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INTRODUCTION

JOHN PIER

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The essays included in this collection seek to take the pulse of recent developments in narratological research in the French-speaking countries. An outgrowth of the structuralist movement during the 1960s and '70s, narratology in France faded into the background during the following decades for a variety of reasons as its principal actors took up other pursuits and its contributions to the understanding of narrative were either assimilated into new developments or contested by new intellectual and scholarly orientations. The interest of French researchers in narrative did not disappear, however, but tended to be assimilated into or marginalized by other concerns (Paul Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutics, Roland Barthes's "text theory," enunciative linguistics, etc.); few of these researchers considered themselves narratologists, even though some of their work had implications for narratology. During this period, a number of English-speaking scholars, well versed in French research, continued to work in this area (e.g., Gerald Prince, Seymour Chatman, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Dorrit Cohn) while the rhetoric of fiction, closer in its origins to the Jamesian tradition than to Russian formalism and structuralism, evolved into rhetorical narratology.

The new directions in research taken during the 1990s in the US and Germany and somewhat later in the Scandinavian countries with the rise of postclassical narratology had little effect in France where, at the time, narratology continued to be associated with structuralism rather than with the

paradigm changes that marked the new currents of narrative research. Nevertheless, there arose with the turn of the century a new interest in narratological issues among French researchers, and activity in the field has since intensified, spurred on, in part, by the realization that narratology cannot be summed up by its formalist and structuralist origins. It is notable that while some convergences between English-language and francophone research in the field exist, it is not the case that the classical/postclassical paradigm of narratology fully describes the situation in the French-speaking countries (see Pier 2011). This is a complex topic whose many dimensions have yet to be fully investigated. One consideration to be taken into account is that structural narratology was a less codified and decontextualized undertaking than it is sometimes made out to be: Early on, the transmedial, transcultural, and transhistorical dimensions of narrative were firmly inscribed in the structural approach to narrative, thus calling on the resources of transdisciplinarity, as can be seen in one of the founding documents, volume 8 of the journal *Communications* (1966) (see Pier 2017). Although these questions were somewhat attenuated by French scholars at the time, structural narratology was from the outset open to inquiry into the contextual aspects of narrative that postclassical narratology was later to lay claim to.¹ In any case, it would be overstating the case, as the essays included in this volume will show, to consider that recent French-language narratology reflects “the established dichotomy of text or textual vs. context or contextual” (Sommer 2012: § 4) commonly spoken of with reference to postclassical narratology.

One factor that was to have an impact on narrative theory in French-speaking countries was narrative and identity (individual, collective, cultural), as foregrounded in particular by Ricoeur in his hermeneutic philosophy, which incorporated the structural narratology of Greimas and Genette. Another is the expansion of the objects of research beyond the literary corpus to embrace narrative in the social and human sciences as a whole. It is this development, the narrative turn, which, as argued by Raphaël Baroni (2016) in an informative and insightful overview of the current state and prospects of research in narrative theory, has alerted researchers in the French-speaking countries to the renewal of narratology.² More recently, Baroni points out,

1. Marie-Laure Ryan observes that “the founding fathers of narratology recognized from the very beginning the medium transcending nature of narrative. . . . Barthes’ and Bremond’s wish to open up narratology to media other than literature went unfulfilled for years.” She adds that “were [Barthes] alive today, he would add blogs, hypertext, and video games” (2014 [2009]: 471).

2. Appearing in volume 30 of the review *Questions de communication*, this article inspired a number of responses in the following issue that debated questions such as the pertinence of the return to the sources, whether the crisis in narratology reveals a cultural crisis, and whether

Christian Salmon's *Storytelling. La machine à fabriquer des histoires et à formater des esprits* (2007; English translation 2010) has stimulated debate over the rhetorically driven "narrativist drift" (*dérive narrativiste*), that is, the radical expansion of narrative itself (and not of narrative theory) and the unsettling impact of storytelling on all areas of social, political, and economic life.³ At the same time, there is a certain amount of work going on in these countries that bears on transmedial, transhistorical, and transcultural phenomena, which, in a sometimes piecemeal way, draws on the narratological "toolkit" without laying claim to being properly narratological research, and this even though in a number of cases this work may be narratologically relevant. This is but one of the obstacles to mapping out and assessing narratology in these countries. Another factor to be taken into account is that few French-speaking researchers would describe themselves as feminist, postcolonial, rhetorical, cognitivist, or unnatural narratologists, although individual researchers may very well glean insights from these and various other such orientations. All in all, it would be difficult to conclude that the postclassical narratologies have decisively taken root in francophone narrative theory. But this is not to say that these developments have failed to have any echo in French-language research. An anthology of writings edited by Sylvie Patron, *Introduction à la narratologie postclassique*, published in 2018, attests to a growing interest among French speakers in the issues raised and the advances offered by this branch of research.⁴ A more diverse collection of essays that nonetheless gives a fair idea of the current tendencies in French-language scholarship, "Le récit en questions," has appeared in the journal *Pratiques* under the editorship of André Petitjean (2019).

