My Narratology

An Interview with Françoise Lavocat

DIEGESIS: What is your all-time favourite narratological study?

Lavocat: Thomas Pavel's *L'Univers de la Fiction* (1987) made a strong impression on me. This book completely reoriented my research and made me focus on fictionality. I discovered it quite late, in 1996, at the start of my university career. My research work on the transition from allegory to fiction, on the difference between fact and fiction, on fiction and beliefs, and on characters was really inspired by this book. Subsequently, *Pourquoi la fiction*, by Jean-Marie Schaeffer, and *Heterocosmica*, by Lubomír Doležel, both published in 1999, also became important in my journey, as they were the point of departure for my interest in neuroscience, possible worlds, and modal logic.

DIEGESIS: Which narrative would you like to take with you to a desert island?

Lavocat: *Don Quichotte*, for sure, if only because it is a novel that contains many other stories that I never get tired of, like the story of the "Curioso impertinente." If I were entitled to a second choice, it would certainly be *Le Décaméron*. If I could take a whole bookshelf*, La Comédie humaine*.

DIEGESIS: Why narratology?

Lavocat: Fiction is not to be confused with narrative, but fiction often comes in the form of narrative. And as so-called postclassical narratology has hosted research not exclusively related to the narrative, it is there where we currently find the most innovative work in the sphere that interests me the most: fiction.

In addition, narratology is to date the most dynamic, international, and interdisciplinary field of literary, cinematographic, and games studies. I also appreciate the widely shared choices in favour of scientific rigor, clarity, and rationality. For me, narratology is an antidote to vagueness and abusive analogies or metaphors that have often to be deplored in literary studies.

DIEGESIS: Which recent narratological trends are of particular interest to you?

Lavocat: I am interested in all projects in favour of diachrony and comparative openness. I find essential the development of a meta-theory having as its object the history of the concepts of narratology by confronting them with ancient works and non-Western corpora (Claude Calame, Monika Fludernik, and

Wolf Schmid work in this direction). I am fascinated, for example, by the development of narratology in China (cf. Luo 2017, 361-79). I am also interested in any revision of concepts that have been developed largely in the twentieth century for implicitly literary corpora in the light of other media. Karin Kukkonen and Sonja Klimek's (2011) work on metalepsis seems exemplary in this respect. In the French-speaking world, I am attentive to Olivier Caïra's (2007; 2010) work on games, or Raphaël Baroni's (2007) writing on graphic art. It is in this triple perspective (diachronic, comparatist, intermedial) that questions relating to characters, metalepsis, or the use of the first-person pronoun in narrative interest me more particularly. In another area, the relationship between cognitive science, neuroscience, and narratology also grabs my attention.

DIEGESIS: What is the future of narratology?

Lavocat: I do not know, but it is precisely in the said triple directions (historical, comparative, and intermedial) that developments in narratology seem the most promising. Interdisciplinary collaboration is also a path to develop and pursue. More generally, I believe that from now on, collaborative projects will prove the most capable of advancing knowledge in the field of narratology.

DIEGESIS: What other question would you like to answer?

Lavocat: None I could think of.

Françoise Lavocat is professor of comparative literature at the University Sorbonne Nouvelle. Since 2010, she wrote or edited: *La Théorie littéraire des mondes possibles* (ed.), Paris, 2010; *Fiction et cultures* (ed. with Anne Duprat), Nîmes, 2010; *Pestes, incendies, naufrages. Écritures du désastre au 17e siècle* (ed.), Turnhout, 2011; *Interprétation littéraire et sciences cognitives* (ed.), Paris, 2016; *Fait et fiction. Pour une frontière*, Seuil, 2016. Her current research unfolds in three main areas: fictionality, demography of characters, and memory of catastrophes.

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Prof. Françoise Lavocat

Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3

LGC

17 rue de la Sorbonne

75005, Paris

E-mail: francoise.lavocat@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr