

Introductions to Narratology

Theory, Practice and the Afterlife of Structuralism

This survey seeks to describe the main characteristics, as well as diversity, of extant introductions to narratology: the fact that most of them contain original contributions to scholarship, their special relationship to “soft” structuralism, the shift from “classical” to “postclassical” theory, and the changes that have affected academic teaching in the last decade, leading to further differentiation within academia. While some introductions target the student who has to do casual work on narratology, others lead to the heart of disciplinary scholarship, and a third group engages in meta-theoretical discussion that is as interesting for experts as it is for beginners. With its capacity to adapt to various audiences and to an ever more differentiated field of study, the introduction has become an important genre in narratological scholarship.

1. Two types of applied narratology

Titles can be misleading. This is why Roland Barthes’ *Éléments de sémiologie* (1964) and *Introduction à l’analyse structurale du récit* (1966), a bargain buy at Gibert Jeune’s bookstore, became two of the major disappointments I experienced as a first-year student. Every student finds out sooner or later that few books are truly “elementary”, and that many “introductions to...” owe their title to the publisher’s mercantile skills, and not to their contents. In Barthes’ case, however, neither the publisher nor the author can be blamed. My misunderstanding of the terms “elements” and “introduction” was simply due to the double meaning of these expressions: they refer to fundamental or start-from-scratch research rather than to the reader’s proficiency. But it is well known that the foundations of scholarship are rarely the point where the novice should start his studies. Barthes does not mean to target an audience of absolute beginners; his titles simply suggest that his research aimed at the fundamental principles that structure fiction, about which it presented a fundamentally innovative theory. In retrospect, a good buy. Although his abstract and technical texts did not help me understand and handle narrative fiction, they certainly gave me an idea of the pitfalls of academic writing.

The present article compares a few “real” introductions to narrative, which reflect not only the evolution and diversity of narratology as theory, but also different stances as to what might be considered “applied narratology”. The genre of “introduction” can be defined by two main characteristics: it addresses beginners (first or second year students as well as budding narratologists of all levels) and it follows a pedagogic path, which implies a

specific organization of its subject matter (this will not be alphabetical, for example). As Barthes' texts show, however, some introductions have a double agenda: they are concerned with the fundamentals of the discipline as much as with the reader's progress in it. And they often have a unique way of merging theory (e.g. various theories of narrativity) with practice (e.g. specific instructions on how to analyze and understand a given narrative). Finally, classical introductions will try and convey a comprehensive understanding of narratology as a pluralist field of research, which leads to multiple narratologies; but there might also be an implied hierarchy, or even explicit comments clarifying the author's definition of "proper narratology", "theory", and "applied narratology". All in all, there are more than a dozen available introductions to narratology that share these characteristics. On the borders of this corpus one finds introductions to particular narrative genres such as the novel or short story and introductions to discourse analysis, as well as to cultural or literary studies, all of which contain large sections on narrative. Moreover there is plenty of information on narratology rushing through the "cloud" of new interactive media, and many parts of it are organized along the generic lines of an introduction. I have chosen to stick to the subject of narratology and to Gutenberg's galaxy, but many other surveys could be written.

Among other things, available print introductions show how the sense of "application" has shifted significantly in the last four decades. I would like to pinpoint this difference, which seems relevant for recent turns in narratology. Classical narratology of the 1970s will consider that the reading of given texts according to its categories, the precise description of a structure, is the best possible use to which a theory can be put. None of the introductions published in the 80s would entirely agree with that. Structural analysis had, by then, become a prerequisite for other kinds of practice in other contexts (non-fiction or non-written documents, culture, gender, media, politics, society...), which called for different theories (provided by sociolinguistics, cultural studies, gender studies, media studies...). However, the original sense of "applied narratology" lingers on in more recent introductions, as these teach one how to practice narratology. Thus the corpus of introductions can be divided with the help of these two categories, which define whether the goal lies in literary or non-literary contexts, and, in either case, whether the student is led towards theoretical argument or towards the use of theory in narratological criticism. Let me visualize the four categories that result from this twofold differentiation:

