



Introduction

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SYLVIE PATRON

Introduction

The identification of interpretive models and methods across different disciplines, notably in the humanities, is one of the major objectives of the HERMES (Histories and Theories of Interpretation) research programme directed by Françoise Lavocat at the University of Paris Diderot-Paris 7. In the field of the theory of literary narrative, the issue of interpretation raises particular difficulties linked to the history of the discipline, or field of research, and its recent development (currently seen as the progression from “classical” to “postclassical” narratology¹). On the 12th and 13th of December 2008, a bilingual, international conference entitled *Théorie, analyse, interprétation des récits/ Theory, analysis, interpretation of narratives* was held at the University of Paris Diderot-Paris 7 thanks to joint funding from the French National Research Agency, which finances the HERMES programme, and the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies and Research in the Department of Literature, Arts and Cinema (CERILAC). Sixteen scholars from Germany, Belgium, France, Japan, North America and Switzerland were invited to study and discuss three issues or sets of issues.

1. The relations between the theory, analysis and interpretation of narrative. What role should theory play in the analysis and interpretation of narrative? What, in turn, might be the effect of the

1 The expression is David Herman's (see Herman 1999: 2-3). It signifies that “postclassical” narratology includes so-called “classical” narratology (developed by Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, Gérard Genette, Mieke Bal, Gerald Prince, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, etc.) as one of its stages, but is also characterized by a profusion of new methods and research hypotheses. Its usage does not usually take theories offering an alternative to narratology into account (such as those developed by Käthe Hamburger, S.-Y. Kuroda and Ann Banfield. See Patron 2009, 24 *et passim* and pp. 147-148 of the present volume).

analysis and interpretation of narrative on narrative theory? Does taking the question of analysis and interpretation into consideration make it possible, for example, to choose between competing theories? Or finally, should narrative theory exclude certain types of modern “narrative”, as Nicolas Ruwet suggests, speaking of poetry?²

2. *The relations between analysis and the “everyday” reading of narratives.* Should analysis account for what goes on in “everyday” readings of narrative? Do studies conducted on empirical groups of readers modify the analysis or even the theory of narrative? What should we make, for example, of the emphasis on the opposition between fictional narrative and non-fictional narrative in narrative theory, and the negation of the same opposition in works of cognitive psychology?

3. *The historical and cultural scope of narrative theory.* How do classicists or specialists of Medieval literature, or non-Western literature, define the limits of the pertinence of the hypotheses and concepts of narrative theory to the analysis and interpretation of their respective narrative corpora?

The term “theory” is understood to refer to a set of hypotheses, concepts and conclusions concerning narrative in general and to imply that, like all scientific theories, it is distinguished by its essential relation to truth and falsehood. “Analysis” is understood to refer to a set of methods and tools aimed at enabling a more accurate or precise description of narratives or of certain narratives in particular. Last, “interpretation” is understood to refer to the process by which the reader or critic, faced with the linear manifestation of a particular narrative, lends it meaning and, in the case of the critic, attempts to explain how the narrative produces such semantic interpretations or other meanings.

2 See Ruwet (1975: 349): “[...] it wouldn’t bother me if a poetic theory in which parallelisms played a central part excluded certain types of modern ‘poetry’ – no more than I would be bothered by a general musical theory that took Mozart, Debussy, Gesualdo, Schönberg, gagaku, Gregorian chant, etc., into consideration but excluded, for example, John Cage’s *Radio Music* as non-music; rather I would see it as corroborating the theory” (my translation).

The present volume contains the acts of the conference held in December 2008 with slight modifications relating to the number and range of contributions.

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The history of the relations between the theory, analysis and interpretation of literary narratives from the late 1960s (emergence of narratology as a discipline or field of research) to the 1990s and beyond (narratology “revisited”,³ identification of postclassical narratology, new relevance attached to alternative theories to narratology) would merit more thorough investigation. For the moment I will simply offer a few pointers.

1. *The interpretive abstinence of narratology.* Sylvère Lotringer uses this expression with reference to poetics (structuralist poetics in general and Tzvetan Todorov’s in particular).⁴ Narratology, generally seen as a branch of poetics, objects to interpretation due to its alleged subjectivity, which is rooted in the apprehension of the work by the critic-interpreter. See Todorov: “The sense (or function) of an element of the work is its potential to enter into correlation with other elements of this work, and with the entire work [...]. It is not the same with regard to interpretation. The interpretation of an element differs according to the personality of the critic, his ideological positions or his era. To be interpreted, an element is included in a system which is not that of the work but that of the critic”.⁵ Narratology sides with neutral, objective, definitive description (“Each element of a work has one or more senses [...] which are finite in number and which it is possible to establish once and for all”⁶) and leaves the task of the

3 See the three special issues of the journal *Poetics Today* entitled “Narratology Revisited” (McHale and Ronen 1990a, 1990b and 1991).

