The 2 Principles of Narrative
Author(s): Tzvetan Todorov
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ferent forms of the Sartrian attempt to understand human experience. Knowledge is slow to come by; it is reached through the synthesis of an infinite series of attempts to understand so many world-views experienced and assimilated throughout a lifetime. The critical essays mark moments of that ideal synthesis which remains by definition incomplete and open to the future. What makes Sartre so interesting to follow is that his self-proclaimed mission as demystifier has ultimately converted his own writings into a Sartrian myth. Sartre's essays, themselves literary reflections, are the basis of the studies by Suhl and Bauer, which are in turn the basis of this essay that is either three times removed from the reality of the primary texts or three times closer to it, through critical filtration. Like Roquentin's effort at self-understanding, Sartre's attempt to comprehend the world through verbal reflection cannot be definitively vindicated. There are only words and demonstrations, more words and future demonstrations.

In theory and in practice, words have never been ends for Sartre. They have been signs of human acts, and Sartre's apparent inconsistencies in linguistic theory can be traced to the ever-changing significance of human acts. Sartre's early linguistic sensitivity, similar to Mallarmé's and Valéry's, appears in the later fiction and criticism, the early problems of language having evolved into problems of communication. The urgency and frustration of interpersonal communication experienced during the German occupation has had a lifelong effect on Sartre's writings. The readership of Les Temps Mo-

dernes is not that of the prewar Nouvelle Revue Française. Sartre has tried to write for the masses. As Being and Nothingness came to carry the weight of his reputation, Sartre was placed in the unwanted role of spokesman. For remote reasons, critics often considered Sartre's fiction and criticism diluted philosophizing which neglected literary problems but wallowed in ideological flimflam. The appearance of The Words was greeted with moans of academic relief for precisely the wrong reasons, a general belief that Sartre had at last returned to literature. He had completed an ideological round-trip and was coming back a humanist! Relief was short-lived. Words alone have never been sufficient to contain Sartre's curiosity. When the early literary problems were pushed aside by the war, Sartre could no longer look back at them in the same way. Having survived the war, he trusted his journalistic career to the générosité he had come to know. His commitments to communication warned him against the self-enchantment which he condemned in Baudelaire and Valéry. If he has occasionally betrayed the same temptation to linguistic self-absorption which he has attacked in others, his commitment has remained firm; his perseverance has vindicated his faith in words.

For a long time I took my pen for a sword; I now know we're powerless. No matter, I write and will keep writing books; they're needed; all the same, they do serve some purpose. Culture doesn't save anything or anyone, it doesn't justify. But it's a product of man; he projects himself into it, he recognizes himself in it; that critical mirror alone offers him his image (*The Words*. trans. B. Frechtman, New York: G. Braziller, 1964, pp. 254-55).

the 2 Principles of Narrative

Tzvetan Todorov

Since narrative is our subject, I shall begin by telling a story.

Ricciardo Minutolo is in love with Catella, Filippello's wife. But Catella does not return his love, despite all his efforts. One day Ricciardo learns that Catella is extremely jealous of her husband and decides to take advantage of this weakness. He publicly displays a loss of interest in Catella; meeting her one day, he confirms this to her in person and at the same time informs her that Filippello has made advances to his

Tzvetan Todorov is one of the founders of the French journal *Poétique*. This text is based upon specific analyses previously published in his *Littérature et signification, Grammaire du Décaméron, Poétique de la prose* and his introduction to the bilingual edition of Dostoevski's *Notes from the Underground*.

wife. Catella is furious and wants to know everything. Nothing could be easier, answers Ricciardo; Filippello has set up a rendez-vous with his wife the next day in a nearby bathing establishment; Catella can simply go in his wife's place and she will be convinced of her husband's perfidy. She does just that; but in her husband's place, she finds Ricciardo, without recognizing him because the bedroom in which they meet remains totally dark. Catella first responds to the desires of the man whom she believes to be her husband; but immediately afterward she begins to bawl him out, revealing to him that she is not Ricciardo's wife, but Catella. At this point Ricciardo also reveals to her that he is not Filippello. Catella is very upset but Ricciardo convinces her that creating a scandal would do no one any good and that, on the other hand, "the lover's kisses have more savor than those of the husband."

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So everything comes out well, and Boccaccio adds that when this story (*Decameron* III, 6) was first told, it was welcomed by a chorus of praise.

