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Sylvie Patron

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## 5 The Narrator

### A Historical and Epistemological Approach to Narrative Theory

SYLVIE PATRON

*A large part of what we believe to be true (and this applies even to our final conclusions) with a persistence equaled only by our sincerity, springs from an original misconception of our premises.*

—MARCEL PROUST, *The Sweet Cheat Gone* (translated by  
C. K. Scott Moncrieff)

This chapter is located within the sphere of the history of linguistic theories as it is understood by the so-called French school: as something more closely related to epistemology than to pure historiography.<sup>1</sup> It also belongs to a discipline or field of research that does not yet exist in literary disciplines as a whole: the history and epistemology of literary theories. The two disciplines share a common plight, which is that recent theories are often vulnerable to being overlooked in the same way that very old theories are, and not necessarily because they have been falsified or absorbed into a more general theory. There is in addition, in the case of recent theories, the phenomenon of voluntary ignorance or “valorization” in the Bachelardian sense of the term—the attribution of value to certain theories or hypotheses on the basis of nonscientific interests.

In this chapter, two narrator theories (*pan-narrator theory* and *optional-narrator theory*) will be placed within the broader framework of the history of literary theories and the complex relationship that history maintains with linguistics. The first section will offer a brief chronology of the issue of the narrator and narrative enunciation in the modern era, which will then be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections. The aim is to lift the veil on a certain number of received ideas—for ex-

ample, the idea that narrative theory achieved scientific status (under the name of narratology) with the recognition of the existence of a fictional narrator in all fictional narratives. We will show on the contrary the confusions and errors that narratologists fall into when they present the concept of the narrator, or related and associated concepts. We will also comment on the general presentism of narrative theory. The fact, for example, that there was a coherent theory of narration (of the narrator and narrative enunciation) already available in 1804 is of hardly any interest to classical and current narratologists, no more than to current proponents of optional-narrator theory.

Overall, this chapter aims to show two things: first, that incorrect or incomplete historical interpretations, or simple ignorance, can have a domino effect on research and distort its orientation, and second, that reversibility is always possible. Thus we will see that past, overlooked, or even voluntarily ignored states of the discipline can regain their pertinence within a current context.

### **The History of the Question of the Narrator and Narrative Enunciation**

The notion of modes of narration is inherited from Greek antiquity. For a long time its content has remained what can be found in book 3 of Plato's *Republic*, without always having a real linguistic consistency. It is based on an opposition between the author (more precisely "the poet," *poietes*), who is the sole enunciator in the case of "simple narrative," and the character or characters, who are the fictional enunciators in the case of "narrative by way of imitation." This opposition accounts for the fictional narratives of the Classical era, which frequently make use of embedded narratives (a character's narrative embedded in the authorial narrative). In this context, there is no need for a concept of the narrator distinct from the author.<sup>2</sup>

In the modern era, we can break down the history of the treatment of the narrator and narrative enunciation into five major stages.<sup>3</sup>

#### *The Emergence of the Concept of the Narrator over the Course of the Eighteenth Century*

The concept of the narrator (meaning the narrator as a concept, as opposed to nonconceptual uses in which "narrator" simply means, as its

 **suffix** implies, “the one who narrates”) was introduced to account for the distinctive character of memoir-novels or first-person novels in the original sense of the term.<sup>4</sup> The essential component of the definition of this concept is *the distinction between the author and the narrator*, which can also be expressed as: *the author is real; the narrator is fictional*.

Use of the concept of the narrator can be seen in the writings of Anna Laetitia Barbauld, a poet, essayist, and editor of Samuel Richardson’s correspondence (1804).<sup>5</sup> Barbauld’s reflections concern narrative prose fiction in the eighteenth century. She states that there are “three modes of carrying on a story.” The first is “the narrative or epic,” in which “the author relates himself the whole adventure” (“The author . . . is supposed to know everything,” “He can be concise, or diffuse,” “He can indulge . . . in digressions”). This is the mode used by Cervantes in *Don Quixote* and Fielding in *Tom Jones*; according to Barbauld, it is the most common mode—or the dominant prototype. The second is that used in fictional memoirs, where “the subject of the adventures relates his own story.” Barbauld cites *The Adventures of Roderick Random* by Smollett, *The Vicar of Wakefield* by Goldsmith, and *La Vie de Marianne* by Marivaux. The third mode is that of the epistolary novel (“*epistolary correspondence*, carried on between the characters of the novel”), illustrated by Richardson and Rousseau. The term “narrator” appears in the description of the second mode, which corresponds to the prototype of fictional memoirs: “it confines the author’s stile, which should be suited, though it is not always, to the supposed talents and capacity of the imaginary narrator” ([1804] 1977, 258). Barbauld also highlights some of the difficulties faced by authors in this mode:

But what the hero cannot say, the author cannot tell, nor can it be rendered probable, that a very circumstantial narrative should be given by a person, perhaps at the close of a long life, of conversations that have happened at the beginning of it. The author has all along two characters to support, for he has to consider how his hero felt at the time of the events to be related, and how it is natural he should feel them at the time he is relating them. (259)

This is the archeology of the division between the narrator as hero or heroine and the narrator proper, which Leo Spitzer (1928) calls, respectively, the *erlebendes Ich* (experiencing I) and the *erzählendes Ich* (narrating I).

