranquil joy confronted the momentous change they had achieved” exemplifies this movement. It starts with their identity as infants, then moves to divide their previous relationship into its two main temporal and spatial frames (childhood at the Tallis estate; young adulthood at Cambridge) and ends with the present moment. The next two sentences trace the movement of Robbie’s thought from the present to the recent past and then all the way back to his birth. Cecilia, for her part, is aware of her “lifetime’s habit” of ignoring his face, and, as she re-names Robbie, she relocates herself in a time before that habit had taken hold and speaks “with the deliberation of a child trying out the distinct sounds.”

As for frequency, the scene is narrated only once. Shortly after this scene and before their lovemaking is complete, the lovers will be interrupted by Cecilia’s younger sister Briony, who later that night will mistakenly identify Robbie as the man who sexually assaults her cousin Lola. That identification will lead to Robbie’s being sent to prison and then, as a way to modify his sentence, to his joining the British army. As a soldier he participates in the retreat to Dunkirk in 1939, which is narrated in Part Two. In their correspondence after this night, Cecilia and Robbie use the phrase “a quiet corner in the library” but that is the only time the narration returns explicitly to the scene. The result, to adapt a phrase from the passage itself, is to highlight its singularity and importance in the narrative.

There are two salient dimensions of duration in the passage. I have already touched on the first, which is about the relation between order and duration. Though the characters’ consciousnesses frequently return to the past, the duration of those returns is minimal: many years are summed up in short phrases such as “the childhood friends, the university acquaintances” while the descriptions of the present instant of stopped time are drawn out: “in a state of expansive, tranquil joy confronted the momentous change they had achieved.” The second dimension is the duration of the period of stopped time itself in relation to the duration of the narration about it. One way to appreciate the extended duration of the narration is to compare the

length of time it would take for Cecilia and Robbie, while physically joined, to exchange gazes, say each other's names, and then "I love you" and the length of time it takes to read the passage. Another way to appreciate the extended duration is to pause over the first sentence of the next paragraph: "They had been motionless for perhaps as long as half a minute."

Turning to narrative perspective, we can see that this passage illustrates the value of Palmer's concept of the continuing consciousness frame, and its advantages over an exclusive attention to sentence-by-sentence movements of focalization. In a classical, grammatical analysis we would note how the focalization shifts as the passage moves from descriptions of physical action (the first sexual intercourse between the two characters) to reports of their thoughts and other mental activity. We'd assign the focalization of the reports of action to the narrator and the focalization of the rest of the passage to the relevant characters. Palmer's concept enables us to recognize the limitation of that approach because it offers a more encompassing and more adequate account of how the discourse is working here. Everything that is reported—the sexual intercourse, its accompanying sensations, emotional responses and thoughts, including the inferences each character makes about the other—falls within the continuing consciousness frame of Cecilia and Robbie. The passage does move from their joint consciousness to their individual consciousnesses, but that movement offers variations on a theme rather than an exposure of significant gaps between them. Consider some elements of the first four sentences. The description of Cecilia's physical movement in the first sentence, though given in the heterodiegetic narrator's voice, is very much within the characters' consciousness frame. "The moment itself was easy" may initially appear to be another external description by the narrator but a little reflection reveals that "easy" describes how the physical act of penetration felt to Cecilia and to Robbie. "It seemed to be a point of pride" may initially appear to be only a sign of the narrator's lack of omniscience but the clause is better understood as Robbie's inference about Cecilia's turning away. Perhaps the best evidence of how attention to the continuing consciousness frame transforms the sentence by sentence analysis of focalization is in the phrase "everything stopped." It is clearly not the narrator's objective report through his window on the events as privileged observer of the scene but rather a way of rendering the joint mental experience of the two characters.

Their joint consciousness is represented down through the sentence, "The closeness of a familiar face was not ludicrous, it was wondrous," but when the narration shifts to their individual consciousnesses, the passage works by repetition with a difference, and it shows that their mental activity goes beyond thought to include their emotions of joy and of wonder at each other and what they are sharing. Each one's line of mental activity is mirrored by the other's: Robbie stares at Cecilia contemplating the magnitude of the change in his perception of her; she returns his gaze and is "struck by her own transformation." They take turns whispering each other's names and then saying "I love you." Finally, although the passage ends with Robbie's consciousness, he is contemplating their mutual covenant before a quasi-sacred, invisible witness.

Turning now to voice, we can see that the passage provides excellent grounds for Genette's distinction between voice and vision/perception as well as for Bakhtin's attention to heteroglossia. While we can confidently identify the characters' continuing consciousness frame as governing the passage, we must also recognize that their voices are not the only ones in the passage. The heterodiegetic narrator's voice is also present on its own and mingled with theirs in the multiple sentences of

indirect discourse. (For the sake of convenience and relying on the principle that the default gender of such a narrator is the gender of the author, I will for now refer to the narrator as “he.” But, as we will see shortly, one of the striking things about *Atonement* is the way in which revelations in its plot have consequences for our understanding of voice.) Sometimes the mingling means that we cannot separate the narrator’s voice from the characters’, as, for example, in “the closeness of a familiar face was not ludicrous, it was wondrous.” We also cannot separate these voices because, in Bakhtin’s terms, they share the same register, that of the well-educated upper middle class. Robbie’s sharing this register with the narrator and with Cecilia is a sign of the difference his education at Cambridge has made. The son of the charwoman has become, in at least this one respect, the equal of the daughter of her employers. But this representation of Robbie’s equality contrasts with the role that class plays in the readiness of almost everyone to believe Briony’s identification of the charwoman’s son as Lola’s rapist.

At other points in the passage, we can identify the characters’ voices with a high degree of probability, thus bringing us closer to their actual thoughts. The “of course” in “Of course there was nothing abstract about a face” seems to belong to both Robbie and Cecilia, while “as fundamental, as fundamentally biological, as birth,” with its quick movement from one phrase to a second that refines the first, belongs to Robbie, and “like a new word—the syllables remained the same, but the meaning was different,” with its quick movement from the analogy to the explanation of the analogy’s meaning, belongs to Cecilia, as does the phrase “lifetime habit.” Similarly, “nothing as singular or important,” “an invisible presence or witness” and “signatures on an unseen contract” also seem to belong to Robbie’s voice,

Furthermore, the language of the passage sets up a Bakhtinian dialogue among the language of the body, the language of voicing itself, and the language of religion. The language of the body is obviously there in the references to “their breath,” “the membrane,” “each other’s eyes” and “the face.” But it is also there in Robbie’s comparison of this moment with his birth, since in both cases something fundamentally biological is going on, and that something involves the connection between his body and that of a woman. This dimension of the passage also links it with the language of Robbie’s letter to Cecilia in the version that he never meant her to see but mistakenly asked Briony to deliver. In that letter, he wrote “In my dreams I kiss your cunt, your sweet wet cunt. In my thoughts I make love to you all day long.” The direct vulgarity of that letter led Cecilia to recognize that she had been repressing her feelings for Robbie, and that recognition led them to this scene. The language of the letter, though not repeated in this passage, nevertheless provides an undercurrent to the more refined language of the body here, a refinement seen most clearly in the way the “ecstatic frenzy” of bodies coupling is mentioned only as a contrast to the stillness they felt. The implicit dialogue between the vulgar and the refined conveys the physical desire driving Robbie and Cecilia’s coupling while emphasizing that their sexual union transcends the physical.

The relation between these languages of the body and the languages of voice and of religion magnifies this effect. By the language of voice I mean McEwan’s descriptions of the way Robbie and Cecilia utter each other’s names and the way each one pronounces the three simple words. Underneath these descriptions, we hear the direct discourse of “Robbie Turner,” “Cecilia Tallis,” “I love you,” and “I love you,” while the descriptions, through their attention to each speaker’s now defamiliarized relation to the utterances, also defamiliarize them for us. The sequence of utterances adds to this effect. Cecilia’s impulse to name Robbie itself

highlights the implied mental activity conveyed by the passage: now that her perception of him has been transformed, she feels compelled to name him anew—as if she were learning his name for the first time. Similarly, now that her perception of him has changed, she hears his utterance of her name in a fresh way. They are like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden naming the wonders of creation, but what they name is each other. The implied mental activity and the defamiliarization effect for both the characters and McEwan's audience carry over to the next logical step in the sequence, the exchange of "the three simple words." The transformation in their mutual perception leads to their re-naming, the re-naming leads to the exchange of "I love you" and that exchange simultaneously gives voice to and enacts their transformed perceptions. "I love you" cannot be cheap within this context of mutual understanding—either for the two characters or for the members of the narrative and authorial audiences. Indeed, the exchange is so satisfying that it evokes the language of religion, even for the nonbeliever Robbie, who cannot help thinking of "an invisible presence or witness in the room." The dialogue of languages emphasizes the mingling of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual in the sexual union of Robbie and Cecilia.

