Introduction

Newspaper reports, history books, novels, films, comic strips, pantomime, dance, gossip, psychoanalytic sessions are only some of the narratives which permeate our lives. One species of narrative will be the subject of this book: the species called 'narrative fiction', whether in the form of novel, short story or narrative poem.

But what is a narrative? What makes the following limerick a narrative?

There was a young lady of Niger
Who smiled as she rode on a tiger.
They returned from the ride
With the lady inside
And the smile on the face of the tiger.

How can we differentiate between this limerick and the following discourse?

Roses are red
Violets are blue
Sugar is sweet
And so are you.

Why isn't the latter a narrative?
And what is narrative fiction? How does it differ from other kinds of narrative? In what sense is a newspaper report, like
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‘Yesterday a store in Oxford Street was burned out’ a narrative but not narrative fiction? What are the features that turn a given discourse into a narrative text? What are the basic aspects of narrative fiction and how do they interact with each other? How does one make sense of a specific narrative text, and how can it be described to others?

These and other questions will be considered in some detail throughout this book. However, it is helpful to begin with working definitions of the key terms of the title, thus providing a framework for further deliberations.

Poetics is

the systematic study of literature as literature. It deals with the question ‘What is literature?’ and with all possible questions developed from it, such as: What is art in language? What are the forms and kinds of literature? What is the nature of one literary genre or trend? What is the system of a particular poet’s ‘art’ or ‘language’? How is a story made? What are the specific aspects of works of literature? How are they constituted? How do literary texts embody ‘non-literary’ phenomena? etc.

(Hrushovski 1976b, p. xv)

By ‘narrative fiction’ I mean the narration of a succession of fictional events. Self-evident as this definition may seem, it nevertheless implies certain positions with regard to some basic issues in poetics. To begin with, the term narration suggests (1) a communicative process in which the narrative as message is transmitted by addressee to addressee and (2) the verbal nature of the medium used to transmit the message. It is this that distinguishes narrative fiction from narratives in other media, such as film, dance, or pantomime.1

The definition further suggests how narrative fiction differs from other literary texts, such as lyrical poetry or expository prose. Unlike the latter, narrative fiction represents a succession of events (Tomashevsky 1915, p. 66. Orig. publ. in Russian 1925). At this early stage of our discussion, an event may be defined without great rigour as something that happens, something that can be summed up by a verb or a name of action (e.g. a ride – perhaps on a tiger). Although single-event narratives are theoretically (and perhaps also empirically) possible (see chapter 2), I speak of a succession of events in order to suggest that narratives usually consist of more than one. Thus the lady in the limerick first rides on a tiger, then returns in it.

Finally, the main interest of this book is in narratives of fictional events. This is why I shall not consider here non-fictional verbal narratives, like gossip, legal testimony, news reports, history books, autobiography, personal letters, etc. The fictional status of events is, I believe, a pragmatic issue. It is arguable that history books, news reports, autobiography are in some sense no less fictional than what is conventionally classified as such. In fact, some of the procedures used in the analysis of fiction may be applied to texts conventionally defined as ‘non-fiction’. Nevertheless, since such texts will also have characteristics specific to them, they are beyond the scope of this book.

The foregoing definition of narrative fiction also gives rise to a classification of its basic aspects: the events, their verbal representation, and the act of telling or writing. In the spirit of Genette’s distinction between ‘histoire’, ‘récit’ and ‘narration’ (1972, pp. 71–6), I shall label these aspects ‘story’, ‘text’ and ‘narration’ respectively.2

‘Story’ designates the narrated events, abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in their chronological order, together with the participants in these events.

Whereas ‘story’ is a succession of events, ‘text’ is a spoken or written discourse which undertakes their telling. Put more simply, the text is what we read. In it, the events do not necessarily appear in chronological order, the characteristics of the participants are dispersed throughout, and all the items of the narrative content are filtered through some prism or perspective (‘localizer’).

Since the text is a spoken or written discourse, it implies someone who speaks or writes it. The act or process of production is the third aspect – ‘narration’. Narration can be considered as both real and fictional. In the empirical world, the author is the agent responsible for the production of the narrative and for its communication. The empirical process of communication, however, is less relevant to the poetics of narrative fiction than its counterpart within the text. Within the text,
My presentation draws upon Anglo-American New Criticism, Russian Formalism, French Structuralism, the Tel-Aviv School of Poetics and the Phenomenology of Reading. However, the book is not structured according to 'schools' or individual theoreticians (as, for example, Hawkes 1977). Rather, it is organized around the differentia specifica of narrative fiction (e.g. events, time, narration). The predilection revealed here for certain approaches as well as the selection of specific aspects from each approach imply a personal stand on the various issues. Nor is this stand confined to tacit implication: on the contrary, it often manifests itself in explicit comments on and modifications of the theories which are brought together. Yet this book does not offer an original theory. Indeed the tension between an integration of existing theories and a presentation of a personal view is one of the inevitable frustrations of any attempt at a synthesis. Similarly, it was necessary to extract the relevant points from each theory without presenting the theory as a whole or following all of its implications. It is hoped that the reader will be encouraged to continue to explore this field, and by so doing to fill in some of these lacunae.
The question of the story's autonomy