We can note that the focus is always on the work of the author who creates the existence and verisimilitude of the fictional narrator (“what the hero cannot say, the author cannot tell,” “the author has all along two characters to support,” “he has to consider,” etc.).

I will return in the following sections to the problems posed by the persistence of the original concept of the narrator in more recent narrative theories.

*The German Controversy over Author-Intrusions  
at the End of the Nineteenth Century*

This controversy in itself had little international impact, although it had precedents and parallels in France, England, and the United States. It opposed, on the one side, Friedrich Spielhagen, novelist and theorist of the novel, who supported “objectivity” or “dramatization,” which is to say the dissimulation of the author in the novel, and on the other, Käte Friedemann, student of Oskar Walzel and author of *Die Rolle des Erzählers in der Epik* (The role of the narrator in epics, 1910), who on the contrary advocated the traditional mode of narration, even making the presence of a narrator who is more or less clearly distinguished from the author the essential characteristic of epic narrative as opposed to drama. It should be noted that condemning the personal presence of the author in the novel meant condemning the works of the great English novelists—and this was so in Spielhagen’s case in relation to Fielding, Thackeray, and above all George Eliot. Spielhagen and Friedemann each had their supporters: Heinrich and Julius Hart, Jakob Wassermann, and the earlier Alfred Döblin on the one side; Oskar Walzel, Robert Petsch, Thomas Mann, and the later Döblin on the other.<sup>6</sup> The controversy continued into the 1950s in the works of Wolfgang Kayser, Franz K. Stanzel, and Käte Hamburger, whole sections of which can only be understood against this historicotheoretical backdrop.

In the works of contemporary narratologists, Friedemann is often presented as the originator of the concept of the narrator: the narrator “invented as a separate figure by K. Friedemann and Wolfgang Kayser” (Fludernik 2005, 42). But this claim is incorrect: the concept of the narrator, inseparable from the distinction between the author and the narrator, is much older than Friedemann’s work. It is, however, correct to say that several of Friedemann’s formulations prefigure some of Kayser’s

famous ones, in particular that “the narrator, in all narrative art, is never the known or as yet unknown author, but a role that the author invents and takes on” (Kayser [1957] 2000, 125; my translation). What can also be seen in Friedemann’s work is a recurrent confusion, which will later be perpetuated by the narratologists, between the original concept of the narrator, meaning the character with the status of narrator in first-person novels, and the new concept of the narrator that comes from the controversy over author-intrusions and Friedemann’s attempt to define the epic narrative as structurally distinct from drama.

There is an intellectual genealogy that links Friedemann, Kayser, and Stanzel (and, through Stanzel, Monika Fludernik). In 1979 Stanzel writes that the “recognition of the fictionality of the first-person narrator preceded the recognition of the fictionality of the third-person narrator” and that the latter “was not generally recognized until the mid-1950s” ([1979] 1984, 81), clearly alluding to Kayser’s article. His formulation, however, conceals the fact that this “recognition” is not a discovery but a *stipulation*. It is far removed from Spielhagen’s conceptions, for example. It also deliberately ignores the challenge to the proposition “the narrator of the third-person narrative is a fictional narrator” in Hamburger’s narrative theory. As Hamburger asserts at a very early stage of this affair, “only in cases where the narrative poet actually does ‘create’ a narrator, namely the first-person narrator of the first-person narrative, can one speak of the latter as a (fictive) narrator” ([1957, 1968] 1993, 140).

Hamburger’s theory, where we can find a descriptive and linguistic translation of Spielhagen’s prescriptive propositions (even though Hamburger makes very little reference to Spielhagen), moving beyond the controversy over author-intrusions, is the starting point for another genealogy, the one that connects Hamburger, Kuroda, and Banfield, which we will come back to later.

### *Gérard Genette’s Coup de Force*

This chapter is partly concerned with the close relationship between narratology and the theory of the existence of a fictional narrator in all fictional narratives, henceforth *pan-narrator theory*. The definitive form of the relationship is found in Genette’s *Discours du récit: Essai de méthode* (1972).<sup>7</sup> Genette posits that all fictional narratives can be divided into two categories that are mutually and necessarily opposed: “homodiegetic” nar-

ratives, which are told by a narrator who is a character in the story, and “heterodiegetic” narratives, which are told by a narrator outside the story (Genette, unlike Kayser, does not go so far as to speak of a character in this case). Even though Genette’s examples of heterodiegetic narrators are potentially misleading (“Homer in the *Iliad*, and Flaubert in *L’Éducation sentimentale*”—in other words, authors; [1972] 1980, 244–45), the opposition between homo- and heterodiegetic narratives must be seen for what it is: a theoretical and ideological *coup de force* which is part of a movement that aims to impose a new conception of fictional narrative and justify a fundamental shift in the way its analysis and interpretation are conceived.