	Literary contexts	Non-literary contexts
Theory		
Practice		

While the possibilities of this matrix account in part for the number and variety of extant introductions, the proliferation of the genre in the last decade comes as a surprise. Of course the narratologist's tasks have evolved greatly since the

days of structuralism: although less varied than the Galapagos finches' beaks, narratology's adaptations to new corpuses and disciplinary contexts have brought with them different types of analysis, which all require their own introduction. It is, therefore, only fair to start a survey with a few classical introductions that shaped the first horizons of applied narratology (section 2), and then to sketch their role in the complex ecosystem engendered by the recent rise of introduction as an academic pursuit (section 3). In a reader-oriented perspective, I would finally like to suggest that recent introductions aim at different kinds of audience. While some target the student who has to do casual work on narratology (sections 4), others lead to the heart of disciplinary scholarship (section 5), and a third group engages in meta-theoretical discussion that is as interesting for experts as it is for beginners (section 6).

2. From classical to postclassical narratology

Gérard Genette's *Discours du récit* (1972) gives a comprehensive, thorough and systematic introduction to narratology. Every reader of Genette will confirm that one learns a lot about critical tools for analyzing narrative fiction, as far as time, voice and mode are concerned; technical terms are explained in a transparent way, and ambiguities are filtered out. When compared to less systematic accounts, such as those by Franz K. Stanzel and Käte Hamburger, which are at the heart of Jochen Vogt's exactly contemporary synthesis (Vogt 1972), Genette's theory allows a more detailed reading of any given narration. The crucial examples taken from canonic fictions are meant to illustrate Genette's theoretical point, and the focus on Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* emphasizes the systematic consistency of the categories brought forward by the narratologist. *Discours du récit* thus not only provides a precise idea of the theoretical challenges of narratology, it also provides a good introduction to the *Recherche* as narrative fiction, which is quite remarkable given the complex and evasive construction of this novel. In 1972 French and German students were, therefore, faced with two fundamentally different approaches: While Vogt chooses the prototypes and gestalt logic of Stanzel, Genette insists on clear-cut categories which are inspired by structuralist research such as that of Barthes and Todorov. The difference seems less important when one realizes that both are mainly concerned with narrative technique; they discuss meta-language and its use in criticism, they name specific elements of narrative and indicate how to spot them. Of course, neither Genette nor Vogt are particularly interested in story, plot and action. What these introductions also fail to answer is what this analysis is good for, what narrative is and what it takes to understand it.

Many of the books and articles written in the following decades with clear reference to the *Discours du récit* engaged Genette in a theoretical debate, leading to the well-known series of supplements, notably the *Nouveau discours du récit* (Genette 1983), and *Fiction et diction* (Genette 1991). The more Genette gets to

the detail of the discussion, though, the more he insists on technical questions. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's limpid and brief account of how to understand and what to do with some key concepts in narratology (Rimmon-Kenan 1983) can be considered a reaction to an ever more abstract approach to narrative. Although *Narrative Fiction* does not present itself as an "introduction", it helps to establish a simple set of distinctions and explains quite clearly how to use them. It reads better than the *Discours du récit*, and it tones down some baroque terminology and allegories which are the French scholar's delight. One prominent example is the definition of "focalization". Genette added the photographic metaphor to Jacques Pouillon's original concepts (Pouillon 1946) without actually leaving his thought-model. Rimmon-Kenan explains convincingly how this model leads to ambiguities because it blends the position of the focalizer (who can be one of the characters, or external to the story) and his / her reach (focalizing from within or from without) (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 139). In spite of the difference in style and the search for greater systematic consistence, *Narrative Fiction* fundamentally shares *Discours du récit's* choices as to scope (it privileges discourse) and corpus (it discusses fiction). Two other introductions of the 1980s challenge these choices by insisting on story (Bal 1985) or amplifying the corpus of narrative studies (Toolan 1988).