Often the techniques McEwan uses here, especially the representation of characters' consciousness, lead to a discrepancy between their perceptions and those of the authorial audience. But in this case the techniques lead us to marvel at what is being revealed. The passage is a part of a remarkable scene representing the power, wonder, and beauty of newly discovered love. As noted above, it is the high point in that love story, one that sustains the lovers after they are separated and one that underlines for us the absolutely devastating consequences for Cecilia and Robbie of Briony's mistaken identification of him as Lola's sexual assailant.

But if we were to stop the analysis here we would be stopping too soon, because McEwan's late revelation that, within the world of the novel, Briony is the author of this passage, complicates our understanding of it. And here the emphases of the rhetorical approach to narrative discourse become especially relevant. McEwan reveals, in the last section of the novel, by means of a diary entry Briony writes after the celebration of her seventy-seventh birthday in 1999, that (a) Briony's novel is her effort to atone for what she did to Robbie and Cecilia and (b) she intends Parts One and Two of her novel to be truthful representations of actual events, while she deliberately alters history in Part Three. Those alterations are major: Part Three represents Cecilia and Robbie as reunited and Briony herself on the verge of some measure of atonement as she prepares to confess her mistaken identification of Robbie to all the relevant parties. But within the storyworld, the reality is that Robbie dies in the retreat from Dunkirk, and Cecilia dies when the Balham Underground Station is blown up a few months later. Briony's only direct effort at atonement takes the form of her novel, Parts One, Two and Three of McEwan's *Atonement*.

The first issue then in reconsidering this passage involves reconfiguring our understanding of the relations among McEwan as implied author, Briony as character in both her novel and McEwan's, and Briony as author of Part One. In both McEwan's novel and Briony's novel, Briony as character, at the age of 13 in 1935, is a budding writer with a limited imagination, someone who is only dimly beginning to realize that other people had consciousnesses as alive as her own: "though it offended her sense of order, she knew it was overwhelmingly probable that everyone else had thoughts like hers. She knew this, but only in a rather arid way; she didn't really feel it" (34). Furthermore, Briony's limited ability to recognize the complexity of other

minds fuels her misidentification of Robbie: having read his letter to Cecilia, she has labelled him a “maniac” and then fit him into her own simplified narrative of what a maniac would do, after she sees a figure retreating from Lola. Thus, McEwan shows Briony the author clearly representing the limitations of Briony the character, and asks his audience to recognize that her critical self-representation is one part of her effort to atone through her novel. Furthermore, he asks us to recognize her authorial act of constructing the scene between Robbie and Cecilia in the library before she interrupted them as another crucial part of her effort at atonement. Through its mastery of many of the techniques of modernist fiction for representing consciousness, the passage gives vivid and enduring life to Robbie, to Cecilia, and to their union, even as it implicitly acknowledges what she as character took from them.

The second issue in reconsidering the passage goes beyond its specifics to the larger ethical dimensions of both Briony’s narrative and McEwan’s. If Briony’s representation of herself and of Robbie and Cecilia in Part One shows her taking responsibility for her misidentification and its horrible consequences, does her altering history in Part Three become an effort to avoid taking ultimate responsibility for that crime and its consequences? Is this alteration of the historical record a sign of her falling back into a more sophisticated version of the sentimental romances she loved—and wrote—when she was 13? Or is her authorial decision to change the historical outcome in her fiction a justifiable choice to reject what she calls the “bleakest realism” in her diary entry, a better way to honor the memory of Robbie and Cecilia? For McEwan’s part, what is the ethical dimension of the unusual relation he sets up between disclosure functions and narrator functions, a relation that keeps his audience in the dark about the nature of the reading they are engaged in? More specifically, what kind of ethical act is it to ask readers to engage emotionally and ethically with a plot of grave error and earnest atonement only to disclose after an extended trajectory of that engagement that, within the storyworld, the error was real but the atonement was not? What do we make of the apparent analogy between Briony’s misidentification of Robbie and McEwan’s misidentification of the nature of his narrative? Attempting to answer these ethical questions in a responsible way would require another long essay, and I have no doubt that the answers would themselves be contested. But the specifics of my answers matter less than the recognition that these questions arise directly out of McEwan’s handling of his narrative discourse.