In another passage in this work, Genette attributes the property of being fictional to the narrator of the third-person narrative, or the heterodiegetic narrator, in his own terminology:

The references in *Tristram Shandy* to the situation of writing speak to the (fictive) act of Tristram and not the (real) one of Sterne; but in a more subtle and also more radical way, the narrator of *Père Goriot* “is” not Balzac, even if here and there he expresses Balzac’s opinions, for this author-narrator is someone who “knows” the Vauquer boardinghouse, its landlady and its lodgers, whereas all Balzac himself does is imagine them. (214)

The argument he puts forward is very close to the one already found in Kayser, in support of the proposition that “the narrator is never the known or as yet unknown author, but a role that the author invents and takes on”: “To him, Werther, Don Quixote and Madame Bovary do exist; he is associated with the poetic world” (Kayser [1957] 2000, 125; my translation). It quickly became a commonplace of literary theory and criticism. The argument, however, can be turned around. If fictional narrative refers to nonexistent entities (characters, places, etc.) as though these entities really existed, this essential given of fiction can be seen as independent of whether there is a fictional narrator for whom these entities “really” (i.e., fictionally) exist—except in cases where there is effectively a fictional narrator, namely the narrator of the first-person narrative.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Linguistic Discussions in the 1970s and 1980s*

Two American linguists, S.-Y. Kuroda and Ann Banfield, significantly advanced the question of the narrator and narrative enunciation thanks

to the methods of transformational generative grammar. They showed that the theories they call “communicational,” based on the concepts of real or fictional narrators and narratees, could only account for a subcategory of fictional narratives, namely first-person narratives, or indeed an even narrower subcategory where the first-person narrative is explicitly marked as communicational with a fictional “I” addressing a fictional “you.” With their work, narrative theory took on an openly affirmed optionalist orientation. It led to the position that there are fictional narratives with a narrator and fictional narratives without a narrator—which means not that nobody has produced them but simply that they contain no linguistic marker indicating a real or fictional subject and situation of enunciation. We can speak of the *enunciative effacement* or *disappearance* of the author of fictional narrative: for Banfield, the author “is not directly embodied in a first person, as a speaker in his speech,” “he does not speak. . . . He writes, rather, and in writing disappears” ([1991] 2019, 138). We should rather speak of the *absence of a narrator* (and not the enunciative effacement of the narrator or, as it is more often described, an “effaced narrator”) when the narrative does not contain any linguistic marker indicating a fictional subject and situation of enunciation. Sentences in the free indirect style in the third person and the past tense, in English or in French, represent a particular case that falsifies the hypothesis of the implicit or effaced narrator.<sup>9</sup>

This conception is very close to the disappearance of the author as the point of origin for referential values and deictic markers (real “I-Origo”) conceptualized by Hamburger. Kuroda and Banfield did in fact read Hamburger early on (in Kuroda’s case, before its translation into English in 1973), much earlier than the narratologists, the French narratologists in particular.<sup>10</sup>

Banfield also draws on the opposition between *telling* and *showing* that was proposed by Percy Lubbock in 1921, where *showing* can in her view be interpreted in linguistic terms as the use of sentences in free indirect style in the third person and the past tense over long passages in the novel. A parallel can be drawn between the German controversy over author-intrusions and the thoughts of Henry James and his disciple Lubbock on the writing of the novel.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Contemporary Era*

Kuroda's work has been ignored in narratological circles, as can be seen from most bibliographies. Banfield's has received reactions that are often as vehement as they are inadequate (see McHale 1983; Genette [1983] 1988, 99–102; see also an answer to McHale in Galbraith 1995, 35–46, 50–51). The considerable growth of contemporary narrative research (conferences, publications, narrative studies societies and research networks, projects funded by universities and research centers) has sanctioned the domination of pan-narrator theory on the international level. Just as Genettian narratology was conceived only within the cultural paradigm of “generalized structuralism,” so the current domination of pan-narrator theory is part of a new paradigm, which could be called the “paradigm of naturalization” of narrative research, symbolized by Fludernik's “natural” narratology or David Herman's cognitive narratology, for which “natural”—meaning oral—narratives are the archetypal form of all narratives, including fictional ones. The result is a banalization of the term “narrator” and the effacement of the difference between the conceptual and ordinary usage of the term in the case of fictional narratives.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Original Narrator and the Necessary**

#### **Narrator: An Irresolvable Duality**

The first two stages in the history of the question of the narrator and narrative enunciation, briefly presented above, introduce not *one* but *two* concepts of the narrator into narrative theory. I draw here on Jean-Claude Milner's observation that “concepts with the same name may in fact be totally different, because they encapsulate different sets of issues,” just as “concepts with different names may be strictly equivalent because it becomes clear that the issues they encapsulate are in fact the same” ([1989] 1995, 17–18; my translation).

The issues encapsulated in the original concept of the narrator are the following:

- an “I” who is not the author but a character in the fiction (which can also be expressed, as we have seen, as: *the author is real; the narrator is fictional*; or: *there is a fictional narrator created by the author*);

- a factuality pact inside the fiction: the narrator is supposed to provide a factual narrative, specifically the narrative of his or her life (which could be expressed as: *the author invents the fictional facts; the narrator fictionally reports nonfictional facts, originally consisting of autobiographical facts*);
- a restriction of the narrative information to what the narrator can know but also what he or she can plausibly recall (especially in the case of reported dialogue);
- a more or less marked opposition between the experiencing “I” and the narrating “I,” to use Spitzer’s terminology.

There are numerous examples in writers’ metatexts—prefaces, for example—of statements which say that despite the use of “I,” the author must not be confused with the narrator (see, for example, Balzac in the preface to *The Lily of the Valley*, which also highlights the ontological difference between the author who is real and the narrator who is fictional). The possibility of what is called the “unreliable narrator” also forms part of the core of the definition of the concept.<sup>13</sup>

There are also issues that, without being really encapsulated in the concept of the narrator, are regularly associated with its use in theoretical and critical discourses. This is the case with what we can call “formal mimetics” (Głowiński [1973] 1977, 106), which is to say the imitation, by means of a given form, of other types of literary, paraliterary, and extraliterary discourses, as well as everyday language. The practice is mostly regarded favorably: people refer to the “truth effect” specific to the first-person novel, and praise the successful imitation of vernacular modes of speech. Authors and commentators also regularly return to the subject of the limits of this narrative mode: the restriction of narrative information to what the narrator can know and plausibly recall, but also the tendency to analysis and introspection that can contradict certain personality traits or social characteristics of the narrator. Finally, an important issue raised by the essayist Charles Lamb, for example, is that of the elimination of the presence of the author. In first-person narrative, the author completely disappears through the use of the narrator, and this disappearance is again regarded favorably. Lamb, for example, expresses at the same time his aversion to personal intrusions by the author (quoted in Patterson 1952, 379–80).

The original concept of the narrator goes hand in hand with a *dualist* or *differentialist* conception of fictional narrative that considers first-person fictional narrative to be *a specific case of fictional narrative*. In other words, the narrator in the original conception is an option that authors can choose to use or not.

I move now to the second concept of the narrator, the one that arises from the controversy over author-intrusions. First of all, the narrator is not distinguished from the author by Spielhagen or any of the other writers involved in this controversy. The distinction does, however, appear in Friedemann, even if not always in a clear or systematic way—a point I will return to. Secondly, the fictional narratives under consideration are third-person narratives, even if we also find references in Friedemann's work to first-person narratives (she also occasionally refers to the epistolary novel and the diary-novel, which she presents as belonging to the same narrative type). A new element is introduced with the reference to drama. Drama is held up as a model for the novel by Spielhagen and other defenders of the "objectivity" or "dramatization" of the novel, but without being considered from a structural point of view. In contrast, drama is structurally opposed to the novel in Friedemann: drama being associated with the absence of a narrator, and the novel with the structurally necessary presence of a narrator.<sup>14</sup>

I maintain that this concept is homonymous to but completely different from the original concept of the narrator. It in effect encapsulates different issues:

- while it is true that there can be an "I" in third-person narratives with author-intrusions, this "I" is precisely not that of a character within the fiction. This is quite explicit in Spielhagen and even in Friedemann: Friedemann's narrator is derived from the oral storyteller of the epic poem, who is an intermediary between the story and the readers and by definition not part of the fiction;
- there is no "I" in the type of third-person narrative without intrusions that is advocated by Spielhagen and also enters into Friedemann's considerations;
- no issues are raised about restrictions regarding narrative information and plausibility, no more than they are raised about the opposition between the experiencing "I" and the narrating "I";

- Friedemann makes the presence of a narrator who is more or less clearly distinguished from the author the essential feature of fictional narrative in relation to drama (she also speaks of the “indirect character of narration”).

It should be emphasized here that in the original conception, the narrator is not and cannot be an essential feature of fictional narrative in relation to drama, since the presence of a narrator only characterizes a certain type of fictional narrative, namely first-person narrative, which is neither the easiest to practice nor the most commonly used by authors. On the contrary, the narrator is not an option in Friedemann but *a theoretical necessity* that precedes and eliminates the question of the author’s choice.

Friedemann, unlike Spielhagen, makes no basic distinction between first- and third-person narratives. In other words, she makes the effective, empirical difference between first- and third-person narratives a secondary consideration within a *monist* theory of fictional narrative.

