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Science and Nescience: Narratology Stripped Bare, The Case of the Narrator

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Intervention

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By Sylvie Patron
Issue on 2020

This article, translated from the first issue devoted to the critical arguments of Sylvie Patron's forthcoming monograph *Narrative Nescience* (2020) (2018), draws on Jean-Luc Cornille's and Sylvie Patron's (2019) *Théorie du roman. Histoire générale du genre* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019).

Narratology (literally: the science of narration) is usually regarded as one of the most developed sectors of literary theory. It has accumulated for scholars its tools and methodology, its precise categories of analysis, the microlanguage specific of its terminology—even when it comes to theorizing or unfolding theory genres that do not a priori admits its field of application.

But there is another discourse on narrative, which, accordingly to which the Dictionary of theorizing, "there is now controversy on almost everything" [1] would be inclined to adopt this second discourse instead and I myself contributed to the controversy in my work on the concept of the narrator—

In this article, I would like to return to the close association, which goes as far as identification, between narratology and the theory of the existence of a narrator in all narratives. More specifically, this theory postulates the existence of a narrator who merges with the author in all non-fictional narratives (historical or sociologic, biographies, etc) and who is different from the author and a fictional narrator different from the author in all fictional narratives (novels, short stories, tales, etc.) with rare exceptions. I have demonstrated elsewhere (and I will focus exclusively on the narrator of the theory that contested fictional narrators).

In the first part, I will present the essential aspects of the association between narratology and the post-narrator theory of fictional narratives. In the second part I will make a few remarks on the content of the theory of the narrator, in the third part I will discuss the theory of the narrator, it seems to me, have a more general relevance for the serious sectors of literary theory.

1. Narratology and the Pan-Narrator Theory of Fictional Narratives

Historic Bachus first already suggested, in some programmatic remarks, that the scientific study of literature belonging to the structuralist paradigm, could and should only be concerned with the narrative, explicitly identified from the author.[2] But as Gerard Genette, a disciple of Jean-Paul Sartre, who laid the foundations of the association tending to become ever closer between narratology and the pan-narrator theory of fictional narratives.

In "Discours du récit: Essai de méthode" (Figures III, 1972 (English-Narrative Discourse an Essay in Method, Ithaca, Cornell, 1980), Genette begins by technically redefining the terms story (narrative), histoire (story, the essential content of the narratival and narration (narrating or narration, the act that produces the narrative, the narratival in a narratival situation) by these. Focuses of narrative discourse with this fact, it, essentially, a study of the relationships between narrative and story, narrative and narration, and story and narration. Genette, in the wake of Sartre, also establishes a distinction between story and narratival.[3] Of the difference between non-fictional and fictional narratives, he first accounts in a rather explanatory manner, saying that in one case story and narrating are real and can be attested by documents outside the narrative, while, in the other, story and the narratival (Genette's word is fictio, "fictive," used in the sense of "fictional") and without external attestation.[4] Is thus the fictional narrative, which, Genette specifies, "does not refer to any reality other than narrative" and that supposedly gives birth to it.[5] This difference is occasionally overshadowed in the pages of the chapter entitled Voix ("Voice"), which specifically distinguishes the narrator of fictional narratives as being himself a fictive "narrator" and assumed directly by the author (in fictional narratives, with a slight difference: "where the role of the narrator is itself fictive, even if assumed directly by the author"—I think fabs under another form of explanation of fiction.

In the chapter "Voice," Genette posits that all narratives can be divided into two categories that are mutually and exclusively exhaustive: heterodiegetic narratives, whose narrator is absent from the story he tells, and homodiegetic narratives, whose narrator is present as a character in the story he tells.[6] In heterodiegetic narratives, the narrator is "absent from the story he tells," "he does not even be mentioned" and "Old Mortality" is the narrator of "Old Mortality"—with an entirely fictional character, and, in the case of fictional narratives, the fictional narrator, the name of the author, and on the other hand, the titles of homodiegetic narratives. The fact that the narrators of the homodiegetic narratives are derived from the names of the authors of the narratives in question contradicts an earlier passage in the chapter, which, in the context of a discussion of the narrator of fictional narratives, Genette seems to propose of being fictional in the case, among and ultimately for the same reasons, of the narrator of first person fictional narratives. "[...] the references in Tristram Shandy to the situation of writing speak to the Fictional act of Tristram and not the (real) one of Sterne," but, Genette, in a more subtle and also more radical way, the narrator of Pico Gentel "is not Balzac, even if here and there he expresses the opinions of Balzac, and even if he is occasionally called Balzac, he is a fictional character, lovingly and his religious and political ideas fictional ideas to Balzac." Finally, in the chapter Voix, Genette puts the name of "Homer" in quotation marks ("Homer of the Odyssey is told by Homer"), meaning the fictional narrator that tells the Odysseyhom which fictional world.

The narrator goes hand in hand with the narrative, at the other pole of the diagram of the narrative communication. "Like the narrative, the narrator is one of the elements of narrative discourse, and is necessarily located at the same degree level, that is, he does not merge a priori with the reader (even an implicit reader) and he does not the narrator necessarily merged with the author."[7]

Following Genette, all works claiming to belong to narratology adopted the main articles of faith of the pan-narrator theory of fictional narrators, of which they contributed to the diffusion, and partially floating in Genette's Fictio, "fictional," "Homer" with or without quotation marks, etc.) The following quotation, taken from the narratologist Elisabeth Rimmon-Kenan, can be considered the clearest and most explicit formulation of the pan-narrator theory of fictional narratives:

> Texts claim to be transcribed (or built-up) not by the author but by a narrator, and the author is the agent responsible for the production of the narrative and for its communication. The empirical process of transmission, however, is less relevant to the poetics of narrative fiction than its counterpart within the text. Within the text, communication involves a narrator transmitting a narrative to a fictional narratee.[8]

Genette himself considerably strengthened the association between narratology and the pan-narrator theory of fictional narrators, to the point of affirming their inseparability in the same work:

2. Some Remarks on the Context of the Emergence and Establishment of the Pan-Narrator Theory of Fictional Narratives

It may have been noted, in the brief presentation above, the scarcity of the attempts to justify, to demonstrate, the principle of the pan-narrator These are hitoriq obvious, of which give the impression that they are natural. However, they are not. There is nothing natural in using the term "narrator" both for the character, that is, the fictional person, man or woman, who tells or (only narrates his or her story, possibly to one or more other characters, in first-person fictional narratives this is the narrator-character, the narrator-character, the narrator-character,

[25] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 30.

[26] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 32.

[27] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 244.

[28] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 244 (I change "narrating" to "narrative," French, *récit*).

[29] Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, 99–100.

[30] See Kuroda, *Toward a Poetic Theory*, which brings together previously scattered articles published between 1973 and 1987.

[31] Genette, "Preface," xv–xvi.

[32] Genette, *Fiction and Diction*, 33.The change from *lui-même*("himself") to "herself", etc. is due to the translator.

[33] Genette, *Fiction and Diction*, 34.

[34] Genette, *Fiction and Diction*, 70–71.

[35] See Andersson and Sandberg, "Sameness versus Difference," esp. 246, 251–52, and Andersson, Klingberg and Sandberg, "Introduction: Sameness and Difference," esp. 13.

[36] Auroux, "L'histoire de la linguistique," 9 (my translation).

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