4 See Lotringer (1971: 197).

5 Todorov (1980 [1966: 3-4]). The opposition between sense (function, functional potential to enter into correlation) and interpretation (meaning produced by the critic-interpreter) is also central to the work of A. J. Greimas, even if the latter calls Todorov’s “sense” “interpretation” (see Greimas 1981 [1966]). There is no other significant mention of interpretation in Barthes (ed.) (1981 [1966]).

6 Todorov (1980 [1966]: 4).

interpretation or, potentially, of the evaluation of narrative to criticism. For Gérard Genette, refusing interpretation takes the specific form of refusing “to impose coherence”, which is dependant only on the persuasive faculties of the critic-interpreter: “[...] but it would be unfortunate, it seems to me, to seek ‘unity’ at any price, and in that way to force the work’s coherence — which is, of course, one of criticism’s strongest temptations, one of its most ordinary (not to say most common) ones, and also one most easy to satisfy, since all it requires is a little interpretive rhetoric”⁷; “I still feel as much repugnance toward those impositions of ‘coherence’ that interpretive criticism carries off so glibly”.⁸ Certain narratologists show more consideration for criticism and its concerns. Mieke Bal even postulates a complementary relation between criticism on the one hand and narratology (seen as “general” narratology) and the science of literature on the other: “The objects of criticism — the analysis, interpretation and evaluation of texts — require a constant interaction between criticism, narratology and the science of literature. If criticism can benefit, for its activities, from the information the other two disciplines provide, the latter need criticism to verify the concepts they propose.”⁹ However, all agree that narratology as a discipline or field of research is not concerned with the interpretation or evaluation of narratives, nor even with explaining the way interpretation and evaluation of narratives work.¹⁰

It should be noted that the representatives of alternative theories to narratology do not differ from narratologists on this point. Ann Banfield speaks of “what is conceived traditionally as the proper object of literary criticism, as opposed to literary theory: questions concerning individual writers’ creative selection and combination of forms latent in language, questions concerning the relation between biography (the ‘life’) and history (the ‘time’) and the work itself,

7 Genette (1983: 266).

8 Genette (1990: 155).

9 Bal (1977: 14), my translation. Also see the preface to the first edition of Bal (1997, 2004 [1985]: ix-x).

10 With the exception of Tamar Yacobi’s work on the interpretation of inconsistencies in narrative, or in certain narratives (see Yacobi 1981).

analyses of the compatibility of style and meaning, questions of interpretation, and judgments of literary value”.¹¹

2. *The Lanser-Diengott debate (or feminist narratology debate).* This exchange marks an important moment in the history of the relations between the theory, analysis and interpretation of narratives and, at the same time, clearly indicates the position of classical narratology. In 1986, Susan S. Lanser published an article called “Toward a Feminist Narratology”, in which she asks “whether feminist criticism and particularly the study of narratives by women, might benefit from the methods and insights of narratology and whether narratology, in turn, might be altered by the understandings of feminist criticism and the experience of women’s texts”.¹² Lanser puts forward three main reasons for explaining why feminist criticism and narratology (understood as “that branch of poetics concerned with defining and describing all aspects of narrative”¹³) ignore each other: indifference to the issue of gender in narratology, whether in designating a canon or formulating questions or hypotheses; the mimetic understanding of narrative and its elements (in particular its characters) in feminist criticism and the semiotic understanding of the same elements in narratology; the importance given to the context of the production and reception of texts in feminist criticism and, by contrast, the decontextualization of narratives carried out by narratology. She shows, based on the study of an example, the form that collaboration between feminist criticism and narratology might take. In 1988, Nilli Diengott replied to Lanser’s article in “Narratology and Feminism”. Basing her argument on the division of literary studies put forward by Benjamin Hrushovsky,¹⁴ she asserts that “what Lanser has to say about the issues on which narratology and feminist criticism differ is inherent to the object and methods of inquiry that narratology as a theoretical poetics is focused on. Her analysis is based on a confusion of theoretical poetics with other fields within the study of literature, such as interpretation, historical poetics,

11 Banfield (1983: 204).

12 Lanser (1986: 342).

13 *Idem*: 362, n. 6.