These questions are also related to the kind of ideological questions about McEwan’s techniques that feminist narratologists would pose. What do those techniques suggest about his view of the relation between gender and authority? If we think McEwan guides us to find Briony’s choice to alter history as an evasion of her responsibility, then we would conclude that he gives Briony the author tremendous authority in Parts One, Two, and Three only to undermine that authority with the inclusion of the diary entry. On the other hand, if we find McEwan guiding us to accept Briony’s justification for altering history, then we would conclude that he is granting her a rare kind of authority, one that links her act of fictional narrative with her act of atonement. More generally, feminist narratologists would raise questions about McEwan’s choice to tell this story about error and possible atonements by focusing on the mistakes of a young girl and the choices of a mature woman novelist. They also would focus on the choice of the central event—the sexual assault of a young woman, who, it turns out, falls in love with and marries her assailant—as another site for questions about the gender politics of McEwan’s choices. Again,

working through the possibilities in a responsible way would require a separate essay, but the point is that the questions arise directly out of McEwan's narrative.

### **Part Three: Unresolved Instabilities**

*I am large, I contain multitudes.*

As I hope is now evident, the narrative of the relation between narrative and narrative theory has many plots, and the dynamics of those plots can be affected in multiple ways. Consequently, as I come to the end of my version, I want to avoid gestures toward completeness, indeed, any signals that this narrative is approaching a state of equilibrium in which theory and narrative, like two lovers in a romantic comedy, will live in a perpetual state of mutual understanding and happiness. Instead, this narrative not only has many unresolved instabilities but it is also one in which new instabilities continually emerge. New instabilities emerge because, as Scholes and Kellogg so amply demonstrate, narrative itself continues to evolve as changes in history and culture (including literary history and culture) prompt innovations in narrative form. New instabilities also arise because any theoretical framework worthy of the name will, in solving some problems, either reveal or neglect others. As theorists then propose solutions to these problems, the larger theoretical frameworks get revised, and the cycle starts again. Finally, new instabilities materialize because interdisciplinarity generates new approaches to narrative, and these approaches either address new problems or old problems in a substantially different way. Recently, a number of critics have been developing an approach to literary narrative derived from the principles of Darwin's *Origin of the Species*. This approach looks at both the behavior of characters and the behavior of authors and readers in evolutionary terms, explaining their motivations and activity by the principles that govern natural selection (e.g., Elizabeth Bennet wants to marry Darcy because, as the leading male in her social circle, he provides the best chance for her genes to survive into future generations). At this stage in its own evolution, "literary Darwinism" strikes me as being too much of an a priori scheme in which the complex relations between nature and culture get reduced to the single pattern of nature trumping culture. The approach works much better in explaining why Elizabeth marries Darcy than it does in explaining why she initially rejects him. But if "literary Darwinism" eventually proves to be a productive new approach to narrative, it will at the very least propose new understandings of character and plot.

Rather than speculate about the fate of literary Darwinism or otherwise predict the future of narrative theory, I'd like to end my telling by highlighting four currently unresolved instabilities, the first two involving the relation between narrative and narrative theory and the second two within narrative theory itself.

1. Narrative theory and the tradition of nonmimetic narrative. In *Unnatural Voices* (2006) Brian Richardson persuasively argues that most existing narrative theory is derived from the study of narratives with a mimetic orientation, which leads it to misleading generalizations about the nature of narrative, and especially the nature of narrative discourse. Richardson shows both that there is a long tradition of narrative that deliberately eschews such a mimetic orientation and he proposes many valuable extensions and revisions of current theory. Among other issues, he analyzes second-person (or direct address) narration, "we" narration, and multi-person narration. Beyond these specifics, Richardson's work opens up a new vein of theoretical exploration.
2. Narrative theory and digital narrative. The advent of digital technology and the development of early hypertext narratives led to many extravagant claims

about the differences between digital and print narratives. But as digital technology continues to evolve and as narrative artists continue to work in the new medium, the likelihood that the differences will become more significant increases. As those differences develop, narrative theory will need to be revised so that it can do justice to the distinctiveness of each kind of narrative. Marie-Laure Ryan in *Narrative as Virtual Reality* (2001) provides an excellent foundation for work on these developments precisely because she places digital narrative and the interactivity it often encourages within the context of the virtual reality generated by print narrative and the immersion it encourages.