We have here a series of sentences that everyone would agree to recognize as a narrative. But what is it that *makes* this narrative? Let us return to the beginning of the story. Boccaccio first describes Naples, the setting of the action; then he presents the three protagonists; after which he tells us about Ricciardo's love for Catella. Is this a narrative? Once again I think we can readily agree that it is not. The length of the text is not a deciding factor—only two paragraphs in Boccaccio's tale—but we sense that, even if it were five times this length, things would not have changed. On the other hand, when Boccaccio says, "this was his state of mind when . . ." (and at least in French there is a tense change here from the imperfect to the aorist), the narrative is underway. The explanation seems simple: at the beginning we witness the description of a *state;* yet this is not sufficient for narrative, which requires the development of an *action,* i.e., change, difference.

In effect, every change constitutes a new link in the narrative. Ricciardo learns of Catella's extreme jealousy—which allows him to conceive his plan—after which he can start carrying out the plan—Catella reacts in the desired way—the rendezvous takes place—Catella reveals her real identity—Ricciardo reveals his—the two discover their happiness together. Isolated in this way, each of the actions follows the preceding one and, most of the time, is linked to it in a causal relationship. Catella's jealousy is a *condition* of the plan that will be con-

ceived; the plan has, as a *consequence,* the rendezvous; public blame is *implied* by the adultery, etc.

Both description and narrative presuppose temporality that differs in nature. The initial description was certainly situated in time, but this time was continuous; whereas the changes, characteristic of narrative, cut time into discontinuous unities; the time of pure duration is opposed to the sequential time of events. Description by itself is not enough to constitute a narrative, but narrative itself does not exclude description. If we were to need a generic term including both narrative and description (i.e., texts containing only descriptions), we could use the term, infrequent in French, *fiction.* There would be a double advantage: first, because fiction includes narrative *and* description; then, because in each case it evokes the transitive and referential use that we make of words (and the example of a Raymond Roussel situating the origin of narrative in the distance between two meanings of a word does not contradict this), as opposed to the intransitive, literal use of language in poetry.

This way of looking at narrative as a chronological and sometimes causal sequence of discontinuous units is certainly not new; the work of Propp on the Russian folktale, which arrives at a similar presentation, is widely known today. It will be recalled that Propp calls each of the actions thus isolated a *function,* when the function is envisaged in terms of its utility within the whole of the story; and he postulates the existence of only thirty-one types of functions for all Russian folktales. "If we read consecutively through the list of functions, we see that each function derives from the other through a logical and artistic necessity. We see that no function excludes another. They all belong to the same pivot, and not to several pivots." The functions follow from one another and do not resemble one another.

Propp thus offers an integral analysis of a tale entitled *The Swan-geese,* and it will be useful to recall this analysis here. It is the story of a little girl who forgets to look after her brother; and the swan-geese kidnap him. The little girl sets out to look for him and, judiciously counseled by a hedgehog, manages to find him. She takes him away, the geese give chase, but, with help from the river, the apple tree and the stove, she succeeds in returning home safe and sound with her brother. Propp identifies 27 elements in this narrative, 18 of which are functions (the other elements are descriptions, transitions, etc.), all of which belong to the canonical list of 31. Each of these functions is placed on the same level; each of them is absolutely different from the others; the relationship among them is one of succession.

We can question the precision of this analysis; in particular, we can ask if Propp has not confused generic (and empirical) necessity with theoretical necessity. All of the functions are perhaps equally necessary to the Russian folktale; but are they necessary for the same reasons? Let's try an experiment. When I told you this tale, I omitted a few of the initial functions: for example, the parents had forbidden the daughter to go away from the house, the daughter had preferred to go off to play, etc. The tale was no less a narrative, was fundamentally identical to itself. I could omit certain functions without

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causing a notable modification of the tale. On the other hand, if I had not said that a boy and a girl lived peacefully in their house; or that the geese kidnapped the boy; or that the girl went after him, etc., the tale would no longer have existed, or else it would have been another tale. Consequently, all of the functions are not necessary to the narrative in the same way; here we have to introduce a hierarchical order.

Analyzing *The Swan-geese* in this way, we arrive at the following result: this story includes five indispensable elements—1) the situation of equilibrium at the beginning 2) the breakdown of the situation by the kidnapping of the boy 3) the girl's recognition of the loss of equilibrium 4) the successful search for the boy 5) the re-establishment of the initial equilibrium, the return to the father's house. None of these five actions could have been omitted without causing the tale to lose its identity. Of course we can imagine a tale which omits the first two elements and starts with an already unsatisfactory situation; or which omits the last two, ending in tragedy. But we sense that these would be two hemicycles, whereas we have here the complete cycle. Theoretical studies have shown (and recent empirical research has confirmed) that this cycle is part of the very definition of narrative: one cannot imagine a narrative which does not contain at least one part of it.