Story was defined above as the narrated events and participants in abstraction from the text. As such, it is a part of a larger construct, referred to by some as the 'reconstructed' (or 'represented') world (or 'level') (e.g. Hrusovski 1976a, p. 7), i.e. the fictional 'reality' in which the characters of the story are supposed to be living and in which its events are supposed to take place. In fact, story is one axis within the larger construct: the axis of temporal organization. Since this is the axis whose predominance turns a world-representing text into a narrative text, I shall confine my discussion to it, leaving out the broader construct which is not specifically narrative.

Being an abstraction, a construct, the story is not directly available to the reader. Indeed, since the text is the only observable and object-like aspect of verbal narrative, it would seem to make sense to take it as the anchoring-point for any discussion of the other aspects - as I do in chapters 4, 5 and 6. What I believe is called for here is a defence of the decision to treat story in isolation in this and the next chapter.

Far from seeing story as raw, undifferentiated material, this study stresses its structured character, its being made of separable components, and hence having the potential of forming networks of internal relations. Such a view justifies attempts to disengage a form from the substance of the narrated content, a specific narrative form. The theoretical possibility of abstracting story-form probably corresponds to the intuitive skill of users in processing stories: being able to re-tell them, to recognize variants of the same story, to identify the same story in another medium, and so on. It is this intuition that has led almost every narratologist following in Vladimir Propp's footsteps to formulate a claim that an immanent story structure, sometimes called 'narrativity', may be isolated at least for the sake of description. What Propp studied in his *Morphology of the Russian Folk-tale*, writes Bremond, was an 'autonomous layer of meaning'. He goes on:

The subject of a tale may serve as an argument for a ballet, that of a novel may be carried over to the stage or to the screen, a movie may be told to those who have not seen it. It is words one reads, it is images one sees, it is gestures one deciphers, but through them it is a story one follows; and it may be the same story.

(Bremond 1964, p. 4. Ron's translation)

A stronger stance is taken by Greimas, according to whom an acknowledgement of Bremond's point amounted to recognizing and accepting the necessity of a fundamental distinction between two levels of representation and analysis: an apparent level of narration, at which the manifestations of narration are subject to the specific exigencies of the linguistic substances through which they are expressed, and an immanent level, constituting a sort of common structural trunk, at which narrativity is situated and organized prior to its manifestations. A common semiotic level is thus distinct from the linguistic level and is logically prior to it, whatever the language chosen for manifestation.

(Greimas 1977, p. 23. Orig. publ. in French 1979)

What emerges from these statements (and one could add Prince 1973, p. 13) is that story is an abstraction from: (1) the specific style of the text in question (e.g. Henry James's late style, with its proliferation of subordinate clauses, or Faulkner's imitation of Southern dialect and rhythm, (2) the language in which the text is written (English, French, Hebrew) and (3) the medium or sign-system (words, cinematic shots, gestures).
Starting with story, rather than with the text from which it is abstracted, the former may be grasped as transferable from medium to medium, from language to language, and within the same language.

This view can be opposed by the equally intuitive counterconviction of many trained literary readers that literary works, not excluding their story aspect, 'lose something' in paraphrase or 'translation' (lose more than something, say, in their Hollywood version). In other words, stories — the claim is — are in some subtle ways style-, language-, and medium-dependent. This is forcefully stated by Todorov in an early work:

Meaning does not exist before being articulated and perceived . . .; there do not exist two utterances of identical meaning if their articulation has followed a different course. (1967, p. 20. Ron’s translation)

If accepted, such a view suggests some limits on the notion of translatability in general. Indeed, readers with a fanatic attitude about the ‘heresy of paraphrase’ (an expression coined by Cleanth Brooks 1947) will have little use for the study of story as such.

Still, as with so-called natural language, users cannot produce or decipher stories without some (implicit) competence in respect of narrative structure, i.e. in something which survives paraphrase or ‘translation’. This competence is acquired by extensive practice in reading and telling stories. We are faced here with the same epistemological dialectic which binds together any opposition of the virtual and the actual (such as ‘langue’ v. ‘parole’ in Saussure, ‘competence’ v. ‘performance’ in Chomsky. See Culler 1975, pp. 8–10; Hawkes 1977, pp. 21–2). In this predicament, the preliminary assumption that story-structure or narrativity is isolatable must be made at least as a working hypothesis. This, however, does not amount to granting any undisputed priority, whether logical or ontological, to story over text (if forced to decide, I would rather opt for the latter).