Inspired by the same formalist and structuralist sources and choosing roughly the same approach as Genette, Mieke Bal targets a readership of students as well as specialists. Her *Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, published in Dutch in 1978 and translated into English in 1985, stresses the need for both systematic deduction of narratology and for instructions on the "tools" or "instruments" which form the pragmatic interface of the theory (Bal 1985, 3-4). However, her systematic approach does not differ much from Genette's: the introduction distinguishes various "layers" of narrative with their respective terms. The "words" of the text, the product of the narrator's voice and the rhetoric choices (what Genette would call "*discours*") can then be successfully distinguished from the specific way the story is told ("story" = "*récit*"), and from the action which actually happens or is supposed to happen ("fabula" = "*histoire*"). The three layers cover the process which leads from things (fabula) to the means of storytelling (story) to the text (words). The transition between what has happened – the *histoire* – and the speech or writing which conveys it looks more important than in the former introductions, which put their emphasis on the dialectics of *discours* and *récit*. The systematic approach leads to many useful distinctions. It helps to analyze place (as part of the fabula) apart from space (which means the way places are represented within the story, e.g. from a specific point of view) and the deictic devices which are part of the text.

Bal's book in itself seems to fall into layers, with every chapter exposing the core concepts with literary or made-up examples *before* commenting on the sources and scholarly discussion regarding the three basic topics. The introduction seems, therefore, to reconstruct the "fabula" of narratology before it comments on the various and contradictory stories which have been told about

it. As to the rhetoric of Bal's own discourse, she admits that "a consequence of the approach taken in this book is that a great deal of attention was given to *classification*" (Bal 1985, 46). Indeed, its differentiated and complete illustration with fitting and helpful examples (as in introductions to logic or in linguistic scholarship, Bal gives them cardinal numbers) constitute the real strength of the introduction. However, the work of the scholar does not resemble the application of an algorithm, and the author seeks to prevent this misunderstanding from the very first page: "Readers are offered an instrument with which they can describe narrative texts. This does not imply that the theory is some kind of machine into which one inserts a text at one end and expects an adequate description to roll out at the other" (Bal 1985, 3). What kind of craftsmanship or skill is necessary in order to work with theory, then? Bal's book is fully aware of this question, but does not tackle it directly: pointing to the necessity of "intuitive decision" (Bal 1985, 16) or a possible "middle-of-the road solution" (Bal 1985, 26), she describes the negotiated deal that goes with practical criticism. It is this concern with applied narratology that spurred two further revisions of Bal's own book and had it embrace non-literary cultural contexts. The question arising from every analysis that remains within the limits of literary structure – the "so what?" question (Bal 2009, 11; Herman 2011, 128) – is one of the starting points of "postclassical"¹ narratology.

Michael Toolan's *Narrative. A Critical Linguistic Introduction* (1988) is another good example of this dynamic, in which the "introduction" is a lot more than a propedeutic tool serving a preexisting theory. In fact, Toolan's interest in sociolinguistics announces the very changes which, a few decades later, would result in a postclassical change of scope and corpus. He acknowledges Bal and Rimmon-Kenan, and the first half of his book, chapters II to IV, discusses the respective advantages and problems of their introductions. Like Bal, Toolan writes explicitly for first-year students (among other useful devices he offers them bold print and practical exercises); he adopts a laid-back attitude towards theoretical debates and rules out any question of competition between available introductions: "students might like the 'bivocal' effect of having two introductions to the same topic" (Toolan 1988, 39). Less concerned with system than with application, he also raises a number of questions about the application of narratology to new contexts. The entire second half of the book (chapters V to VII) crosses the border to other disciplines and represents something like a "cultural turn" in narratology. Toolan uses William Labov's sociolinguistics in order to grasp the 'social' signification of narrative; he also tries to account for the political implications (class, gender and ethnic characteristics) that are of paramount importance in the news or in court. Finally, the pedagogic thrust of the book also shows in the chapter it dedicates to children's stories, that is not only "children's narrative development", but also "stories for and with children" (chapter VI).