The other actions isolated by Propp do not all have the same status. Certain ones are optional, are added to the fundamental scheme. For example, the absence of the girl at the moment of the kidnapping could have been motivated or not. Others are alternative: at least one of them must appear in the tale; it is a matter determining the concrete way in which the action prescribed by the scheme is to be carried out. For example, the girl relocates her brother, but how? Thanks to the intervention of an auxiliary. She could have found him thanks to her ability to run fast, or her powers of divination, etc. Claude Bremond has undertaken the task of describing all the possible alternatives that narrative possesses.

But if we set up a hierarchy of the basic actions in this way, we note that new relationships are established between them: we can no longer be content with temporal or causal sequence. It is obvious that the first element repeats the fifth (the state of equilibrium); and that the third is the inversion of one and five. In addition, the second and the fourth are symmetrical and inverse: the little boy is taken away from his house or taken back. Thus it is not true that the only relationship between the units is one of *succession;* we can say that the relationship of the units must also be one of *transformation.* Here we have the two principles of narrative.

Can a narrative do without the second of these principles, transformation? In dealing with problems of definition and terminology, it is necessary to recognize that these gestures are necessarily somewhat arbitrary. We have before us a continuum of facts and relations; then we draw a boundary-line somewhere, calling whatever lies on one side of it narrative, and whatever lies on the other side nonnarrative. But the words of the language that we use take on different nuances for different speakers. We

have just based the opposition of narrative and description on the two kinds of temporality that they display; but some readers would call a book like Robbe-Grillet's *Dans le labyrinthe* a narrative, although it suspends narrative time and presents the variations in the characters' behavior as simultaneous. Likewise for the presence or absence of transformational relationships between the individual actions. A narrative in which they are lacking can be artificially constructed; one might even find, in certain medieval chronicles, concrete examples of a pure principle of succession. But I think we can easily agree that neither these chronicles, nor the novel of Robbe-Grillet, are typical representatives of narrative. I shall say more: bringing out the difference between narrative and description or between the principle of succession and that of transformation allows us to understand why we take such narratives to be, in some sense of the word, marginal. Ordinarily, even the simplest, least developed narrative simultaneously incorporates the two principles; (anecdotal) evidence is offered by the French title of a recent Italian western, *Je vais, je tire, je reviens* (I come, I shoot, I return): hidden behind the apparent purity of succession there is a relationship of transformation between "aller" and "revenir"!

What is the nature of these transformations? The one that we have noted so far consisted in the changing of one term into an opposite or contradictory one. To simplify matters, let us call this *negation.* Lévi-Strauss and Greimas have put great emphasis on this transformation, studying its particular forms, to the point of giving the impression that it is the only one possible. It is true that this transformation enjoys a special status: it doubtless reflects the unique place that negation already occupies within our thought process. The passage from A to non-A is in some sense the paradigm of all change. But this exceptional status still should not go so far as to cover up the existence of other transformations —and we shall see that they are numerous. In the tale analyzed by Propp, we can, for example, observe a modal transformation: interdiction, i.e., a negative obligation imposed by the parents upon the girl, who is not to leave her brother for one moment. Or again, an intentional transformation: the girl decides to leave to look for her brother, then she actually does leave; the relationship of the decision to the departure is that of an intention to its actualization.

If we return now to our tale from the *Decameron,* we can see the same relationships in it. Ricciardo is unhappy in the beginning, happy at the end: thus, negation. He wants to possess Catella, then he does possess her: thus, a modal transformation. Yet, other relationships seem to play a more important role here. The very same action is presented three times: first there is Ricciardo's project of drawing Catella into the bathing establishment; then there is the erroneous perception of this scene by Catella, who thinks she is meeting her husband; finally the real situation is revealed. The relationship between the first and third of these propositions is that of a plan to its realization; in the relationship of the second and third we see the opposition of an erroneous and a correct perception of an event. It is this deception which obviously constitutes the

mainspring of the Boccaccian narrative. A qualitative difference separates the first type of transformation from the second. In the first case, we observe the modification of a basic predicate, which was taken in its positive or negative form, with or without a modal component. In the second case, the initial predicate is accompanied by a second one, so that paradoxically, "to plan" or "to learn" designates an autonomous action, yet, at the same time, can never appear by itself: one always plans for *another* action. Here we see that an opposition between two types of narrative organization is taking shape: on the one hand, a type which combines the principle of succession and the first kind of transformation; these will in some sense be the simplest narratives, and I would like to reserve the term *mythological* for this type of organization. On the other hand, the type of narrative in which the principle of succession is assisted by the second type of transformation, narratives in which the importance of the event is less than that of our perception of the event, of the degree of knowledge that we have about it: this leads me to propose the term *gnoseological* for this second type of narrative organization.