The notion of narrative grammar

Although story is transverbal, it is often claimed to be homologous (i.e. parallel in structure) to natural language and hence amenable to the type of analysis practised in linguistics. Such analysis frequently takes the form of the construction of narrative ‘grammars’, whether involving a direct application of linguistic methods and terms which in some sense become metaphorical, as in Todorov’s Grammaire du Décaméron (1969), or a broader notion of ‘grammar’ as in Greimas’s statement:

The linguist, then, will not fail to take note that narrative structures present characteristics which are remarkably recurrent, and these recurrences allow for the recording of distinguishable regularities, and that they thus lead to the construction of a narrative grammar. In this case it is evident that he will utilize the concept of grammar in its most general and non-metaphorical sense, understanding such a grammar to consist in a limited number of principles of structural organization of narrative units, complete with rules for the combination and functioning of these units, leading to the production of narrative objects.

In recent years, narrative grammar has become a highly specialized field, where every move requires more methodological considerations and more rigorous formalizations than I can deal with here. Within this chapter it is impossible to construct a narrative grammar or even to offer an adequate survey of existing proposals for such a grammar. Only an eclectic and cursory presentation of a few main notions deriving from several models can be attempted here. However, I shall borrow from such grammars the concepts of deep and surface structure, using them as organizing principles for the rest of this chapter. In so doing, I shall include under these headings both issues which were explicitly raised within this framework and others which can now be seen to contribute to it, even though they were developed independently.

The notions of deep and surface structure come from ‘transformational generative grammar’, which undertakes to enumerate (characterize) the infinite set of sentences of a
language by positing a finite number of deep-structure (phrase-
structure) rules and a set of transformational rules which
convert deep structures to surface structure. Whereas surface
structure is the abstract formulation of the organization of the
observable sentence, deep structure — with its simpler and more
abstract form — lies beneath it and can only be retrieved through
a backward retracing of the transformational process. Thus, the
sentences ‘The police killed the thief’ and ‘The thief was killed
by the police’ have different surface structures (subject +
predicate + direct object v. subject + predicate + indirect
object — to use traditional syntactic terminology). They also
assign the same words to different structural positions, the thief
being object in the first and subject in the second, the police
being subject in the first and indirect object in the second.
Nevertheless, the two sentences have the same deep structure,
since the passive form is a transformation of the active. Conversely,
a sentence like ‘Flying planes can be dangerous’ has one
surface structure but two deep structures, depending on
whether we take it to mean ‘it can be dangerous (for someone) to
fly planes’ or ‘planes which fly (as opposed to those that stand)
can be dangerous’.

Theorists of narrative who are interested in how the infinite
variety of stories may be generated from a limited number of
basic structures often have recourse, like linguists, to the notions
of deep and surface structure. Both surface and deep narrative
structures underlie the surface and deep linguistic structures of
the verbal narrative text:

To the two linguistic levels
1. surface linguistic structures
2. deep linguistic structures
two other narrative levels are added:
3. surface narrative structures
4. deep narrative structures.

(Greimas 1971, p. 797)

Whereas the surface structure of the story is syntagmatic, i.e.
governed by temporal and causal principles, the deep structure
is paradigmatic, based on static logical relations among the
elements (see examples in the section below). This is why deep
structures — even when abstracted from a story — are not in
themselves narrative; rather they are ‘designed to account for
the initial articulations of meaning within a semantic micro-
92). This is also why I shall discuss deep structure more briefly
than surface structure.

**Deep narrative structure**

To my mind, the most important models of deep structure are
those developed by Lévi-Strauss (1968. Orig. publ. in French
1958) and Greimas (1966, 1970, 1976). Although different in
formalization, both consist of a correlation of two binary cat-
gories. True, Lévi-Strauss has not used the term ‘deep struc-
ture’, but Greimas, recognizing the affinity between the two
models, rightly says:

The distinction made by Lévi-Strauss, since his first study
dedicated to myth, between an apparent signification of the
myth, revealed in the textual narrative, and its deep meaning,
paradigmatic and archetypal, implies the same assump-
tions. … We therefore decided to give to the structure
evolved by Lévi-Strauss the status of deep narrative struc-
ture, capable, in the process of syntagmatization, of generat-
ing a surface structure corresponding roughly to the syn-
tagmatic chain of Propp.

(1971, p. 796)

According to Lévi-Strauss, the structure which underlies
every myth is that of a four-term homology, correlating one pair
of opposed mythemes with another. The emerging formula is:
A : B :: C : D (A is to B what C is to D). In the Oedipus myth, for
example, the first opposition is between the overrating of blood
relations (e.g. Oedipus marries his mother, Antigone buries her
brother in spite of the interdiction) and its underrating (e.g.
Oedipus kills his father, Oteocles kills his brother). The second
opposition is between a negation of man’s autochthonous origin
(i.e. his being self-born, or sprung from the earth), and its
affirmation. The negation is implied by various victories over
autochthonous creatures, like the dragon and the sphinx, while
the affirmation is suggested by several human defects (autoch-
thonion implying imperfection): Oedipus’ swollen foot, Laius’
name connoting left-sidedness, etc. The correlation of the two pairs of opposites 'says' that 'the overrating of blood relations is to the underrating of blood relations as the attempt to escape autochthony is to the impossibility to succeed in it' (1968, p. 216). The myth makes the problem of autochthony easier to grapple with by relating it to another, more common contradiction (for a more detailed discussion see Scholles 1974, pp. 68–74; Culler 1975, pp. 40–54; Hawkes 1977, pp. 39–43).

Whereas the two pairs of opposites in Lévi-Strauss's homology are of the same kind, Greimas puts into play two kinds of opposed semes (the 'same' being the minimal unit of sense): contradictories and contraries. Contradictories (A v. not-A) are created when one seme (or - in logic - one proposition) negates the other, so that they cannot both be true and they cannot both be false. They are mutually exclusive and exhaustive (e.g. 'white' v. 'non-white'). Contraries, on the other hand (A v. B), are mutually exclusive but not exhaustive (e.g. 'white' v. 'black'). They cannot both be true, though they might both be false (Copi 1961, pp. 142–3). Replacing 'A' and 'B' by 'S1' and 'S2' (the 'S' standing for 'same'), Greimas presents the 'semiotic square' thus:

```
+-------+    +-------+
| S1    |    | S2    |
+-------+    +-------+
| non-S1|    | non-S2|
|       |    |       |
```

(1966, 1970)

In the universe of the French novelist Bernanos, for example, S1 and S2 are 'life' and 'death', and the square takes the following form:

```
+-------+    +-------+
| life  |    | death |
+-------+    +-------+
| non-death|    | non-life|
|       |    |       |
```

(1966, p. 222 and passim)

The same values can be manifested differently in different texts. Thus Greimas juxtaposes the 'life'/death' opposition in Bernanos to the same opposition in Maupassant:

```
+-------+    +-------+
| life  |    | death |
+-------+    +-------+
| non-death|    | non-life|
|       |    |       |
```


The labels given to events in reading or in a story-paraphrase are not necessarily identical with the language used in the text.
This poses the problem of non-uniform labelling. If an event is described in the text as 'A blast was heard' or 'His fingers pressed the trigger', it may be labelled variously as Pressing a Trigger, Firing, Shot, Hit (or Miss), Killing, Success (or Failure), Homicide, Murder, Revenge, Crime, Misdeed, Violation, Breakdown of Order (or Re-Establishment of Order). The difference in label may depend on the level of abstraction, the purpose of the paraphrase, and the integration of other items of information from the text. The reader may assign any of the above labels at different points in the reading process according to the needs of intelligibility. As he progresses, he may also change a label he gave an event at an earlier stage of his reading. But more is required of the critic or the narratologist: he must be able to abstract homogeneous paraphrases, providing a consistent representation of the logical and semantic relations among all the events included. Some attempts along these lines have been made (see pp. 20–5), but the problem of uniformity keeps cropping up.

So far I have adopted an approach to story-paraphrases, discussing events in terms of labels. But it is evident that these leave out some information necessary for the intelligibility of what happens in the story. An apparently coherent sequence of actions identified by the event-labels Shooting, Wounding, Killing, would lose much of its coherence if the participants did not remain constant (if the shooter were not the killer or the wounded person not the one who was killed). Since any event involves one or more participants, the second approach suggests that instead of merely naming an event (giving it a label) it would be better to paraphrase it as a simple sentence. Like the labels discussed above, these simple sentences, called narrative propositions, are different from the sentences of the text (Todorov 1977, p. 12; Greimas 1977, p. 29. Orig. publ. in French 1969).

Whether consisting of labels or of narrative propositions, a story-paraphrase arranges events according to a chronological principle. If the content-paraphrase abstracted from a text is organized according to principles other than chronological then it is not a story-paraphrase and the text in question is not a narrative. Descriptive or expository propositions, for example, are distinct from narrative ones in that they are thought of as simultaneously valid according to some spatial or logical principle which is relatively or ideally independent of temporality (Tomashevsky 1965, p. 66. Orig. publ. in Russian 1925). This is the case of the fine specimen of a non-narrative text already quoted in the introduction: 'Roses are red/Violets are blue/Sugar is sweet/And so are you'. All four propositions are simultaneously true; there is no temporal succession in the 'world' represented by these statements, and hence no story (Prince 1980, p. 49).