Friedemann insists on the independence of the work of art from its creator, which is why she distinguishes the author and the narrator. This distinction therefore does not mark a separation between, as in Barbauld and in the original conception, a real being and a fictional being. Friedemann’s distinction is internal to the author him- or herself: it separates the personal existence of the author from his or her aesthetic existence. The narrator, according to Friedemann, represents an aestheticized form of the author. Even where the narrator, whose presence is revealed by an intrusion, bears the name of the author (as in the works of Jean Paul or E. T. A. Hoffmann), Friedemann considers it to be a pretense, a feigned personality. (She does not, however, refer to it as a character.) The narrator, as the aestheticized form of the author, is an organic part of the narrative work and, as such, may freely intervene in the work without compromising its unity.

Friedemann’s distinction between the author’s personal identity and the aestheticized form of the author is not always clear. At times, she uses the word *Dichter* where it must be assumed that she means the aesthetic identity of the author, which is to say, the narrator (*Erzähler*). It is possible to quote passages containing contradictory statements from this point of view.

Friedemann's distinction between the author and the narrator was not immediately adopted by later critics (we can cite, for example, Emil Ermatinger, Ernst Hirt, and Rafael Koskimies). Robert Petsch made a similar distinction between the real and the "epic" identity of the author (in German, *reales Ich*, *episches Ich*). It is the latter who is supposed to be narrating—intrusions included. It is also the latter who selects and arranges and assembles the work of art. The "epic I," then, is the creative force of the author, not only the narrator. Finally, Kayser conceived of the narrator not as a form of the author but as a purely fictional figure, or even a character created by the author to tell the story.

To conclude this section, the opposition between the two concepts of the narrator, the original concept and the new one that arose from the controversy over author-intrusions, cannot be resolved. The original concept of the narrator refers to a concrete empirical object that distinguishes the prototype of the first-person narrative from the other narrative prototypes available in a given period. The second concept of the narrator refers to a theoretical object, an abstraction or construction, and not an empirical given, even if in Friedemann it is revealed empirically in the passages called author-intrusions. This second concept has imposed itself as a pillar of narrative theory; it is the source of the narrator being considered a theoretical necessity by proponents of current pan-narrator theory, with all the obscurities and even contradictions that implies. In contrast, the original concept of the narrator corresponds to an effective, empirical reality: the narrator of the first-person narrative, which pan-narrator theory is obliged to integrate. We can see, however, that this integration always introduces a theoretical disequilibrium or disparity, as when Genette or Stanzel draws a parallel between the obvious fictionality of the narrator of the first-person fictional narrative, and the much more problematic fictionality, or the supposed fictionality, of the narrator of the third-person narrative.

Even in the case of third-person narratives with intrusions, it may seem erroneous to confuse the creation of a character, which is to say a fictional person who belongs to the same fictional world as the other characters, and the construction of a *persona* or a feigned personality of the author, which rather calls for the rhetorical notion of *ethos*. As we have seen, none of the theorists before Friedemann confused these, and many theorists after Friedemann are still able to avoid doing so.

### Some Historical Errors of Genette's

Even a quick reading of the passages devoted to the narrator in Genette's work shows that Genette does not know, or does not acknowledge, the existence of an original concept of the narrator that goes hand in hand with the dualist conception of fictional narrative, which considers first-person narrative to be a specific case of fictional narrative. He also makes many errors in this discussion, as when he opens the "Person" section:

Readers may have noticed that until now we have used the terms "first-person—or third-person—narrative" only when paired with quotation marks of protest. Indeed, these common locutions seem to me inadequate, in that they stress variation in the element of the narrative situation that is in fact invariant—to wit, the presence (explicit or implicit) of the "person" of the narrator. This presence is invariant because the narrator can be in his narrative (like every subject of enunciation in his enunciated statement) *only* in the "first person." ([1972] 1980, 243–44)

The problem is that in the traditional definition of the terms "first-person narrative" and "third-person narrative" (more precisely, "first-person novel" and "third-person novel"), the focus is not on the narrator but on the hero:

- first-person fictional narrative (novel) = narrative in which the hero is the narrator;
- third-person fictional narrative (novel) = narrative in which the hero is a third person whose story we are told by the author.

In the language of art, we call a novel in which the hero appears as being himself the narrator of his fate a first person novel, in opposition to other novels, where the hero is a third person whose adventures we are told by the poet. (Spielhagen [1883] 1969, 66; my translation)<sup>15</sup>

There is thus nothing inadequate in these common locutions. They stress variation in an element effectively subject to variation—not of the "narrative situation" in Genette's sense but of the poetics of fictional narrative. The same comment can be made regarding the "unfitness" of the term "first-person narrative":

The presence of first-person verbs in a narrative text can therefore refer to two very different situations which grammar renders identical but which narrative analysis must distinguish: the narrator's own designation of himself as such, as when Virgil writes "I sing the arms and the man," or else the identity of person between the narrator and one of the characters in the story, as when Crusoe writes "I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York." The term "first-person narrative" refers, quite obviously, only to the second of these situations, and this dissymmetry confirms its unfitness. (Genette [1972] 1980, 244)

There is nothing unfit in the term "first-person narrative," if we refer again to the definition of this term in Spielhagen and his followers, as well as the history of the concept or rather of the two concepts of the narrator, which Genette conflates here.