It goes without saying that with an opposition of this type, our aim is not the distribution of all the world's narratives into two piles: on this side, the mythological narratives; on the other, the gnoseological ones. As in any typological study, we are instead seeking to set forth the abstract categories which allow us to account for the real differences between a given narrative and some other. Moreover, a narrative does not have to include just one type of transformation, and not the other. If we return now to the tale *The Swan-geese,* we can also observe in it some traces of gnoseological organization. For example, the kidnapping of the brother occurred during the girl's absence; in principle, she does not know who is responsible for it, and this would be the point to introduce a search for knowledge. But the tale says simply, "the girl guessed that they had taken away her little brother," without lingering over this process. On the other hand, Boccaccio's tale is based entirely upon ignorance followed by discovery. When seeking to link a given narrative to a given type of narrative organization, we have to look for qualitative or quantitative predominance of certain transformations, not for their exclusive presence.

Let us now look more closely at a narrative with gnoseological organization. A work like *The Quest for the Grail* usually prefaces the sequences which relate material events with others, in which the same events are evoked through predictions. There is a distinctive feature to these suppositional transformations: the characters always carry them out, and even perceive them as a moral imperative. Thus the outcome of the plot is related in the first pages by Perceval's aunt: "For well do we know, in this country as in other places, that in the end three knights, more than all the others, will have the glory of the quest: two will be virgins and the third will be chaste. Of the two virgins, one will be the knight for whom you are searching, and you will be the other; the third will be **Bohort de Gaunes**. These three will finish the quest." Or, there is Perceval's sister, who foresees the place where her brother and Galahad will

die: "For my honor, have me buried in the Spiritual Palace. Do you know why I request that of you? Because Perceval will lie there and you nearby him." Generally speaking, in the entire second part of the book, the actions that will take place are first announced by Perceval's sister in the form of imperative predictions.

These suppositional transformations preceding the event are complimented by others that we remember only when the event has already taken place. As he proceeds on his way, Galahad chances to be led into a monastery; the adventure of the shield gets underway; but just as it ends, a heavenly knight appears and declares that everything has been foreseen. " 'Here then is what you shall do,' said Joseph. 'There where Nascien will be buried, place the shield. It is there that Galahad will come, five days after having been received into the order of knighthood. Everything has been carried out as he had announced it, since on the fifth day you arrived in this abbey where Nascien's body lies.' " The same is true for Gawain: he receives a hard blow from Galahad's sword and immediately remembers: "Thus is confirmed the Utterance that I heard on the day of Pentecost, concerning the sword which I struck. It was announced to me that before long I should receive a terrible blow from it, and it is this very sword with which this knight has just struck me. The deed has indeed occurred just as it was foretold to me."

But still more than by this particular suppositional transformation constituted by the "announcement," *The Quest for the Grail* is characterized by another transformation, this time one of knowledge, which consists in a reinterpretation of previous events. In general, all earthly actions are interpreted by *prud'hommes* and hermits from a heavenly perspective; often purely terrestrial revelations are added. Thus, when we read the beginning of the *Quest,* we believe we understand everything: here are the noble knights who decide to undertake the quest, etc. But the narrative provides us, little by little, with another meaning of these same scenes: thus Lancelot, whom we thought to be strong and perfect, is an incorrigible sinner: he lives in adultery with queen Guinevere. Sir Gawain, who was the first to vow to undertake the quest, will never complete it, for his heart is hard and he fails to think enough about God. The knights whom we admire at the beginning are inveterate sinners who will be punished: they have not been to confession for years. The events of the beginning are evoked again but this time we see them from the vantage point of truth and not from that of deceitful appearance.

Here the reader's interest does not stem from the question "what happens afterward?" which sends us back to the principle of succession or to the mythological narrative. From the start we know perfectly well what will happen, who will find the Grail, who will be punished and why. Our interest derives from an entirely different question, one which refers to the gnoseological organization and which is: what is the Grail? This narrative, like so many others, tells the story of a quest; what is sought, however, is not an object, but a meaning: that of the word Grail. And since the question bears upon meaning

rather than upon action, the exploration of the future will give way to the exploration of the past. All through the narrative we will ask about the meaning of the Grail; the principal narrative is a narrative of knowledge; ideally, it never stops.