The presence or absence of a story is what distinguishes narrative from non-narrative texts. However, non-story elements may be found in a narrative text just as story elements may be found in a non-narrative text. A novel may well include the description of a cathedral, and the description of a cathedral, say in a guidebook, may include the story of its construction.

The constitutive units of the surface structure

The description of the paraphrase as consisting of event-labels or of propositions constructed around events implies that the events themselves are the constituent units of the story."

An event is defined by the OED as a 'thing that happens', and it is with such a vague notion that I began in the introduction. To make this a bit more useful for the purpose of the present study, one might add that when something happens, the situation usually changes. An event, then, may be said to be a change from one state of affairs to another. Unlike Chatman (1978, pp. 31–2), I do not insist on an opposition between state and event (or stasis and process), because it seems to me that an account of an event may be broken down into an infinite number of intermediary states. This is why a narrative text or a story-paraphrase need not include any sentence denoting a dynamic event; a succession of states would imply a succession of events, as it does in 'He was rich, then he was poor, then he was rich again.' Just as any single event may be decomposed into a series of mini-events and intermediary states, so—conversely—a vast number of events may be subsumed under a single eventlabel (e.g. 'The Fall of the Roman Empire'). This is why it may be difficult at times to maintain an absolute distinction
between the notion of ‘event’ and that of ‘succession of events’.

Events can be classified into two main kinds: those that advance the action by opening an alternative (‘kernels’) and those that expand, amplify, maintain or delay the former (‘catalysts’) (Barthes 1966, pp. 9–10; Chatman 1969, pp. 3, 14–19. Chatman 1978 calls the second type ‘satellites’). If a telephone rings, a character can either answer it or not; an alternative is opened and the event is therefore a kernel. But between the ringing of the phone and the answer (or the decision not to answer), the character may scratch his head, light a cigarette, curse, etc. These are catalysts—they do not open an alternative but ‘accompany’ the kernel in various ways.

Structural descriptions show how events combine to create micro-sequences which in turn combine to form macro-sequences which jointly create the complete story. Between the macro-sequences and the story, it is sometimes convenient to disengage an intermediary unit which may be called ‘story-line’. A story-line is structured like the complete story, but unlike the latter it is restricted to one set of individuals. Thus in King Lear one can distinguish the story-line involving Lear and his daughters from the one concerning Gloucester and his sons, although the two often intersect. Once a succession of events involving the same individuals establishes itself as the predominant story element of a text (and, unfortunately, there are no clear-cut criteria for predominance), it becomes the main story-line. A succession of events which involves another set of individuals is a subsidiary story-line.

Principles of combination

How are events combined into sequences and sequences into a story? The two main principles of combination are temporal succession and causality.

TIME

As Todorov points out (1966, p. 127), the notion of story-time involves a convention which identifies it with ideal chronologically ordered, or what is sometimes called ‘natural chronology’. In fact, strict succession can only be found in stories with a single line or even with a single character. The minute there is more than one character, events may become simultaneous and the story is often multilinear rather than unilinear. Strict linear chronology, then, is neither natural nor an actual characteristic of most stories. It is a conventional ‘norm’ which has become so widespread as to replace the actual multilinear temporality of the story and acquire a pseudo-natural status.

CAUSALITY

Temporal succession, the ‘and then’ principle, is often coupled with the principle of causality—‘that’s why’ or ‘therefore’. Half a century ago Forster used these two combinatory principles to distinguish between two types of narrative which he called respectively ‘story’ and ‘plot’:

We have defined story as a narrative of events arranged in time-sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. ‘The king died and then the queen died’ is a story. ‘The king died and then the queen died of grief’ is a plot.

(1963, p. 93. Orig. publ. 1927)"

But there is nothing to prevent a causally-minded reader from supplementing Forster’s first example with the causal link that would make it into an implicit plot (see also Chatman 1978, p. 46). Indeed, as Barthes points out, stories may be based on an implicit application of the logical error: post hoc, ergo propter hoc (1966, p. 10). By way of example we may cite the witty account of Milton’s life where the humour resides precisely in the cause and effect relation which can be read into the explicit temporal succession. Milton wrote Paradise Lost, then his wife died, and then he wrote Paradise Regained.

Causality can either be implied by chronology or gain an explicit status in its own right. But the very notion of causality is by no means unproblematic. Without embarking on a philosophical discussion of the issue, it is worth noting that two quite different senses of the term are often used as if they were one. Suppose we want to know ‘why’ in the early part of Dickens’s Great Expectations (1860/61) the six- or seven-year-old Pip aids the runaway convict. Two different kinds of answer are possible: (1) according to the logic of verisimilitude (made
prominent, in fact, by the text): the child was frightened into submission; (2) according to the structural needs of the plot: this act is necessary for Magwitch to be grateful to Pip so as to wish to repay him; without it the plot would not be the kind of plot it is. The second type is in fact teleological (i.e. concerned with purpose), but teleology of this kind is often grasped as ‘forward causality’, i.e. as distinct from the ‘backward causality’ of the first type.

TIME, CAUSALITY AND THE NOTION OF MINIMAL STORY

Are the two combinatory principles equally necessary to turn a group of events into a story, or is one more basic than the other? Here is Prince’s definition of a minimal story:

A minimal story consists of three conjoined events. The first and the third events are stative, the second is active. Furthermore, the third event is the inverse of the first. Finally, the three events are conjoined by conjunctive features in such a way that (a) the first event precedes the second in time and the second precedes the third, and (b) the second causes the third.

(1973, p. 31)

An example of a minimal story provided by Prince is: ‘He was rich, then he lost lots of money, then, as a result, he was poor.’

The above definition requires three principles of organization: (1) temporal succession; (2) causality; (3) inversion (which I take to be one of several forms of closure based on symmetry or balance).

While granting that causality and closure (i.e. a sense of completion) may be the most interesting features of stories, and the features on which their quality as stories is most often judged, I would like to argue that temporal succession is sufficient as a minimal requirement for a group of events to form a story. My argument is based on: (1) the above suggestion that causality can often (always?) be projected onto temporality, and (2) the counter-intuitive nature of Prince’s requirements. If, like him, we posit causality and closure (through inversion, repetition, or analogy) as obligatory criteria, many groups of events which we intuitively recognize as stories would have to be excluded from this category.

Take, for instance, Chekhov’s ‘Lady with Lapdog’ (1927. Orig. publ. in Russian 1899) which may be summarily paraphrased as follows: ‘Gurov meets Anna Sergeyevna in Yalta, then they have an affair, then he returns to his family in Moscow, she to her husband in a provincial town, then Gurov goes to her town to seek her out, then they resume their affair in Moscow.’ This, I believe, would be recognized by readers as a story, although it lacks Prince’s conjunctive feature ‘as a result’. One could, of course, supply causal connections by writing into the paraphrase propositions like ‘he is unhappy’, followed by a causal conjunction like ‘therefore he seeks her out’, or ‘she is still in love with him, therefore she comes to Moscow.’ However, not only can the story be recognized as story even without them, but the text goes a long way toward preventing such causal connections from becoming obvious and presenting the conjunction of events as inevitable but not necessarily causal. Likewise, the chain of events does not display any obvious inversion or closed cycle: the state of affairs at the end is different from the initial one, but they are not symmetrically related (the characters are not ‘happy’ as opposed to ‘unhappy’ or vice versa).

Does this mean that any two events, arranged in chronological order would constitute a story? Theoretically speaking, the answer must be Yes. True, temporal succession in itself is a rather loose link. Nevertheless, it implies that the events in question occur in the same represented world. There would indeed be something very odd about the following bit of story: ‘Little Red Riding-Hood strays into the forest and then Pip aids the runaway convict.’ But if we accept this as the possible paraphrase of some text (perhaps a narrative pastiche by Robert Coover or Donald Barthelme), then the temporal conjunction requires us to imagine some world where these events can co-exist. The link will become a bit tighter, without as yet becoming causal, if the same individuals (or a closely related group of individuals) remain constant as the participants in the series. For example: ‘Don Quixote fights the windmills, then Don Quixote battles the gallant Basque, then Don Quixote converges with Sancho, then Don Quixote meets with the goatherds’ etc.
Two descriptive models

VLADIMIR PROPP

The aim of Propp’s pioneering study (orig. publ. in Russian 1928) is to unearth the common pattern governing the narrative propositions abstracted from a corpus of close to two hundred Russian fairy tales (one type of folktale). For this purpose, the constant elements have to be abstracted from the variable, specific events and participants constituting the individual stories (as well as the propositions abstracted from them). The constant element is called a ‘function’, and its meaning for Propp is ‘an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action’ (1968, p. 21). Functions may remain constant even when the identity of the performer changes. Compare, for example, the following events:

1 A tsar gives an eagle to a hero. The eagle carries the hero away to another kingdom.
2 An old man gives Súčenko a horse. The horse carries Súčenko away to another kingdom.
3 A sorcerer gives Iván a little boat. The boat takes Iván to another kingdom.
4 A princess gives Iván a ring. Young men appearing from out of the ring carry Iván away into another kingdom, and so forth.

(Propp 1968, pp. 18–20)

The only constant element in all four cases is the transfer of someone by means of something obtained from someone to another kingdom. The identity of the participants in this event may change from tale to tale; both their names and their attributes are variable. This is why Propp insists that the study of what is done should precede ‘the questions of who does it and how it is done’ (p. 28).

But what is done may also contain a variable aspect: the same event, located at different points of the story, may fulfill different functions:

if, in one instance, a hero receives money from his father in the form of 100 rubles and subsequently buys a wise cat with the money, whereas in the second case, the hero is rewarded with a sum of money for an accomplished act of bravery (at which point the tale ends), we have before us two morphologically different elements – in spite of the identical action (the transference of the money) in both cases.

(p. 21)

Consequently Propp labels his functions in a way that would express the differences in their contribution to the plot even when they are given the same designation in particular texts or when their general semantic content seems identical. Thus the first of the two events mentioned in the example is defined as ‘Receipt of a Magical Agent’ and occurs near the middle of the tale, whereas the second is a variant of a function labelled ‘Marriage’ (i.e. the hero’s reward) which ends the tale.

The above explanation suggests (although Propp does not say this explicitly) that the choice of ‘function’ may have been motivated by two different dictionary senses of this term. In one sense, a function is the ‘activity proper to anything, mode of action by which it fulfills its purpose’, in this case its contribution to the plot. In another – logico-mathematical – sense, the term denotes a ‘variable quantity in relation to others by which it may be expressed’ (OED). This is appropriate because what Propp investigates are propositional functions, i.e. the common pattern of many singular propositions derived from the text of many particular stories.

Propp summarizes his conclusion in four points (the first of which I have already discussed):

1 Functions of the characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, regardless of how and by whom they are fulfilled.
2 The number of functions known to the fairy tale is limited.
3 The sequence of functions is always identical.
4 All fairy tales are of one type in regard to their structure.

(1968, pp. 21–3)

The number of functions, according to Propp, is thirty-one (see list 1968, pp. 26–63). They need not and in fact do not all occur in any one fairy tale. But those that do occur, always appear in the same order. This ‘determinism’ may be dictated by the material Propp analyzed, but it may also be a bias caused by his
method. Having defined a function by its contribution to the next function and having 'justified' this by the dictum 'Theft cannot take place before the door is forced' (p. 20), Propp is bound to find a constant order governing his functions. It is this, among other things, that Claude Bremond criticizes in Propp's theory.

CLAUDE BREMOND

Wishing to account for the possible bifurcations at each point of the story (even those that are not realized in the unfolding of a given tale), Bremond constructs a model which is more logically than temporally oriented (1966, 1973). After expounding the model, I shall present Ron's application of it to Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, a plot often praised for its tight logical structure. However, for the sake of clarity and illustration, I shall also draw on this application during the explication itself. Roughly speaking, the horizontal axis of the chart (see pp. 24–6) represents relations among states and events which are only logical, whereas the vertical axis represents relations that are both logical, and chronological.

As with Propp, the function is the basic unit for Bremond. Every three functions combine to form a sequence in which they punctuate three logical stages: possibility (or potentiality), process, and outcome. Rather than automatically leading to the next function, as in Propp, each function opens two alternatives, two directions the story can subsequently take. This structure can be schematized in the form of a sort of horizontal tree:

```
potentiality (objective defined)  \   /  \   /  \   /  \  
process of actualization (steps taken)  \   /  \   /  \  
  success (objective reached)  \   /  \   /  \  
   non-actualization (no steps taken)  \   /  \   /  \  
    failure (objective missed)
```

(Bremond 1966, p. 75. English translation modified)

The notion of bifurcation preserves a measure of freedom and allows for the description of plots where the Struggle with the

Story: events

Villain, for example, does not always end in Victory. It may thus provide a formal ground for comparing different but related plot-patterns (e.g. comic v. tragic plots, folk-tale or romance v. ironic novelistic plots).

Such elementary sequences tend to combine into complex sequences in one of three ways:

1. Enchainment, or 'back to back' succession: the outcome (function 3) of one sequence amounts to ( = ) the potential stage (function 1) of the next. An example of this appears in Chart III: Oedipus' granting of the appeal is tantamount to a duty (or a promise) on his part, which opens a new sequence.

2. Embedding (Bremond's term is 'enclave'): one sequence is inserted into another as a specification or detailing of one of its functions. Bremond offers the following example:

```
[task to accomplish] ↓
[means to use]

[procedure for = putting means into operation] ↓
[accomplishing the task]
[accomplished = success of means task]
```

In Chart I below there is an example of an embedded sequence which is dominated by the second function (rather than by the first as in Bremond's example): Laius' attempt to ward off the dangers emanating from his son takes the form of (a) an intent to kill Oedipus, (b) an action taken to do so and (c) the failure of this action.