These cases of ignorance and errors have had significant consequences in the history of narrative theory, which I will not elaborate on here. Suffice it to say that it meant narratologists were unable to correctly read and understand John R. Searle's "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," for example, based as it is on the original concept of the narrator that goes hand in hand with the dualist conception of fictional narrative, which considers first-person narrative to be a specific case of fictional narrative.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Denial of Falsification**

Another point that needs elucidating is the relationship between contemporary research and the marginalization of results obtained by linguists. Some of the several possible explanations are narratologists' lack of familiarity with linguistic reasoning; the influence of Genette, even in those aspects where he is the most vulnerable to criticism; skepticism regarding the possibility of falsification in the domain of narrative theory; and misinterpretation of the term "communication" as it is used by linguists.

The lack of familiarity with linguistic reasoning among narratologists is clearly apparent in their accounts of Banfield's work. Brian McHale acknowledges it himself at the beginning of a 1983 article (17, 18). With regard to Genette, the widespread myth that "structuralist" narratology is a linguistic approach to narrative needs to be dispelled. Genette well rep-

resents a “literary structuralism” that has always privileged a typological and classificatory approach over a conceptualization of the linguistic discourse or performance that narrative represents, and over the goal of characterizing this discourse by specific linguistic markers. Genette refers periodically to enunciative linguistics and pragmatics, which provide him with maxims, and arguments from authority (see, for example, [1972] 1980, 244; [1983] 1988, 99). His reading of Émile Benveniste’s famous article “The Correlations of Tense in the French Verb” ([1959, 1966] 1971), however, devoted in part to narrative enunciation, is a typical example of distorting assimilation.<sup>17</sup>

Genette’s proposition, “Insofar as the narrator can at any instant intervene *as such* in the narrative, every narrating is, by definition, . . . [virtually] in the first person” ([1972] 1980, 244; translation slightly modified), should have been discredited within the narratologist community, and justifiably so, as we will see. This discrediting did not happen, however. On the contrary, the proposition was reiterated in *Narrative Discourse Revisited*—“in my view every narrative is, explicitly or not, ‘in the first-person’ since at any moment its narrator may use that pronoun to designate himself” ([1983] 1988, 97)—and has been repeated by numerous narratologists. We can explain this state of affairs by the influence of Genette, which was founded on the success of *Narrative Discourse*, especially once it was translated into English. The reiteration of this proposition in *Narrative Discourse Revisited* deliberately ignores Banfield’s falsification of its presupposition: “the narrator can at any instant intervene *as such* in the narrative.” It should be highlighted here that the whole section of *Narrative Discourse Revisited* dedicated to Banfield’s narrative theory (see Genette [1983] 1988, 99–102) is characterized by the use of very questionable modes of argumentation (untruths, misinterpretations of certain terms, generalizations and conflation, plays on words, quotations taken out of context) and, more generally, the use of ridicule in place of genuine arguments.

Banfield’s demonstration rests on the characterization of certain sentences of free indirect discourse (*represented speech and thought*, in her own terminology) in linguistic terms. Genette is right to point out the link between the first linguistic descriptions of the free indirect style in Charles Bally and Marguerite Lips, and the systematization proposed by Banfield in the context of transformational generative grammar, even

if for him it is an object of ridicule (see Genette [1983] 1988, 53). He also pays insufficient attention to the conceptualization of expressive elements and constructions—exclamations, for example. Banfield’s theory is difficult and demands a lot from its readers. I will just mention here the crucial test, which I have elsewhere called “the Banfield test” and which is as much a discovery as the theory being tested. If we define the sentence of free indirect discourse in the third person and the past tense as a sentence in which expressive elements and constructions are attributed to the referent of a third-person pronoun, for example,

n’importe! elle n’était pas heureuse, ne l’avait jamais été (Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*)

No matter! She was not happy—she never had been (translated by Eleanor Marx-Aveling)

we realize that, with the addition of a pronoun or other forms of the first person (“mon” and “my” in the following examples), the sentence loses all of its original characteristics:

N’importe! elle n’était pas heureuse, ne l’avait jamais été, à mon avis.

No matter! She was not happy—she never had been, to my mind.

In the modified sentence, it is no longer possible to attribute the expressive elements and constructions (in this case, the exclamations) to any subject other than the referent of the “I” contained in “my.” In other words, *it is no longer possible to consider the sentences as sentences of free indirect discourse*. This test, to my knowledge, has never been refuted. The general difficulty of the theory, however, in addition to the skepticism regarding the possibility of applying the criterion of falsifiability to narrative theory, has meant that Banfield’s theory has been marginalized by narratologists and its results disregarded by a rhetoric of minimization.

The term “communication” as it is used by linguists has given rise to numerous misinterpretations (see again Genette [1983] 1988, 101–2, but more recently Walsh [1997] 2007, 174n1, for example). Briefly put, “communication” for Kuroda and Banfield refers to the use of a particular type of sentence (early Kuroda, Banfield) or speech act (later Kuroda) that is characterized by an explicit or implicit “I-you” structure, or as having an intended hearer, one intentionally designated by the speaker as the ad-

dressee of the speech act, as opposed to unintended hearers or bystanders. Banfield and Kuroda's work establishes that certain sentences commonly found in third-person fictional narratives in English, French, and Japanese do not conform to the communication model. But Kuroda and Banfield do not deny the existence of communication in another sense between the author and reader of the fictional narrative, which can be variously called "co-intentionality" (Kuroda), "inferential communication" (Walsh), and so on. This other sense of communication does not seem incompatible with the transmedial considerations of the type proposed by Richard Walsh.

### The Presentism of the Contemporary Era

The domination of pan-narrator theory in current narrative research on the international level has not prevented the emergence of criticisms that have sometimes developed into genuine alternative theories (henceforth, *optional-narrator theories*). These dispute the relevance of the concept of the narrator treated as a theoretical necessity by proponents of current pan-narrator theory. On the other hand, they seem no more aware than Genette, for example, of the existence of an original concept of the narrator that is older than and different from the previous one.<sup>18</sup>

These criticisms focus in particular on the internal inconsistency of the concept of the narrator in pan-narrator theory and its fuzzy relationship with the concept of character. We can quote for example this pertinent comment of Walsh's on Genette's typology: "Such narrators [extradiegetic homodiegetic narrators], because they are represented, *are* characters, exactly as intradiegetic narrators are. . . . But of course, it is the fourth class of narration, the extradiegetic heterodiegetic, that constitutes the real issue" (Walsh [1997] 2007, 72).

On the other hand, none of the current optional-narrator theories seem able to develop a constructive dialogue with the theories that came before them. Walsh ([1997] 2007, 174n1) refers to the theories of Hamburger, Kuroda, and Banfield but at the same time excludes them from the proposed discussion. Tilmann Köppe and Jan Stühling (2011, 75n3) dilute them in a sea of uncategorized and unranked references, none of which are included the field of copresence and discussion. In such circumstances, there is nothing surprising in the fact that certain propositions of the optional-narrator theorists

- unknowingly repeat some of Banfield's propositions, for example, the criticism of the inverted hierarchy between the fictional narrator and the language of fiction: "to treat a represented instance of narration as ontologically prior to the language doing the representing is to press the logic of representation beyond representation itself and to make the subordinate term superordinate—that is, to assert a paradox in the name of logic" (Walsh [1997] 2007, 80); and
- appear regressive in relation to some of Hamburger's, Kuroda's, and Banfield's stronger propositions, such as when the role of the author of the fictional narrative is simply assimilated to that of the narrator—"The answer I am proposing to my original question, 'Who is the narrator?' is this: the narrator is always either a character who narrates, or the author" (Walsh [1997] 2007, 78); "we can say that Watson is the *internal* author/narrator and Doyle the *external* author/narrator" (Currie 2010, 67).

These propositions forget or sidestep the fact that *the author of a fictional narrative does not narrate in the same way as a narrator narrates (more precisely, fictionally narrates, or is created as narrating) about characters, places, and so on, that exist independently of and prior to his or her act of narration.* This opposition is at the core of Hamburger's theory of fictionality, but it is also found in Searle and perhaps, in another way, in Walsh, despite his misleading use of the term "narrator."

### Reversibility

History and historical comparisons necessarily lead to relativism. I will mention again a few of the results this inquiry has produced. Narrative theory has not always been the pan-narrator theory with which it is predominantly and most commonly identified today. It has posited an older concept of the narrator that is different from the one considered a theoretical necessity by proponents of current pan-narrator theory. It is not obvious that the representatives of this other narrative theory were in the wrong and the proponents of current pan-narrator theory are in the right. The proof of this statement is that some of the proponents of current optional-narrator theory have reconnected—most of the time unknowingly, but sometimes knowingly—with some of the propositions

of the older theories (“the narrator is always either a character who narrates, or the author”). The inquiry has also shown that there is nothing inevitable and natural in conceiving all fictional narrative, which narrates a fictional story, as something enunciated by a fictional narrator whose story is for him or her made up of real facts. Note that this is the description the older theory reserved for first-person fictional narrative, considered as a specific case of fictional narrative.