The search for knowledge also dominates another type of narrative which one might hesitate to connect with *The Quest for the Grail:* the detective or mystery novel. We know that the latter is grounded in the tension between two stories: the missing story of the crime, and the presented story of the investigation, the sole justification of which is to make us discover the first story. One element of this story is in fact told to us at the outset: a crime is committed almost under our nose; but we have not learned the identity of the criminals nor the true motives. The investigation consists in reviewing incessantly the same events, in verifying and correcting the tiniest details until, in the end, the truth about this same initial story is revealed; it is a narrative of apprenticeship. But unlike the *Grail,* knowledge is characterized here by its capacity to have only two values: true or false. We know or do not know the killer's identity, whereas the quest for meaning in the *Grail* includes innumerable intermediate degrees of knowledge, and even in the end, we cannot be sure that it is complete.

If we now take as a third example a tale by Henry James, we shall see that there can be still other forms of the gnoseological search. Here, as in the detective novel, we are seeking the truth about a material event, not an abstract entity; but, as in *The Quest for the Grail,* at the end of the book we are not sure of possessing *the* truth; rather, we have passed from our initial ignorance to a lesser ignorance. For example, *In the Cage* tells the story of a young woman, a telegraph operator, who concentrates her full attention upon two persons whom she hardly knows, Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen. She reads the telegrams that these characters send, she hears bits of sentences; but, despite her aptitude for imagining the missing elements, she does not manage to reconstitute a faithful portrait of the two unknown persons. Moreover, meeting the captain in person does not give her a better view of things: she can see how he is built physically, observe his gestures, listen to his voice, but his "essence" remains quite as intangible, if not more so, than when the windowed cage separated them. The senses retain only appearances: the truth is inaccessible to them.

Comprehension is made especially difficult by the fact that the telegraph operator pretends to know much more than she actually does when, in certain circumstances, she can question intermediary characters. Thus, when she meets a friend, Mrs. Jordan, the latter asks her: "Why, don't you know the scandal? She [the telegraph operator] fell back for a moment on the following remark: Oh, there was nothing public."

James will always refuse to name directly the "truth" or the "essence" which exists only in the form of multiple appearances. This decision will have a profound effect on the organization of his works and will draw his attention to the techniques of "point of view," to what he himself terms "that magnificent and masterly indirectness." *In the Cage* presents the perception of the telegraph operator bearing upon that of Mrs. Jordan who, in turn, tells what she has drawn out of her fiancé Mr. Drake who, in turn, knows Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen only casually!

Once again, the process of knowledge is *dominant* in James' tale, although it does not exclude every other one. *In the Cage* also follows a mythological organization: the opening equilibrium of the telegraph operator is disturbed by the meeting with the captain; at the end of the narrative, however, she will return to her initial project, which was to marry Mr. Mudge. On the other hand, alongside those which are properly termed transformations of knowledge, there are other transformations, which possess the same formal properties without bearing upon the same process (the term "gnoseological" is no longer appropriate here): this, in particular, is the case of what we might call "subjectivation," the personal reaction or stance taken in the face of an event. *Remembrance of Things Past* will develop this latter transformation to the point of hypertrophy: the slightest incident of life, like the grain of sand around which a pearl may form, will serve as a pretext for long descriptions of the manner in which the event is experienced by one character or another.

Here it is necessary to distinguish between two ways of judging transformations: according to their *formative* power or according to their *evocative* power. By formative power, I mean the aptitude of a transformation to form, by itself, a narrative sequence. It is hard to imagine (although not impossible) a narrative which would contain only transformations of subjectivation, which, in other words, would be limited to the description of an event and the reactions which it provokes in various characters. Even Proust's novel includes elements of a mythological narrative: the narrator's inability to write will be overcome; Swann's way and the Guermantes' way, at first separated, will be joined by the marriage of Gilberte with Saint-Loup; etc. Negation is evidently a transformation with great formative power; yet the combination ignorance (or error)/knowledge also serves quite often as the framework for narratives. The other techniques of mythological narrative seem less apt (in our culture, at any rate) to form sequences by themselves. A narrative including only modal transformations would actually be more like a moral and didactic work, in which the sequences would be of the type "X should act like a good Christian—X acts like a good Christian." A narrative formed solely by intentional transformations would be akin to certain passages of *Robinson Crusoe:* Robinson decides to build himself a house—he builds himself a house; Robinson decides to enclose his garden—he encloses his garden.

But this formative (or, if you prefer, syntactical) power of certain transformations should not be confused with what we value especially in a narrative, or with what is richest in meaning, or with what allows us to make a precise distinction of one work from another. I remember that one of the most intriguing scenes of a recent spy film, *The Ipcress File,* consisted in showing us the principal hero in the process of making an omelet. Naturally, the narrative importance of this episode was nil (he could

have casually eaten a ham sandwich); but this captivating scene became almost the emblem of the entire film. This is what I call the evocative power of an action; it seems to me that a given fictional universe, as distinguished from some other, is primarily characterized by transformations of manner; but, by themselves, they could not generate, without considerable difficulty, an autonomous narrative sequence.