3. Joining: the same triad of events has a double narrative relevance and must be redundantly ranged under two character names. This relation is expressed by the symbol 'v.' (although Bremond sometimes, inconsistently, uses '='). Laius' sequence, used as example for type 2, is joined to Oedipus' survival sequence in this way, with each stage matched against its counterpart (really another label for the same state or event) in the other sequence. In this manner, what is an improvement in the state of one character may be ipso facto a deterioration in the

The notion of bifurcation preserves a measure of freedom and allows for the description of plots where the Struggle with the
The plot of Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex according to Bremond’s method (slightly modified)

[Laius]
- good state: possession of wife
- 2 dangers: loss of life, loss of wife
- attempt to ward off
  - intent to kill son
  - action to kill son
  - failure to kill son
  - mortal danger
  - tribulation
  - survival =
    - good state: adoption (i.e. having parents)

[Oedipus]
- 2 dangers: parricide, incest
  - attempt to ward off
    - [Jocasta]

[Thebes]
- bad state: harassment by sphinx
- need to defeat sphinx
- action against sphinx
- need for king
- selection process
  - chance to win throne & queen
  - action to win throne & queen
    - need to defeat sphinx
    - struggle
    - victory over sphinx
    - v. remarriage

[Jocasta]
- possibility of remarrying

[Thebes]
- improved state = sphinx defeated = king found
  - throne & queen =
    - failure to ward off danger no. 2: incest
state of another. Note that events affecting more than two characters seem to require additional axes. In the charts the number of axes is kept down by disregarding the perspectives of minor, although functional, characters like the shepherd and the messenger, and by inserting a third and fourth perspective horizontally as a pis-aller.

According to Bremond, all sequences, at least all macro-sequences, are either of improvement or of deterioration. An improvement sequence begins with a lack or a disequilibrium (e.g. a lack of a wife) and finally establishes equilibrium (e.g. finding a wife; marriage). This can be the end of the story, but when it is not, the equilibrium is disturbed (e.g. the wife runs away), and a process of deterioration follows. Reaching its rock bottom stage (e.g. divorce), this can give rise to further improvement (finding a new wife), and so on ad infinitum (at least in theory). Thus the first chart begins with a good state (Laius possesses both life and wife) and ends with a bad one (Laius dies). The second chart does the reverse (i.e. it begins with Thebes being harassed by the sphinx and ends with the defeat of the sphinx), and the third again begins with bad (plague) and ends with good (the city is saved). However, it should be noted that in ambiguous plots it may be impossible to classify states neatly into 'good' and 'bad'.

Having presented a few deep-structure and a few surface-structure models, the time has come to say that a complete model should also include the transformations leading from the former to the latter. Some work along these lines has been done (e.g. by Dołężeł 1971, and Greimas 1976), but further development is clearly called for. Even less work has been done on the transition from narrative structures to linguistic structures (if indeed there is such a transition). Thus Greimas:

> It is the passage from level three where narrative objects are located to level two upon which linguistic discourses organ-

*Note:* (1) Chart III represents action taking place on stage; I and II past events revealed during the stage action. Chart I and some aspects of II could possibly be embedded in III under 'process of obtaining evidence'. (2) For clarity's sake these charts disregard certain character perspectives and the sequences that go with them (Green, Shepherd, Messenger). (3) This method cannot represent characters' awareness of the significance of events or any modalities of knowledge. Consequently Chart III ignores Thiresias and his prophecy. (4) This method does not strictly represent relations of succession and simultaneity between events.
ized by narrativity are unravelled that the greatest difficulties in interpretation arise.

(1971, p. 797)

I am not at all convinced that, from the reader's perspective, the passage from surface linguistic structures (1) to surface narrative structures (3) necessarily leads through deep linguistic structures (2). Several years ago a review of the state of the art concluded:

Despite the variety of models, there is as yet no clear method of traversing the path from the concrete text to the abstract narrative structure, without either quantitative or qualitative gaps intervening.

(Lipski 1976, p. 202)

To my knowledge, the situation has not changed significantly to date.

Whereas the study of the story's events and the links among them has been developed considerably in contemporary poetics, that of character has not. Indeed, the elaboration of a systematic, non-reductive but also non-impressionistic theory of character remains one of the challenges poetics has not yet met. My own contribution, however, falls short of this goal, and in the present chapter I shall indicate why this is so.

The death of character?

In addition to pronouncements about the death of God, the death of humanism, the death of tragedy, our century has also heard declarations concerning the death of character. 'What is obsolescent in today's novel', says Barthes, 'is not the novelistic, it is the character; what can no longer be written is the Proper Name' (1974, p. 95. Orig. publ. in French 1976).

Various features which had been considered the hallmarks of character, modelled on a traditional view of man, were denied to both by many modern novelists. Thus Alain Robbe-Grillet (1963, pp. 31–3) rejected 'the archaic myth of depth' and with it the psychological conception of character. Objecting not only to the notion of psychological depth but also to the corollary one of individuality, Nathalie Sarraute focused on an 'anonymous', 'pre-human' stratum underlying all individual variations. Her