Some theorists also reconnect with the original concept of the narrator, for example, Nicholas Wolterstorff’s concept of the *narrating character* (see 1980, 163–79), which is picked up—apparently unknowingly—by Roger Edholm (2018). Another example is Jan-Noël Thon, from the perspective of a study of fictional narratives across different media (see 2016, 138–52, on the opposition between narrating characters and “narrating instances”). We can also quote this observation made by Lucien Dällenbach in 1977, right in the middle of the period of Genettian influence; it is perfectly consistent with the usage of the original concept of the narrator:

It goes without saying that I do not use this term [“author”] in its biographical, but rather in its *poetic* sense. By “author”—or, in Booth’s more precise terminology, “implicit author” . . .—I mean the donor of the book, the organizer and the *real* enunciating subject of the narrative. The “narrator,” despite common usage, is merely the fictive enunciating subject. . . . In line with this bipartite division, which tends to rehabilitate the function of the author, I would say that a third-person narrative is a narratorless narrative. (Dällenbach [1977] 1989, 198n5; translation slightly modified)

The relativism of historical description must, however, be qualified by considering how adequate the clusters of theorization, concepts, and theories are to the phenomena. It is clear that theoretical propositions like “the narrator is always either a character who narrates, or the author,” and “Watson is the *internal* author/narrator and Doyle the *external* author/narrator” suffer from underconceptualization. This deficit concerns the specificity of the act of narrating a fictional narrative in relation to the act of narrating a factual narrative. In Hamburger’s terms, “the narrative poet is not a statement subject. He does not narrate about persons and things, but rather he narrates these persons and things. . . . *Between*

*the narrating and the narrated there exists not a subject-object relation, i.e., a statement structure, but rather a functional correspondence*" ([1957, 1968], 1993, 136; Hamburger's italics). The propositions quoted above also say nothing about the act of "creating" or "bringing into existence" a fictional narrator, which is nevertheless an interesting object of study.

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Narrative theory has undergone a dogmatic phase with the generalization of pan-narrator theory. The concept of the narrator today brings together questions from a critical phase in the evolution of both narrative theory and the theory of fictionality. It is reasonable to assume that a better knowledge of the history of concepts, clusters of theorization, or fully formed theories constitutes the foundation for critical thought to address, examine, and correct errors and inadequacies, and in so doing be able to grow and develop.

*Translated by Melissa McMahon with  
the collaboration of Sylvie Patron*

#### Notes

1. See the work of the Laboratoire d'Histoire des Théories Linguistiques (<http://htl.linguist.univ-paris-diderot.fr>) and Colombat, Fournier, and Puech (2010, esp. 32–33). See also Patron ([2012] 2014; 2019, chap. 10; 2020).
2. See Esmein-Sarrazin (2008, 437; my translation): "In the theoretical and critical texts [of the seventeenth century], . . . the explicit distinction between these two agencies never appears." The situation in England seems to have been identical.
3. This part concerns only the United States and Western Europe, limited to England, France, and Germany. For a more developed version of sections "Gérard Genette's *Coup de Force*" and "Linguistic Discussions in the 1970s and 1980s," see Patron ([2009] 2016, chaps. 1, 8, and 9).
4. Unless they use the fiction of the "found manuscript," memoir-novels do not have an embedding structure, which means that we do not necessarily know who the character speaking is, nor even that it is a character speaking, when we first encounter the pronoun "I."
5. According to Rothschild (1990, 22–23), it is "the first explicit discussion of the concept of the narrator in a work originally written in English." For my own part, I have not found earlier mentions in either English or French.

6. For an English account of the controversy, see Frey (1948).
7. Without being able to go into more detail here, I maintain that there are still elements of openness, indeterminacy, and hesitation in prior works, even in Chatman (1978), who is nevertheless strongly inspired by Genette.
8. Or a fictional editor, as in the preamble of *Werther*, for example. In *Don Quixote*, the case is more complex.
9. Regarding the expression “free indirect style,” see my introduction (9), and for an explanation of the procedure of falsification, see section “The Denial of Falsification.”
10. It was not until 1986 that *Die Logik der Dichtung* was translated into French. The translation distorts and in some places mutilates the text; a new translation is due.
11. See Gerber (1968, appendix: “Friedrich Spielhagen and Henry James”).
12. In this context, it is intriguing to find this salutary clarification in the work of a specialist of everyday oral narrative: “[I] want to make clear that the concept [of the narrator], in its narratological meaning, has nothing to do with everyday oral narration.” “If the word ‘narrator’ is used in social research, it is only a term, a name for the person who is telling, and has no connection whatsoever to the narratological distinction between author and narrator” (Hyvärinen 2019, 63–64).
13. I will not elaborate on this concept, which is well known to narratologists and other narrative theorists, but will simply indicate the origin of the term “unreliable narrator” in Booth ([1961] 1983, 158–59). I will also mention Mander (1999), which contains a historicization of the concept of the unreliable narrator in the French domain.
14. For an exposition of Friedemann’s theoretical background, borrowed from the poetics of Goethe and Schiller, I refer English-speaking readers again to Gerber (1968).
15. I recall here the traditional definition of the term “first-person novel,” setting aside the case that appeared quite quickly in the history of the genre, of the first-person novel where the narrator is not the hero but a secondary character and a witness to the story of the main character (e.g., the narrator in Balzac’s *Louis Lambert*).
16. For a more detailed development of this topic, see Patron ([2009] 2016, chap. 5).
17. This is amply demonstrated in Kuroda ([1976] 2014, 79–80, 89), and Patron (2019, chap. 2).
18. For a more detailed development of this point, see Patron (2019, chap. 8), and Patron in Gammelgaard et al. (forthcoming).

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