All in all, the two halves of this introduction provide two different sorts of proficiency. While the first chapters try to find a common ground or "*juste milieu*" of existing theory, the second part puts it in context and looks for social,

political or simply cultural meanings which had been excluded from the structuralist approach. Toolan provides a more comprehensive account of narrative, as he includes the cultural issues mentioned by Bal and explains the further relevance of narratology. As a result, his introduction allows the student to gauge the function of narrative in various non-literary contexts, in addition to the analysis of its literary structure. Toolan's book is the first to represent "postclassical" narratology, which until then, only consisted of some isolated landmarks such as Peter Brooks' *Reading for the Plot* (1984). It is elementary in the two senses I mentioned with regard to Barthes: helpful for the budding narratologist, and at the same time seminal for entire branches of applied narratology. As an uncanny side-effect of this introduction's impact, the current edition of Toolan can refer to authors such as David Herman (Toolan 2001, 247) who – given their age – might have developed their theories under the influence of his first edition.

It is worth mentioning that none of these introductions is at ease with "hard" structuralism – except for Barthes, of course. The 1980s acknowledge not only the pedagogic advantages of binary distinctions, but also the fact that the main paradigms of narratology (as well as the term itself, coined by Todorov 1969, 10) arise from structuralist criticism, but they generally do so in order to insist on the necessity of other theories that transcend the limits of structuralism, or simply to use its categories as tools. Bal puts this rather bluntly: "One need not adhere to structuralism as a philosophy" she says in the preface to the first English edition of her book, in order to use the terms and views of structuralism as an "instrument" (Bal 1985, X) for feminism, Marxism or cultural criticism.² However, the alienation of structuralist narratology is consistent with its own struggle against positivist, biographical, historicist criticism, and its propedeutic use echoes its original prophylactic, purifying thrust. Meant to free the analyst from contextual prejudice, the focus on structure continues to fulfill its purpose. The theory of the 1970s is the 1980s propedeutic, as the earlier goal has now found its place in a two-step protocol. This approach, which shows in the double structure of Toolan's introduction, seems to have become a commonplace of hermeneutic correctness. Michèle Clément phrases this attitude in a recent interview:

In order to give the text's interpretation, one needs the methodological prerequisite of structural analysis, which is a very good preparation, and which precisely helps to eliminate one's prejudices. [...] Only then will one reintroduce the context³ (Bonnafous / Clément 2011, 191-192).

It is not surprising, then, that the use of structural analysis as a prerequisite prevails not only in the genre of introductions that provide tools for narrative analysis, but also in those that teach students how to cope with turns in theory.

3. The rise of the introduction

In bookstores today students can choose between current editions of Bal's, Toolan's and Rimmon-Kenan's works or more recent introductions. Translations, additions and revised editions have changed the 1970s and 1980s introductions: Bal's second revised edition (1997) includes new chapters, while Toolan's (2001) offers "new exercises, further reading suggestions, and an updated bibliography" (as the publisher's online advertisement says) together with sections on fashionable subjects such as "narrativity". Rimmon-Kenan's book – by now probably the most popular of all introductions to narratology – is available in countless editions (including an e-book). There are two reasons for these revisions, which help perpetuate the 1980s classics alongside more recent works: on the one hand, the thriving scholarship in the field of narratology, and on the other hand, the insights the authors have gathered from their ongoing research and teaching experience. Thus, as well as exhibiting Bal's, Toolan's and Rimmon-Kenan's narrative theories, these also contain original contributions to state-of-the-art scholarship.