3. Narrative theory, the borders between fiction and nonfiction, and cross-border traffic Spurred by the work of Hayden White on the similarities between the techniques of writing history and writing fiction, including the necessity of emplotment, some theorists argue that the borders between fiction and nonfiction are illusory. Dorrit Cohn advances the counterargument that there are distinctive “signposts of fictionality,” such as its freedom to employ internal focalization and unreliable narration. Richardson’s work could also be marshalled in support of Cohn’s case. In my rhetorical view, preserving the borders has the major advantage of helping us account for the differences in the ways we respond to particular narratives, even as the debate calls attention to various kinds of border-crossing—of technique, of character, of place, and so on. Susan Lanser offers a promising proposal for looking at another kind of border crossing: the similar “attachments” that authors of fiction and nonfiction can have to their statements. Lanser persuasively argues that much commentary within the borders of fiction—e.g., a narrator’s generalizing statements about the nature of the world—is as directly attached to their authors as if that commentary occurred outside the borders of fiction.
4. Narrative space. Genette, Ricoeur, Brooks, Herman, and others have all done significant work on narrative time, and though there has been some significant work on narrative space throughout the history of narrative theory, it has not received the same amount of attention. Recently, however, the situation is changing as critics of various orientations turn their attention to the importance of space within narrative. To cite just two examples: Susan Friedman has recently followed her work on “spatialization” with a provocative proposal for the development of a “spatial poetics.” Such a poetics would recognize space’s intimate connection with time and its capacity to be not just a static background but a dynamic element of narrative structure. From a cognitivist perspective, Marie-Laure Ryan has proposed a project of “literary cartography,” the analysis of strategies that readers employ for reconstructing mental maps of narrative space.<sup>6</sup>

Although the narrative of the relation between narrative theory and its object of study remains very much *in mediis rebus*, my version of the last forty years of that narrative must, thankfully for all, come to a close. In order to pay tribute to the groundbreaking work of Scholes and Kellogg and to underline once again the intimate and evolving connection between narrative and narrative theory, I would like to quote and then adapt their conclusion. They end with a short and suggestive narrative about their subject: “narrative literature is the most restless of forms, driven by its imperfections and inner contradictions to an unceasing search for an unattainable ideal. It is this terribly human struggle that makes the study of narrative art the most fascinating of literary studies” (282). Shifting the subject from narrative to



narrative theory, I end thus: At its best narrative theory is the most restless of pursuits, driven by its own imperfections and by the wonders and the variety of its object of study to an unceasing search for an unattainable ideal: the comprehensive account of the pervasiveness and power of stories and storytelling, in short, for the nature of narrative itself. It is this simultaneously daunting and exhilarating challenge that makes narrative theory one of the most vital and valuable enterprises of contemporary intellectual inquiry.

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<sup>1</sup> For a different approach to the problem of comprehensive coverage of the field, see *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (2005), a 718-page tome by more than 200 diverse hands, containing entries on approximately 450 topics, ranging from “actant” to “writerly text.” For a recent snapshot of the state of the field, see the *Blackwell Companion to Narrative Theory* (2005), a 571-page volume containing 35 essays on topics ranging from the history of narrative theory to the relations between narrative and music.

<sup>2</sup> Related work, also influenced by the Russian formalists and by structuralist linguistics, was being done by the Moscow-Tartu group that included Juri Lotman and Boris Uspensky, but this work has not been as influential as that of the French structuralists—yet. Another important branch of structuralist inquiry, one that preceded much of the work done in France, was carried out by the Prague School, a group that included Jan Mukarřovský and Nikolai Trubetzkoi. For excellent overviews of these bodies of work, along with essential bibliographies, see the entries in the second edition of the *Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* by Uri Margolin (on the Moscow-Tartu group) and Lubomir Dolezel (on the Prague School group).

<sup>3</sup> Significant deconstructive work has been done on narrative primarily by Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, and Barbara Johnson, and much of that work is brilliant in its individual analyses and its posing of theoretical challenges to nondeconstructive methods. But I do not feature that work in this narrative because I do not see it as having had an enduring effect on narrative theory’s understandings of plot, character, and narrative discourse. Deconstruction would loom larger in my story of literary criticism since 1966 than it does in my story of narrative theory since that time. To put this point another way, although deconstruction has amply established that all narratives, narrative elements, and narrative theories are susceptible to deconstruction, narrative theory has nevertheless continued to pursue what it regards as substantial, if provisional, understandings of narrative, narratives, and the elements of both.

<sup>4</sup> For more on this potential problem, see my discussion in Chapter 2 of *Reading People, Reading Plots*.

<sup>5</sup> Also noteworthy is Sternberg’s work on the relation between narrative elements and techniques, on the one side, and their functions on the other. He persuasively develops a “Proteus Principle,” which stipulates that “in different contexts . . . the same form may fulfill different functions and different forms the same function” (“Proteus,” 148).

<sup>6</sup> Important earlier work includes Juri Lotman’s *The Structure of the Artistic Text* and Bakhtin’s essay on “Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel” in *The Dialogic Imagination*. Other useful more recent work includes Manfred Jahn’s overview in his entry on “Space” in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* and David Herman’s chapter on “Spatialization” in *Story Logic*.