14 See Hrushovsky (1976).

or criticism”.¹⁵ For Diengott, “Gender can be of great significance [...] in interpretation [...]. But interpretation is not narratology, not theoretical poetics”, “Obviously Lanser is interested in interpretation, but narratology is a totally different activity”.¹⁶ Diengott’s article today is mainly of historical interest, even if some of the issues it raises (for example that of the relations between the “system of literature” and the literary works themselves, or that of the definition of context¹⁷) have a more general epistemological value.

3. *New narratologies*. “Contextualist narratology”, “feminist narratology”, “rhetorical narratology”, “‘natural’ narratology”, “cognitive narratology”, “historical and cultural narratology”, etc.: the 1990s witnessed an explosion of new forms of narratology. They all take up problems, such as context, gender, rhetorical transactions between authors, narrators and different types of receivers, the cognitive processes involved in narrative understanding, etc., which narratology had voluntarily or involuntarily ignored, and question the emphasis laid on description to the detriment of the interpretation and evaluation of narratives. As Ansgar Nünning remarks in relation to what he terms “contextualist, thematic and ideological approaches”, most “are not really ‘narratologies’ in that they are merely applications of narratological models and categories to specific texts, genres, or periods. With the possible exception of feminist narratology, which has arguably contributed genuinely narratological insights, shedding new light on ‘narrative *qua* narrative’ (Prince 1995a: 79), most of the contextualist, thematic, and ideological approaches have been concerned with issues that are not really germane to narratology”.¹⁸ Nünning therefore proposes a distinction between “applications of narratology”, or “narratological criticism”

15 Diengott (1988: 46).

16 *Idem*: 45, 49.

17 See *ibid.*: 44-45 and 46, Lanser (1988: 55 and 56), Prince (1995: 77-78 and 78-82) and Roussin in the present volume (pp. 48, 53-54).

18 Nünning (2003 [2000]: 251). Note that Nünning’s “thematic approaches” do not designate the same reality as Raphaël Baroni’s “thematic narratology” in the present volume (188, 191). Baroni’s “thematic narratology” is equivalent to “story (oriented) narratology” or “syntactic narrative theory” in Nünning’s article.

(an expression used by Gerald Prince¹⁹), and “narratology properly speaking”, specifying that it is not so much a binary opposition as a gliding scale between two poles.

4. *The Darby-Kindt and Müller debate (or contextualist narratology debate)*. The article published in 2001 by David Darby entitled “Form and Context: An Essay in the History of Narratology” provoked two sorts of reaction. The first concerned the comparison it put forward between German narrative theory and structuralist narratology and its main developments in the United States.²⁰ The second, which is the one that interests me here, concerns the reorientation it advocates in favour of a “contextualist” or “functionalist” narratology,²¹ associating narratological analysis and the interpretation of narratives in the context of their production and reception, with the implied author as a key concept. In “Narratology and Interpretation: A Rejoinder to David Darby”, Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller show the limits of Darby’s historical and epistemological study (“A Paradigm Shift”²²) and present the concept of the implied author as “an endless source of conceptual confusion”.²³ “Like most contextualist manifestos”, they argue, “Darby’s examination of previous work in the field creates the false impression of an obligation to choose between a classic structuralist theory of narrative that rejects interpretation of literary texts and a contextualist-functionalist narratology that includes such interpretation. The comparison leaves out the possibility of understanding narratology as a heuristic tool rather than a theory of interpretation”.²⁴ Like Nünning, they consider that, in practice, the

19 See Prince (1995: 77).

20 See Fludernik (2003).

21 The expression “contextualist narratology” stems from Seymour Chatman (see Chatman 1990); the adjective “functionalist” from Meir Sternberg (see Sternberg 1992: 529).

22 Kindt and Müller (2003a: 415).

23 *Idem*: 417. On the implied author, also see Kindt and Müller (2006).