Of course, there are interferences, and the books cannot always hide their age, especially when it comes to corpus, yet the very first introductions written by Genette and Vogt are still good sales, and both authors maintain their original commitment to "classical" narratology – together with the old questions and quarrels. The preface to the tenth, revised edition of Vogt's 1972 book insists that the advantage of German structural analysis (as against the semiology and communicational models of French structuralism) lies in its modest terminology and its willingness to engage in a close reading of the text (Vogt 1972, 10). Consequently, Käte Hamburger's, Eberhart Lämmert's and Franz K. Stanzel's theories are still at the heart of this introduction. And just like its models, *Aspekte erzählender Prosa* (Vogt 1972) allots a huge place to the novel: it focuses on the poetics of the novel more than narrativity in general, with two sections dedicated explicitly to this genre, which, as the author eventually states, is the main reference and benchmark ("*eigentliche[r] Bezugspunkt*") of this introduction (Vogt 1972, 195). Given that Genette's own criticism of Stanzel rests mainly on a book on the novel (Pouillon 1946, *Temps et Roman*), one should not hold this preference against Vogt. It simply shows that the first introductions did not always differentiate between "theory of narrative" and "theory of the novel". While this difference seems irrelevant for Genette and Vogt (and *a fortiori* for the authors they use as a reference), there are good reasons to refer the analysis of the novel to the theory of literary genre just as much as to narratology. Recent postclassical narratology has opened the corpus even more, and embraces non-fictional or even oral and graphic narratives. It is the cultural turn of the 1980s that gives Rimmon-Kenan's title "Narrative fiction" its distinctive meaning, for in Genette and Vogt's time virtually all narratology dealt with fiction. So nowadays there are roughly three types of corpus and accordingly, among recent introductions, there are those that con-

sider all kinds of narrative, those that still privilege fiction, and those that turn to the novel.⁴ However, the latter, which would have been at the core of narratological scholarship for Stanzel or Pouillon, have entirely lost their hegemonic position.

The question as to which text can be the subject of narrative analysis has become a part of narratology itself, and the introductions of the last two decades have offered various answers, especially as far as the differences between fiction, literature, writing, and their respective counterparts are concerned. All narratologists agree, however, that practical application to texts is paramount and should be taken into account by theorists: “Theories of narrative”, write Herman and Vervaeck, “are misconstrued if they insist on abstraction and lose touch with actual stories” (2001, 1). With its clear stance against para-philosophic theory in the humanities, narratology is structuralism’s revenge on post-structuralism. It also favors the genre of introduction with its characteristic, exciting blend of theoretical issues and close readings.

The proliferation of introductions during the past decade is due to both the need for renewal, which goes with the “postclassical” turn, and to the growth of narratology itself, which has become a major field of study. In Germany alone the past ten years have seen the release of eight books, from the collective work *Neue Ansätze in der Erzähltheorie* (Nünning / Nünning 2002), which echoes David Herman’s pluralist project *Narratologies. New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis* (Herman 1999), to last year’s *Wie analysiere ich eine Erzählung?* (Vogt 2011). Vogt quotes a helpful survey (Gross 2008) in order to distinguish a branch of applied narratology he calls “*Erzähltextanalyse*” from systematic or fundamental research, which uses examples only in order to corroborate its theoretical arguments. Theoretical narratology in this narrow sense would according to Vogt (2011, 10) be “*Erzähltheorie*”. It is unfortunate that, although this distinction makes good sense, the two terms are normally used in a different way: while roughly half the recent introductions opt for the traditional “*Erzähltheorie*” (which coexists with “*Narratologie*” in German scholarship), the other half uses “*Erzähltextanalyse*” (which one could translate as “applied theory of narrative texts”). The relevant difference, and the respective sense of these terms, has to do with the innovations of postclassical theory (media or oral storytelling can be analyzed as narrative, but not necessarily as texts). All in all, one pair of opposite terms is not enough to describe a complex field, where the opposition between theory and practice only defines one dimension, while the other is determined by the gap between classical and postclassical contexts.

4. Training the student

Among the host of recent manuals, a few trend towards minimalism. These introductions neither pretend to give a comprehensive account of state-of-the-art narratologies, nor do they seem overly concerned with theoretical debates.