One of the main challenges faced by the narratologist is to further the understanding of narrativity in its diverse and ever-changing manifestations and to do so through the lens of perpetually evolving disciplinary, methodological, and epistemological developments without falling victim to narratological imperialism or to a blurring of the boundaries that define the specificity of narrative. Emblematic of the open-ended environment of narratological inquiry is the rise of digitally based and other interactive forms of

narratology can be absorbed into the information and communication sciences (Fleury and Walter 2017).

3. Salmon expresses some hostility to narratology, but ironically the reception of his book has proved the positions he stakes out to be germane to a number of issues that are now regarded as critical.

4. Included are contributions by Susan S. Lanser, James Phelan, Monika Fludernik, David Herman, Ansgar Nünning, Marie-Laure Ryan, and Brian Richardson. Also to be mentioned is Baroni's *Les Rouages de l'intrigue* (2017), which incorporates a number of principles of postclassical narratology.

storytelling, resulting in a rethinking and reconfiguration of narrative categories as they have been handed down from the study of text-based narratives.⁵ Other examples can be brought to bear on this point, of course, but what is important here is that the use of narrative theories as ready-made props serving some purpose other than the exploration and understanding of narratives per se risks falling short of the heuristic potential of the narratological enterprise. What sets narratology off from other forms of theorizing about narrative is that it proceeds by critical examination of its premises, including those of its predecessors, and, where called for, by reformulating and adapting its own *modus operandi* appropriately.

It is this objective that the essays assembled in the present volume seek to fulfill. Well versed in French narrative theory, both classical and more recent, the authors also draw on scholarship coming from other research traditions. The result is that these contributions offer a number of syntheses and perspectives representative of recent French-language scholarship in the field that readers from other horizons may not be familiar with or that provide them with further insight into subjects they may have encountered in other contexts. Needless to say, the topics dealt with and the approaches adopted do not cover the full range of research being carried out (an undertaking that exceeds the ambition of this book), but they will, it is hoped, leave readers with a greater awareness of the directions taken by present-day French-language narratology, not to speak of new and developing themes in narrative theory generally.



The overall tone of the essays is set by Raphaël Baroni's "Pragmatics in Classical French Narratology and Beyond." Noting that his work on narrative tension, devoted to describing a dynamics of plot, was originally inspired by the functionally oriented approaches of Sternberg, Eco, Brooks, Phelan, and Ryan (authors critical of the formalist-structuralist framework of French narratology) as well as by Tomashevsky, Baroni proposes to take a fresh look at francophone sources of the "classical" period where, in fact, a narrative dynamics did exist, albeit in a latent and muted form. Much emphasis was laid by

5. The question is raised as to "how classical narratology, whose main concern has been so far texts that represent a certain combination of modes—diegetic, representational, retrospective, scripted, receptive, autonomous, determinate, and literal—can be extended to digital narratives, which are simulative rather than representational, emergent rather than scripted, participatory rather than receptive, and simultaneous rather than retrospective" (Ryan 2006: xxi).

French-speaking theoreticians on the logical structure of the *fabula*, but interaction between the text and the reader and the problems of narrative interest were not ignored, even by an author such as Greimas. For various aesthetic and ideological reasons, these questions tend, in francophone scholarship, to be relegated to popular literature even today, although their pragmatic and epistemological dimensions, Baroni concludes, have much in common with anglophone research.

In her chapter “No-Narrator Theories/Optional-Narrator Theories: A Survey of Recent Proposals and Continuing Problems,” Sylvie Patron offers a critique of “pan-narrator” theories that posit a narrator for all fictional narratives, theories that, she maintains, are fundamental to classical and postclassical narratology alike. Through a systematic survey of the relevant literature, Patron sets out an argument in favor of “optional narrator” theories, dividing these theories into first and second generation, the latter encompassing a variety of analytical, ontological, inferential, and other arguments. She points, however, to the lack of historical perspective among both “optionalist” and “panist” theoreticians. To remedy this shortcoming, she calls for a scientifically conceived history of narrative theories based on the model of the history of linguistic theories as developed by the French school, an approach linked not only to historiography but also to epistemology.

“A novel is a narrative; it is also a book.” So begins Richard Saint-Gelais’s “Narration outside Narrative.” In narratives, it is argued, there is an “inside” of the text produced by the narrator and an “outside” produced by the writer, publisher, graphic artist, and others, one being the subject of narratology, the other of paratextual studies. But the lines between the two dimensions are not impermeable, and Saint-Gelais provides a variety of examples of leakage between them: segmentation of the book into chapters, titles that are actually the words of a character, dubious attribution of epigraphs, characters’ names written in colored ink, metaleptic permutations between author and narrator, and so on. Such operations suggest that reading a text as narrative involves a negotiation between text and fiction, a process that Saint-Gelais proposes to call *parafictionalization*: treating “a textual feature as *representing* a diegetic element.” Among other things, this process arises out of a more general interpretive strategy through which a narratorial figure may or may not be attributed to the discourse.

The problem of the narrator is also examined by Benoît Hennaut, but in this case in the theater according to the dramaturgical approach to narration. In “Narrator on Stage: Not a Condition but a Component for a Postdramatic Narrative Discourse,” Hennaut points out that narratologists (at least those who consider theater to be a narrative genre) generally focus on narratorial

figures on the stage and/or in the playscript, effectively adopting the categories of textual narrative analysis. He takes exception to the condition of narratoriality based on a theoretical analogy of textual function applied to the theater, however, and adopts the principle developed by performance studies according to which performance takes precedence over text: In this view, narrative discourse is inscribed within the performance, and it is at this level that events, actionality, and other elements of narrativity are generated. Going a step farther (based on his analysis of postdramatic theatrical productions), Hennaut rules out any necessity for a narrator as a disembodied super-agent and considers performance itself to be the narrative function as expressed through the use of gesture, choreography, sound, lighting, décor, verbal language. "It is on the basis of the eventfulness engendered by performance discourse that a given performance contains narrativity."

A related problem, though in a very different genre, is addressed by Françoise Revaz in "The Poetics of Suspended Narrative": the suspensive effects of the fragmentation of narrative. By suspended narrative is understood "the sequential release of a narrative in installments, with a frequency of publication dictated by the type of publication." This type of narrative, characterized by the rhetoric of seriality and discontinuous reading, is illustrated by a corpus of two kinds: media sagas in the press such as ongoing political or economic affairs in which the writer has no control over the episodes to come, and to-be-continued stories in comics magazines, where the writer is free to determine future episodes. Such narratives challenge the Aristotelian principle of wholeness based on unity and closure, and they do so in instructively contrasting ways that Revaz spells out in detail. This can be seen, for instance, in the boundary lines between the end and the beginning of successive episodes in media sagas as compared to those found in to-be-continued stories, but also in the fact that the former, unlike the latter, defy macro-narrative ordering. Moreover, the fragmentary mode of production (found also in TV series) generates a type of narrative tension in the reading experience that tests the usual norms of works completed prior to their publication.

One of the influential developments in francophone narrative theory has been discourse analysis, the subject of John Pier's "Discourse Analysis and Narrative Theory: A French Perspective." Discourse analysis, which got underway in the late 1960s, was generated partly out of a critique of structuralism, for it prioritizes discourse in context over structure by stressing the inextricable relations between textual organization and enunciation. Most important, however, is that discourse analysis, unlike narratology, takes an interest in discourse in all its forms and in all social and disciplinary domains; in this way, narrative, though undeniably pervasive, must be situated among other

forms of discourse. Pier examines the various dimensions of discourse analysis, which include text linguistics (where the relevant division is text and discourse rather than story and discourse), the theory of enunciation (Émile Benveniste), speech genres (Mikhail Bakhtin), and the scene of enunciation (Dominique Maingueneau). The latter two categories in particular provide a set of generic distinctions that make it possible to situate narrative within the vast variety of discourses without the risk of overexpansion of the categories peculiar to narrative.

For some years now, it has been considered that narrativity constitutes a release from the constraints of immanence, a formal and closed concept that cuts structures off from context. However, it is sometimes forgotten that in the earliest full treatment of the subject, in the semiotics of A. J. Greimas, the two principles, narrativity and immanence, were closely interconnected. The evolution of the relations between these principles is examined by Denis Bertrand in "Regimes of Immanence, between Narratology and Narrativity." Narrativity, regarded as central to the semiotic conception of meaning, permeates the categories of Greimassian semiotics. Later, the concept of immanence was radicalized by the members of this school at the expense of narrativity, and narratological pursuits were largely abandoned. Bertrand proposes to renew the connection between the two concepts by adopting a notion put forth by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: *regimes of immanence*. A narrative discourse consists of at least two such regimes, one structured by the narrative "said" (the enunciated) and forming the subject of narratology, the other bearing on the narrative "saying" (enunciation) and forming the subject of narrativity. The highly metadiscursive interactions between these two regimes are examined in a few passages from Cervantes's *Don Quixote*.

Fiction has long been equated with narrative mimetic fiction. However, the upsurge in the study of fiction as a general phenomenon in recent decades has altered the landscape considerably as new objects of fiction have entered the debate, rendering the distinction between fiction and nonfiction unclear. Olivier Caïra takes stock of this situation in "Fiction, Expanded and Updated." Among the many examples he mentions are, for instance, board and video games, which have a narrative content but are meant to be played rather than told or shown. Another example is interactive digital media, where improvisation is a major feature. Caïra points in particular to nonmimetic forms of fiction and simulation games in which perception and action are simulated rather than represented, another example being abstract nonmimetic games such as checkers or Tetris. To account for these and other varieties of fiction, he rehabilitates the old but neglected distinction between mimetic and mathematical or axiomatic fictions, made salient thanks in part to the rise of the

digital technologies. A number of consequences of the expansion and redefinition of fiction are discussed (there is no “language” or “distinction” of fiction, the opposition of fiction and reality is irrelevant, etc.). The importance of fictional framing is stressed (see the works of Erving Goffman), and in place of the so-called fictional contract (to be entered into or not) is fiction as a social institution, establishing authority to be accepted or contested.

One of the major challenges for narratology has long been the treatment of narratives from different epochs and cultures. Claude Calame’s “Narratology and the Test of Greek Myths: The Poetic Birth of a Colonial City” is a case study bearing precisely on this problem. Calame argues that “myths” in ancient Greece did not exist as such but were compiled in modern times out of heterogeneous and fragmentary stories in verse devoted to heroic characters, local events, the founding of cities, and so on that were originally performed in ritual and song, particularly during the preclassical period.⁶ In his close analysis of Pindar’s Fourth *Pythian Ode*, which recounts the foundation of the colonial city of Cyrene in Libya, Calame adopts the semio-narrative approach, an approach that passes from structural narratology to a pragmatically oriented narratology with a focus on the enunciative dimension of the individual narrative. In this way, it is possible to reconstruct the work’s narrative syntax and semantic organization within the pragmatic framework of the production and reception of meaning. Thanks to this method, the author is able to highlight, *inter alia*, how elements from the natural world are integrated into a narrative program of anthropomorphic actions around themes such as autochthony.

The disciplinary status of narratology, once regarded as a method or technique of analysis, has long been a subject of debate but has gained in stature since the advent of the narrative turn and intensified transdisciplinary research by narratologists. In “Policing Literary Theory: Toward a Collaborative Ethics of Research?” Françoise Lavocat argues that in the current state of academic research, narratology offers a number of valuable prospects for the furtherance of literary studies and research in literary theory. In this well-documented study, whose aim is to consider the place of narratology in the current research environment, Lavocat discusses the rise and fall of French Theory from the 1970s to the 1990s, followed by the return, in French academia, to “common sense” and literary history. However, narratology, which maintains a scientific ambition that allows it to span disciplines as well as epochs and cultures, constitutes a collaborative undertaking with an attrac-

6. For a major study on Greek mythology, see Calame (2015).

tive potential in the present-day academy. Indeed, concludes Lavocat, it is a disciplinary pursuit that might serve as a model for literary theory.

A number of seminars, research centers, and websites exist in France and in Switzerland that will allow scholars to keep abreast of narratological research in the French-speaking countries. These include the research seminar “Recherches contemporaines en narratologie,” organized under the auspices of the Centre de recherches sur les arts et le langage (Cral), a research unit at the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) and the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris, created in 2003.⁷ Another center in France is the Laboratoire Interdisciplinaire Récits Cultures Sociétés (LIRCES) (formerly the Centre de Narratologie Appliquée, founded in 1984) at the Université Nice Sophia Antipolis.⁸ The online review *Cahiers de narratologie*, the oldest review in the field in France, is hosted by LIRCES.⁹ The Centre de recherche sur les médiations (CREM) is located at the Université de Lorraine.¹⁰ Also to be mentioned is the Paris Center for Narrative Matters (Université Paris Diderot and The American University of Paris). Finally, in 2018 two dedicated websites, Réseau des Narratologues Francophones (RéNaF)¹¹ and Pôle de Narratologie Transmédiale (NaTrans), were launched at the Université de Lausanne.¹²

While there is a growing interest in new approaches to narrative theory in France and in other French-speaking countries, it cannot be said that a “school” of narratology has coalesced or that any particular method or theory prevails. It is the case, rather, that French-speaking narrative theorists are attached to addressing specific problems of narrative with appropriately adapted concepts and methods of analysis. Such is the spirit in which the contributions to this volume have been written and are now presented for public debate.

7. The website of the seminar, which also lists its annual program of lectures, is <http://narratologie.ehess.fr/>.

8. Website: <http://unice.fr/laboratoires/lirces/fr/accueil>. The journal *Cahiers de Narratologie* has been appearing at this center since 1987. It can be consulted online at: <https://journals.openedition.org/narratologie/>.

9. Website: <https://journals.openedition.org/narratologie/>.

10. Website: <https://crem.univ-lorraine.fr/>.

11. Website: <https://wp.unil.ch/narratologie/renaf/>.

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