24 Kindt and Müller (2003a: 416). Reference is made to Kindt and Müller (2003b); see, notably: 211-215. Note that Darby never uses the expression “theory of interpretation” while Kindt and Müller, in their different works and articles on the question, are not entirely clear on its meaning, which is synonymous at

contextualist approach is more a form of criticism than of narratology: “As far as we can see, contextualist analyses of narrative have so far limited themselves to applying the vocabulary of classic narratology in interpretive contexts. Instead of presenting a new conception of narratology, they merely demonstrate the heuristic usefulness of traditional narrative theory.”²⁵

5. Kindt and Müller have published several works and articles dealing in full or in part with the issue of the relations between narratology, or narrative theory more generally, and interpretation.²⁶ They are also responsible for a taxonomy of positions held within narratology regarding interpretation (“autonomist”, “contextualist”, “foundationalist” and “heuristic”²⁷) and an attempt to define the requirements narratology needs to fulfil in order to be what they term “an interpretive heuristic”.²⁸ It is unfortunate, however, that they have also contributed to focussing attention on the problem put to narratology by contextualist approaches to the detriment of other ways of viewing the relations between narrative theory and interpretation. Last, despite a considerable difference of calibre, their position resembles Diengott’s on a number of points: defence of traditional narratology, seen as a non-problematic source of knowledge; strict opposition between description and interpretation (whatever constitutes description is not interpretation and vice versa); refusal of the “corpus argument”, according to which narratological models and methods might be modified by extending the narratological corpus; viewing narrative theory as an analytic discipline working with concepts (like philosophy) and not as an empirical discipline or field of research (like linguistics for example).

times with “approach” or “interpretive grid” (such as feminism, psychoanalysis or indeed Marxism, which they do not mention) and at others with “general theory of interpretation” (such as Umberto Eco’s, for example).

25 Kindt and Müller (2003a: 417, n. 14). The sentence is repeated in almost identical form in Kindt and Müller (2003b: 210-211).

26 See Kindt and Müller (2003b, 2006: 63-148), Kindt (2007: 65-78) and (2008).

27 See Kindt and Müller (2003b: 206-209). Also see Roussin in the present volume (50-51).

28 See Kindt and Müller (2003b: 209 and 211-215).

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To my mind, an interesting object of study in the context of the HERMES programme and the *Theory, Analysis, Interpretation of Narratives* conference more specifically was the manner in which the application of narratological models and methods (which are in principle non-interpretive, since they deal with the similarities between the work and other works, whereas interpretation is supposed to identify what makes it unique) determines the properties of the work and thereby prescribes a particular interpretive framework. My position is aligned to feminist narratology and certain “postmodernist” developments on this point. See Lanser: “Formalist-structuralist narratology may ‘know’ that its categories are not immanent, but it proceeds as if they were ‘a stable and immediately knowable text, directly available to classificatory operations that are themselves neutral and innocent of interpretive bias’ (Chambers: 18-19). Feminist criticism has simply not had this luxury: in its critique of masculine bias, it has of necessity taken the view that theory sometimes says more about the reader than about the text”.²⁹ See also Andrew Gibson’s study of voice, from which I shall quote only a few lines: “Genette argues that ‘every narrative resonates with voice’ and the concept of voice is actually indispensable to Genettian narratology [...]. [But] Genette never problematizes the idea of voice. While the manifestations of narrative voice can be classified, voice itself simply exists as an essence”.³⁰ Gibson insists on the fact that “narratology based on voice is itself part of a particular cultural and ideological universe” and adds that “other conceptions of narrative are possible.”³¹ I could also cite David Herman in his introduction to *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis* (1999) and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, from the postface to the new edition of *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (2002), both of whom show their allegiance to postclassical narratology by acknowledging, notably,

29 Lanser (1986: 345).

30 Gibson (1996: 144). “Every narrative resonates with voice” is a quotation from Marc Blanchard, paraphrasing Genette (see Blanchard 1992: 65).

31 Gibson (1996: 144).

that description is never neutral and never entirely separate from interpretation.³²

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The book is divided into three sections, which retain the titles of the three sessions of the conference. It begins with two general articles, the first by Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller, the second by Philippe Roussin. Kindt and Müller's article, which develops their earlier studies and articles without concluding the series ("What, Then, Is Narratology? A Next-to-Last Look"), concerns the status, structure and function of narratology. Its authors notably reassert, against contextualist approaches, that narratology can and must be viewed as an interpretive heuristic only. In the second part of their analysis, they argue against the idea that success or failure encountered in the application of the models and methods of a theory is a criterion (or at least a sufficient criterion) for evaluating the theory. (This passage is aimed essentially at Franz K. Stanzel and his "verificationist" or "confirmationist" position regarding the evaluation of theories). They suggest replacing the practical application criterion by a set of criteria dealing exclusively with the concepts used by the theory. The article by Philippe Roussin, who adopts a very different position from Kindt and Müller regarding contextualism, situates the evolution from classical narratology to postclassical narratology within the larger framework of the evolution of the humanities and social sciences since the 1960s (return to the forefront of the problematics of hermeneutics and interpretation, the "narrative turn" in history, sociology, psychology, etc.). Roussin notably points out that, in a significant reversal, being set in a context is no longer considered to be either an essential or an incidental property of narrative, but rather, today narrativity itself is seen as a property dependent on context. He shows the problems that immediately arise, however, on attempting to define narrative context. Brian Richardson's article on the fictional narratives he calls "unusual",