What distinguishes the books of this group from the rest is their pedagogical stance: they are written with an eye on the classroom, or more precisely on the student. Their goal is simply to assist him or her with the “narratological” reading of texts, not to turn them into narratologists. This is why they rarely take time to explore theoretical byways or delve into case studies. They also tend to underestimate the impact of practice (specific corpus, for instance) on theory.

L'Analyse des récits (Adam / Revaz 1996) is a short (96 pages) pocket manual meant to support students with the preparation of their exams. Its diagrams, cross-references, bottom lines all try to satisfy both high theoretical standards and the student's urgent need for simplicity, panoramic views and phrases that are easy to remember. The overall structure does not follow a systematic outline, as in Bal, for example, but works its way through twenty sections which can also be read independently. All topics are related to a series of central issues, that is: action, description, time, transformation, succession, text and narration. The various questions are also related by means of an index and cross-references. Of course, some chapters look like entries in a dictionary; the authors insist on the importance of a continuous reading that reveals the systematic coherence of the subject (Adam / Revaz 1996, 4). And there is, indeed, some point in looking for such coherence. Adam and Revaz, who both have a background in linguistics and philosophy, combine the structural tradition with up-to-date concepts, and even account for Paul Ricœur's phenomenology of narration (Adam / Revaz 1996, 11). This leads to an interesting double focus: on the one hand the analysis consists in considerations of representation (along the lines of Ricœur's refined theory of mimesis), and on the other hand it summarizes the contributions of discourse linguistics to narratology.

L'Analyse du récit (Reuter 2005) – similar in title and size – conveys a systematic, well-explained overview of classical narratology in only 126 pages. It organizes the overall argument remarkably well; the structure reminds one of Bal's (the threefold distinction of “fiction”, “narration” and “mise en texte” roughly covers the same ground as “fabula”, “story” and “words”) and several supplements, which take up specifically literary contexts such as diversity, realistic and intertextual function, as well as reflections about analysis and hermeneutics. Genette would agree with all of this, and so would everyone else; the preface emphasizes the consensual nature of the knowledge imparted by this manual: “the concepts of narratological analysis do not stand in contradiction with those of other interpretive theories.”⁵ (Reuter 2005, 7) According to Reuter, the tools he offers are just meant to create a solid foundation (“*un soubassement*”) for other, more sophisticated constructs. I have already mentioned the commonplace on the instrumental use of structuralism. In Reuter's introduction, however, the concessive gesture goes with a bias. *L'Analyse du récit* presents a very light bibliography (major theorists such as Bal are missing completely), and almost no references. Even if “the” means and tools of narratology were consensual, this introduction does not allow the student to go to the sources in order to use them for proper research (which cannot simply

bypass issues of reference). Nor does it question the technical terms in such a way as to encourage theoretical thought; finally, it lacks linguistic sophistication – and this is another contrast to *L'Analyse des récits* (Adam / Revaz 1996). In fact, the slight difference in the books' titles – using “récit” in the plural and singular respectively – hides a major opposition. Adam / Revaz (1996) address the possibility that there is no clear-cut definition of “*récit*” and suggest a family resemblance between various types of “*récits*” (Adam / Revaz 1996, 12-13). By the same token they seek to account for the variety of points of view in scholarship from Aristotle to Paul Ricœur. Reuter (2005), on the other hand, chooses a less complex outline and seems less concerned with systematic or meta-theoretic issues than with pedagogy.