Now that we have begun to familiarize ourselves with this opposition between the principles of succession and of tranformation (as well as the subdivisions of the latter), we might wonder if, in fact, it does not amount to the opposition which Jakobson makes between metonymy and metaphor. This connection is possible but does not seem necessary. It is difficult to assimilate all transformations to relationships of similarity, just as it is difficult, moreover, to assimilate all similarity to metaphor. Succession gains nothing, either, by being named metonymy or contiguity, especially since one is essentially temporal, the other, spatial. The connection would be all the more problematic since, according to Jakobson, "the principle of similarity governs poetry" and since "prose, on the other hand, moves essentially in relationships of contiguity"; whereas from our point of view, the principle of succession and the principle of transformation are equally necessary to narrative. If we had had to oppose narrative and poetry (or epic and lyric), we would have done so, first, (and here in agreement with Jakobson) on the basis of the transitive or intransitive character of the sign; second, on the basis of the nature of the temporality which is represented: discontinuous in narrative, perpetual present (which is not to say a-temporality) in poetry; third, on the basis of the nature of the nouns which occupy the position of semantic subject, or topic: narrative allows only particular nouns in the position of the subject, poetry allows general as well as particular nouns. As for philosophical discourse, it would be characterized both by the exclusion of particular nouns and by a-temporality; poetry would then be an intermediate form between narrative discourse and philosophical discourse.

But let us get back to narrative and ask instead if all the relationships of one action to another can be distributed between mythological type and the gnoseological type. The tale analyzed by Propp included an episode which I did not stop to discuss. Having set out to look for her brother, the little girl met some possible benefactors. First, a stove, from which she requested information, and who promised it to her on the condition that she eat some of its bread; but the girl, who was insolent, refused to do so. Next, she met an apple tree and a river: "analogous propositions, same insolence in her replies." Propp designates these three episodes by the term "triple testing," a very frequent device in folklore.

What is the exact relationship between these three episodes? We have seen that, in transformations, two propositions are brought into connection; the difference resides in a modification of the predicate. But in the three actions described by Propp, it is precisely the predicate which remains the same: in each case, the one offers, the other refuses insolently. What changes are the agents (the subjects) of

each proposition, or the circumstantial factors. Rather than transformations of one another, these propositions appear to be *variations* of a single situation, or parallel applications of the same rule.

One might then conceive of a third type of narrative organization, not mythological or gnoseological, but, shall we say, *ideological,* insofar as it is an abstract rule, an idea, which produces the different adventures. The relationship which holds among the propositions is no longer direct, we no longer pass from the negative to the positive form, or from ignorance to knowledge; the actions are linked by the intermediary of an abstract formula: that of the help offered and the insolent refusal, in the case of *The Swan-geese.* Often, in order to find the relationship between two actions which, materially, are entirely distinct, we have to look for it on a high level of abstraction.

I have attempted, for several texts, to describe the logical rules, the ideological imperatives, which control the events of the narrative universe (but one could also do so for each of the previously evoked narratives). Thus, the example of *Les Liaisons dangereuses:* all the actions of the characters can be presented as the products of a few very simple and very abstract rules: these rules, in turn, refer back to the organizing ideology of the book. Here are a few examples:

The first rule formulated concerns the love relationships of the characters: "Given two actors, A and B, and that A loves B. Then A acts so as to achieve the realization of the proposition 'A is loved by B'." In other words, desire is regularly followed by efforts to obtain what is desired. Thus Valmont, in love with Tourvel, does everything to make the latter love him in return. Danceny, in love with Cécile, proceeds in the same way; and likewise, Merteuil or Cécile.

Second rule: "Given two actors, A and B, and that A loves B on the level of being but not on that of appearance (i.e., he is not conscious of it). If A becomes conscious of the level of being, he acts against this love." An example of the application of this rule is furnished by the behavior of Mme de Tourvel when she realizes that she loves Valmont: she hurriedly leaves the chateau and herself impedes the development of this feeling. The same is true for Danceny, when he believes that his relationship with Merteuil is merely one of close friendship: by showing him that this is a love identical to what he feels for Cécile, Valmont induces him to renounce this new *liaison.*

Third rule: "Given two actors, A and B, and that B is the confidante of A. If A becomes the subject of a proposition generated by the first rule (above), he changes confidantes (the absence of a confidante representing the ultimate in confidence)." Cécile changes confidantes (from Sophie to Mme de Merteuil) as soon as her *liaison* with Valmont begins; likewise, Mme de Tourvel, having fallen in love with Valmont, takes Mme de Rosemonde for her confidante; for the same reason, in a less pronounced way, she had stopped confiding in Mme de Volanges. His love for Cécile leads Danceny to confide in Valmont; his *liaison* with Merteuil interrupts this confidence.

Thus apparently independent actions, carried out by different characters and in various circumstances, reveal their kinship, serving to illustrate or exemplify a common ideology.

Likewise, in Constant's *Adolphe*. Here there are essentially two rules which govern the behavior of the characters. The first derives from the structure of desire as it is presented by this book and can be formulated as follows: one desires what one does not have, one flees from what one has. Consequently, obstacles reinforce desire, and any assistance weakens it. There is a first blow to Adolphe's love when Ellénore leaves the comte de P. to come to live with him; a second when she dedicates herself to caring for him after he is wounded. Each sacrifice by Ellénore exasperates Adolphe: it leaves him still fewer things to desire. By way of contrast, when Adolphe's father decides to separate the two of them, there is an inverse effect, which Adolphe enunciates explicitly: "While believing that you are separating me from her, you may well be binding me to her forever." The tragic nature of this situation results from the fact that desire, although obedient to this uncommon principle, does not therefore cease to be desire, i.e., to cause the unhappiness of whoever is unable to satisfy it.

The second law of this universe, also a moral one, will be formulated by Constant in this way: "The great question in life is the suffering that one causes, and the most ingenious metaphysics does not justify the man who has broken a heart which loved him." Since one person's happiness always means the unhappiness of the other, it is not possible to base one's life upon the search for contentment. But one can organize it around the requirement that he cause as little pain as possible: this negative value will be the only one to have an absolute status in *Adolphe*. The commandments of this law take precedence over those of the first rule, when the two come into conflict. This is what will make it so hard for Adolphe to tell the "truth" to Ellénore. "Speaking in this way, I saw her face become suddenly covered with tears: I stopped, I retraced my steps, I retracted, I explained" (Chapter IV). In Chapter VI, Ellénore hears the whole story: she falls down, unconscious, and Adolphe can only reassure her of his love. In chapter VIII, he has a pretext for leaving her, but he will not take advantage of it: "Could I punish her for the imprudent actions that I was causing her to commit, and, as a cold hypocrite, seize upon her imprudence as a pretext for pitilessly abandoning her?" Pity comes ahead of desire.

Once again, then, isolated, independent actions, often carried out by different characters, reveal the same abstract rule, the same ideological organization.

I would like to give one last example of this ideological organization by recalling the adventures described in the second part of Dostoevski's *Notes from the Underground*. The principle which the narrator and the other characters (the insolent officer, Zverkov, the schoolmates, Apollo) obey is that of the master and the slave. It requires that, when two individuals meet, one of them occupy, as soon as possible, the position of a superior, for otherwise he risks finding himself in the inferior position. Equal-

ity is unknown in this world, and to demand equality amounts to recognizing one's inferiority. But the status of superiority, once attained, does not bring with it the anticipated satisfaction: only the process of becoming master is significant; once acquired, superiority loses its meaning. Despite the meager happiness that characters find in the roles that this structure offers them, they cannot do without it: for they have discovered that their very existence depends upon a relationship of otherness (*altérité*), and this they are sure to find in the interplay of master and slave.

Thus, in the first episode, the narrator picks a fight with an unknown officer; he dreams of having himself thrown out; this he does solely because the fight implies his recognition by the look of the other person. Next he devotes his efforts to provoking a dispute on the Nevski perspective, in which he will not give ground to the officer. And when his wishes are fulfilled—both of them have to back off somewhat—he concludes with satisfaction: "I publicly placed myself on an equal social footing with him." Likewise with Zverkov: he participates in the dinner offered to him, although foreseeing the humiliation that he will have to undergo; but, by this very act, he will affirm his existence. Along with these roles of the slave, the narrator also knows the role of the master; he finds it in particular in his relationship with Lisa, whom he needs to belittle in order to be able to affirm his superiority: thus he will draw a black picture of the life and death of prostitutes; or again, he will remind Lisa of her condition by giving her money at the very moment when she least expects it.

The ideological organization seems to possess a weak formative power: it is rare to find a narrative which would not place the actions produced by it in another framework, which would not add a second organization to this first one. For, the illustration of a principle or an ideology can go on indefinitely, and there is no reason for a given illustration to precede—or to follow—some other one. Thus, in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* the actions which have been described are taken up again within a framework which stems from the mythological organization: the exceptional condition which is constituted by the domination of the "roués," Valmont and Merteuil, will be replaced by a return to the traditional order.

The case of *Adolphe* and *Notes from the Underground* is a bit different. Another order, which is not simply the absence of the preceding one, is established, and it is constructed with relations that might be termed "spatial": repetitions, antitheses and gradations. Thus in *Adolphe*, the succession of the chapters follows a clear-cut line: portrait of Adolphe in the first; build-up of emotions in chapters II and III; the slow decline of these emotions in IV-X. Each new manifestation of Adolphe's feelings has to be more intense than the preceding one in the first part, less intense in the second part. The end becomes possible thanks to an event which seems to have an exceptional narrative status, death. In the *Notes from the Underground*, the succession of events simultaneously observes a principle of gradation and a law of contrast. The scene with the officer

presents in abridged form the two roles open to the narrator; next he is humiliated by Zverkov, then he in turn humiliates Lisa; he is humiliated again by his servant Apollo and again humiliates Lisa with still more severity. The narrative pattern is broken by the enunciation of a different ideology, represented by Lisa, which consists in refusing the master-slave principle and in loving others for themselves.

Once again, then, we see that individual narratives exemplify more than one type of narrative organization (in fact, any one of them could have served to illustrate all of the organizing principles); but the analysis of one of these types is more illuminating for the understanding of a particular text than the analysis of another. We might make an analogous observation on a very different level: a narrative analysis will be illuminating for the study of certain types of texts, and not for others. For what we were studying here is not the *text*, with its own varieties, but *narrative*, which can play either an important or a negligible role in the structure of a text, and which, on the other hand, appears both in literary texts and in other symbolic systems. Today it is a fact that it is no longer literature which provides the narratives which every society seems to need in order to live, but film-makers tell us stories whereas writers deal with the play of words. The typological remarks which I have just offered relate then, in principle, not specifically to literary narratives, from which I drew all of my examples, but to all kinds of narrative; they pertain less to *poetics* than to a discipline which seems to me to have a solid claim to the right of existence, and which could be called *narratology*.[1]

(Translated by Philip E. Lewis)

[1] *Key critical references for the preceding discussion include: V. Propp,* Morphology of the Folktale *(Bloomington: Indiana University Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore, and Linguistics, 1958); Claude Lévi-Strauss, "La Structure et la forme,"* Cahiers de l'Institut de Science Economique Appliquée *(series M, no. 7, 1960), pp. 3-36; Claude Lévi-Strauss,* Mythologiques *(Paris: Plon, 1964 sq.) 4 vols.; A. J. Griemas,* Sémantique structurale *(Paris: Larousse, 1966); Claude Bremond, "La Logique des possibles narratifs,"* Communications *(Fall, 1966), pp. 60-76; Claude Bremond, "The Morphology of the French Folktale,"* Semiotica *(Fall, 1970), pp. 247-276.*

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interview/Claude Lévi-Strauss

The following interview is a translation of the integral transcript, a shortened version of which was published earlier this year in L'Express.

Q.— You are one of the greatest living ethnologists as well as the founder of structural anthropology. Do you consider the human sciences to be sciences?

L.-S.— I don't know if we must totally despair, but in any event, they are far from it. The physical and natural sciences have achieved this stage by succeeding in isolating for each type of problem a small number of significant variables at the heart of quite complex phenomena. We of the human sciences, or those claiming such status, remain overwhelmed and submerged by the number of variables and all the more so since, for us at the outset, this number is incomparably higher.

Besides, science studies objects, and it is particularly difficult for man to agree to become an object for himself by making an abstraction of his subjective existence, since he is at the same time both subject and object. One can foresee that, as they progress, the human sciences, much more than their sister fields, will be constantly running into this irreducible antinomy.

Q.— What significance do you attribute to your research?

L.-S.— What one calls, correctly or not, structuralism constitutes precisely an attempt, in a few fixed and limited areas, to circumvent this twofold obstacle. Structuralism tends towards objectivity by considering preferably those phenomena which develop outside the disturbances and illusions of conscious thought processes, and for which it is possible to restrict oneself to a relatively limited number of variables which may explain the diverse forms that the same phenomena take on in different societies.

But, proceeding in this manner, one can only hope for a little improvement in our understanding of things which until then remained incomprehensible, still knowing well that neither we nor anyone else will ever fully understand them. After all, the only way to reduce life's boredom lies in our pursuit of knowledge. That's our best, perhaps our only justification.

Q.— What do you think of the vogue of structuralism?

L.-S.— One always feels a little bit amused and flattered by all of the attention one gets, even if it's annoying to be sought after for all sorts of things which have no justification whatsoever: such as formulating a message, setting forth a philosophy, while I feel I am devoting myself to specific craft-like tasks.

Further, structuralism's momentary vogue has