32 See Herman (1999: 12) and Rimmon-Kenan (2002: 139). Herman's sentence is quoted in Nünning (2003 [2000]: 245, n. 6).

“unnatural” or “non-mimetic” in relation to real world narratives provides a transition between the general articles and those based on case studies. Richardson puts forward several arguments in favour of including such narratives in the narrative theory corpus. He also emphasizes classical narratology’s mimetic bias, which can be perceived in its understanding of history and narrative (approached via temporality), of the narrator and narrating (approached via the opposition between homodiegesis and heterodiegesis) and of character (a realist, anthropomorphic understanding). He emphasizes the unusual character of a situation where “categories are produced for potential but currently nonexistent narrative types, as found in the work of Todorov and others, even as existing, influential, and prize-winning narratives are ignored”³³ and calls for a reconfiguration of narrative theory based on an empirical examination of existing narratives. The next four articles are based entirely or in part on case studies. Henrik Skov Nielsen’s agrees with Richardson’s in its critique of unified theories of narrative, which define all narratives in relation to conversational narratives, which are seen as prototypical, and in its insistence on the not only un-prototypical, but also completely untypical character of fictional narratives. Based on several examples, including James Frey’s *A Million Little Pieces*, Nielsen shows that the concept of the author as creator of potentially unnatural and non-communicational forms needs to be studied anew, in lieu of the concept of the narrator as used in unified theories, if fictional narratives are to be interpreted correctly. The article by James Phelan (whom Nielsen cites among the representatives of unifying theories, but whose work also bears witness to his interest in the interpretation and evaluation of narratives) is a convincing exploration of “what Kafka and a rhetorical narrative theory can do for each other”: rhetorical narrative theory makes it possible to determine certain effects which make “*Das Urteil*” (“The Verdict”) powerful, while the critical reading of Kafka’s story enriches the theory on a number of points. John Pier’s article on John Barth’s *Lost in the Funhouse* illustrates the fact that all narrative works of a certain complexity (and *a fortiori* an extremely complex narrative work like Barth’s)

33 Cf. p. 68.

represents a challenge for narrative theory (in this instance, the theory of embedded narrative as presented by Genette in particular). My own article on Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* differs from the preceding articles in that it starts with a theoretical opposition, the opposition between "communicational" and "noncommunicational" or "poetic" theories of fictional narrative, and sets out to put the two theories to the test of an empirical micro-reading. My article has some views in common with Nielsen's, but it also differs by affirming the need to distinguish, in fictional narrative, between elements pertaining to the content of the fictional representation and those pertaining to the means employed to construct that representation (this distinction is close to the one made by Phelan between "mimetic" components and "synthetic" components in fictional narratives).

The second section, entitled "Analysis and the 'everyday' reading of narrative" contains far fewer articles than the first. However, it is clear that several articles in the first section (those by Richardson, Phelan and myself in particular) contain passages which are directly related to the problematics of the second. This section opens with an article by Raphaël Baroni dealing with the postclassical understanding of plot and its difference from the classical, structuralist understanding of narrative sequentiality (accent placed on the reader's interpretive performance and its passional and cognitive dimensions; critique of the separation between thematic narratology, or the narratology of history, and discursive narratology; critique of narrative sequentiality being abandoned for the former; reevaluation of the discursive dimension of plot). Baroni's reader is no specialist reader, but an everyday reader who presses ahead and, led by powerful semanticism, is carried away by the story told. The two following articles form an antagonistic diptych about the distinction between fictional narratives and nonfictional narratives. Jérôme Pelletier's article, "Du récit à la fiction: un point de vue de philosophie cognitive" ("From narrative to fiction: a cognitive philosophical viewpoint") takes the results of several brain-imaging experiments compared with hypotheses put forward by psychologists on the comprehension of narratives and asserts that "there is no basis for distinguishing between the mental faculties put into action in the cognitive analysis of fictional and