Vogt's most recent (2011) introduction illustrates the trend towards propedeutic. Less than thirty pages suffice to summarize a minimalist *toolbox* of narratology (Vogt 2011, 17-46), which can then be used (and refined) in a series of model readings. This attempt at applied narratology is unique in the sense that it is an introduction to “narratological” interpretation working with the utmost economy of means. I use quotation marks here not only because theory is the smaller of the two parts of the book, but also because of the huge gap between its “classical” stance and the state of the question in recent narrative theory. A minimal introduction might be appropriate for a short curriculum like the B.A., but it emphasizes the division of labor between research and teaching that must have taken place in the fifteen years between 1996 and 2011. While Adam / Revaz (1996) still manage to provide dense information and point to ongoing work in narratological scholarship, Reuter (2005) and Vogt (2011) discourage theoretical meditation and appeal to the sense of efficiency which is at the heart of the Bologna process. One should add that yet another recent introduction (Lahn / Meister 2008) explicitly targets B.A. students. However, this book also strives to give an adequate insight into theoretical developments, including the new contexts and corpuses of narratology.

5. Training the future narratologist

There are two major groups among the introductions of the last decade: those that add more and more “applied” training to classical narratology, and those that transcend literary contexts altogether and get straight to the point of post-classical narratology. Both groups are consistent with the scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s. In Bal's case, the horizons of cultural studies blend quite naturally with those of literary studies; from the second edition (1997) on, she includes visual documents and postmodern, non-canonical narratives. While the writers of the first group – Martínez / Scheffel (1999), Herman / Vervaeck (2001), Wenzel (2004) and Lahn / Meister (2008) – all include a supplementary chapter on postclassical theory, those of the second group start from a postclassical base, which often shows in the broad use of non-literary case

studies and the reference to other disciplines of scholarship (linguistics, cognitive psychology, anthropology). Thus while the first group offers a more or less autonomous course with clear-cut borders, the second engages the student in an interdisciplinary project with large and growing horizons.

Moreover, systematic consistency and completeness are a major goal within the first group: Schmid (2005), Lahn / Meister (2008), Bal (2009), Martínez / Scheffel (1999) all emphasize the need for systematic classification, while Herman / Vervaeck (2001) offer an interesting insight into the history of the discipline, with a diachronic approach to theory and important chapters on non-structuralist and postclassical narratology. Wenzel (2004) consists of chapters by different authors highlighting the main subjects. Most maintain the interest of the early introductions in classification and much of their concepts, but set these against recent scholarship, which gives the student an insight into the debates that surround and have refined the well-known terminology.

Not many, however, combine the scholarship originating in different scientific communities. It is part of Schmid's (2005) agenda to feed recent narratology back to its sources in Soviet literary theory. There is a clear split between the English-speaking community, which rarely takes into account anything that has not been translated, and the "others". This may simply reflect the shift towards English as the *lingua franca* of literary and cultural studies; in some cases it leads to surprising asymmetries. Revaz (2009) quotes Herman on action and story, yet Herman (2011) does not acknowledge the research of the Francophone scholar, although her introduction and field of study would be directly relevant to his idea that "narrative is a cognitive activity, which may or may not be realized as an artifact falling within the text type *narrative*" (Herman 2009, 92). Thus, it is in the non-English introductions that one finds the most helpful explanations of the "false friends" of international narrative terminology; an interesting diagram in Martínez / Scheffel (2012, 28) shows the various meanings of "fabula", "plot", "story", etc. Likewise, few introductions feature a cosmopolitan bibliography that expects students to do their further reading in more than one language. The examples (and primary reading) are even more prone to national, or at least linguistic, partition. It makes sense to interpret original literary texts, which means that Lahn / Meister (2008) insist on the German canon, Herman / Vervaeck (2001) comment mostly on Dutch fiction, Wenzel (2004) and everyone else on English texts, while Schmid (2005), which is based on an introduction written in Russian, reads like a handbook of Russian narrative. Of course, there are practical reasons to avoid puzzling the inexperienced reader with examples in too many languages or too much further reading; then again, this does not encourage international liaisons and collaboration on a subject which has become popular in more than one community.