nonfictional narratives”³⁴ (although Pelletier postulated the existence of a “fictional skill” defined as the capacity to manage cognitions and emotions in a manner adapted to representations of a fictional type). Marc Hersant’s article, “Hercule travesti: la fiction, une impasse pour l’interprétation des *Mémoires* de Saint-Simon” (“Hercules distorted: fiction, a dead end for interpreting Saint-Simon’s *Memoires*”), shows the necessity of the distinction, in an equally convincing manner, for understanding and interpreting a work like Saint-Simon’s. It is worth noting that Hersant does not claim allegiance to narratology, which he reminds us has only recently discovered the distinction between fictional and nonfictional narrative, but rather appears to find more food for thought in Käte Hamburger’s narrative theory: “A passionate or neurotic relationship to occurrences is not to be confused with the creative freedom of pure fiction in the sense of the author of *The Logic of Literature*. The subjective distortion of reality, contrary to what is often written, is the *opposite of fiction*.”³⁵

The third section, which deals with the historical and cultural range of narrative theory, contains four articles which can be grouped two by two. The first, by Michèle Gally, concerns the medieval French novel and its relation to the “*conte*”, or tale, understood both as the *conte* it is no longer and revendicates no longer being, as shown in Chrétien de Troyes’s prologues, and the *conte* frequently called upon as the origin of the story recounted (in the well-known formulae “*Or dist li contes que...*”, “*Or se taist atant li contes*”, etc.). For Michèle Gally, it amounts to a legitimizing strategy involving several dimensions: the linguistic dimension of the opposition between Latin and French; the “mediological” (my adjective) dimension of the opposition between oral and written, and the religious dimension of the relationship to *auctoritas*. At several points, she suggests that noncommunicational or poetic theories of fiction, which focus on the work of the author, are better adapted to dealing with such narratives than communicational theories, which focus on the discourse of the (or a) narrator. Patricia Eichel-Lojkine’s article, “Comment interpréter un objet variable, le conte?” (“Interpreting a variable object: the

34 Cf. p. 227, my translation.

35 Cf. p. 261, my translation.

folktale”) deals with classic European tales and concerns methodology more than theory in the strict sense. Taking Perrault’s “Puss in Boots” and comparing it to Straparola’s and Basile’s stories of astute cats, it shows the potential of combining a “phylogenetic” approach to the tale, taking its insertion into a series of texts and intertextual motifs into account, with an “ontogenetic” approach focussing on its particular arrangement. The last two articles are the work of specialists in Japanese literature and, in different ways, question the idea that Western narrative theory is universal and applicable to all cultures (the question is already raised in Richardson’s article concerning unnatural fictional narratives). In “La narratologie a-t-elle des frontières linguistiques et culturelles?” (“Does narratology have linguistic and cultural borders?”), Akihiro Kubo offers an interesting presentation of Sadakazu Fujii’s narrative theory, focusing on the concepts of the “zero-person” and “fourth person”, seen as emblematic of Fujii’s “Asian perspective”. His article also sheds light on the problems concealed by our terminology regarding issues such as the oral or written character of narrative, the understanding of the situation of production of the narrative or of the linguistic inscription of the narrator in the narrative. Finally, in “La littérature japonaise et le sujet flottant: jalons d’une esthétique” (“Japanese literature and the floating subject: pointers towards an aesthetics”), Cécile Sakai examines the way in which certain Japanese authors (Natsume Sôseki, Yasunari Kawabata, Haruki Murakami) have taken advantage of the potential made available by the absence of a grammatically expressed subject in Japanese sentences. She calls for “the development of a critical apparatus, in narrative theory, adapted to a configuration of gaps”³⁶ and contributes to the initiative with her own analyses. These two articles and my own show a common interest in translation and the interpretive issues involved.

The collection as a whole, in its richness and variety, with its omissions and, sometimes, its contradictions, which no attempt has been made to hide, forms a stimulating introduction to the study of the issues raised by the relations between the theory, analysis and interpretation of literary narratives, which deserves further attention in

36 Cf. p. 326, my translation.

individual and joint research projects, as indeed several of the articles suggest.

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Please note that James Phelan's article is to be published in English in a collected volume on Kafka and is previewed here in French translation with permission of the publishers:

James Phelan, "Progression, Speed, and Judgment in Kafka's *Das Urteil*", in Jakob Lothe, Beatrice Sandberg and Ronald Speirs, *Franz Kafka: Narrative, Rhetoric, and Reading* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011).

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