A second major characteristic is the increasing number of "bonus devices" that do not belong to the argument but help the student to understand it. On the upside, Wenzel (2004) includes a "toolkit" (sic) of questions at the end of every section, which help apply the theory to a given text. These questions will

also encourage the student to find out whether he or she has understood the main concepts of a given section, and give him the precise source of the necessary information. If one cannot answer the question “What are the signs of narrative unreliability? (cf. Ch. 6.3)”⁶ (Wenzel 2004, 140), he or she can simply turn to Chapter 6.3. On the downside, however, the sections are plagued with diagrams that are meant to underscore the argument but use just too many circles and arrows to be helpful (Wenzel 2004, 34, 55, 102, 118, 172, 199). The visual elements reach a state of perfection in Lahn / Meister (2008), which add true splendor to the genre: not only can it boast pictures (mostly reproductions of book covers, but also a few pertinent illustrations), but also different background colors and fonts, which guide the student through a multi-layered argument. There are frames with definitions and chronological surveys, orange boxes with examples and model readings, and grey boxes elaborating on theoretical questions. The whole presentation is structured in a highly detailed way, and its short paragraphs call to mind Adam / Revaz’ (1996) pocket manual. Of course, Lahn / Meister’s book is three times as big; it is user-friendly in that it does not presuppose much. Indeed, narratology has become a popular subject in German literature and language curricula, and this shows clearly in the trend toward applied and propedeutic elements. Fludernik even provides explicit methodological advice for beginners – including samples of student writing and their correction (Fludernik 2006, 153-167).

The difference between Lahn / Meister (2008) and the latest edition of Bal’s introduction (2009) is striking. Although both share much of the terminology and a certain pedagogic attitude, they choose two entirely opposite styles of academic writing – and probably represent a different view of academia altogether. While Lahn / Meister’s user-friendly interface inevitably calls to mind power-point presentations in front of large (and full) classrooms, Bal takes the student as close as he or she can to the place where theory “is made”, that is to the scholar’s desk and mind. While this feels like experiencing the privilege of one-on-one teaching, it can also be difficult to follow in the case of an extremely vivid and non-conventional train of thought. A middle-of-the-road solution is the discourse of Martínez / Scheffel (1999), who aim to adapt to student needs as well as to the requirements of scholarly debate. There is a glossary at the end, which helps with precise definitions and cross references but, as with Bal, every chapter also has a supplement where the respective theoretical discussion is summarized, with precise reference to relevant books and articles. The authors break most binary oppositions down to gradual polarities – a change that helps greatly with their application in given texts. The distinction between “homodiegetic” and “heterodiegetic” narrative, for instance, follows Susan Lanser’s model: it does not confine itself to an ontological opposition but describes various pragmatic attitudes of the narrator towards his narration (Martínez / Scheffel 2012, 85; cf. Lanser 1981, 160). As in the case of the homodiegetic / heterodiegetic voice, the authors offer large diagrams with relevant examples. Finally, their model interpretations are themselves a model of consistent academic writing and show students how to build

an argument and support it with textual evidence. All in all, this introduction does everything to encourage the application of narratology in the context of literary studies, while at the same time engaging with theoretical questions.

6. Training the narratologist

It is not easy to classify the diversity of current postclassical narratology. Recent theory of narrative embraces non-literary contexts, which evokes multitudinous new questions. This diversity calls for complementary introductions addressing these contexts and the specific contribution of narratology to them. Gerald Prince writes: “Classical narratology tried to exclude certain questions. Postclassical narratology might give in too easily to the temptation to ask them all.”⁷ (Prince 2006) Thus today’s narratologist has to turn to more than one book in order to find answers. And he is never done with training...

The first type of new question arises from a change of corpus. Film, cartoon or graphic novels have been an important field of scholarship for a long time. However, the last decade has moved away from the western canon and from too obvious forms of fiction. While Seymour Chatman’s relevant books (1978, 1990) deal mostly with film, recent introductions choose “image” (Revaz 2009, 88-92) or “visual stories” (Bal 2009, 165-175) as central concepts; and this usually goes with an implicit or explicit questioning of “narrativity”. Recent studies of “narrativity” are thus in a way a result of the fact that narratology has left the secure paths of literary history and started to deal with a wide variety of documents. The question was less urgent while only established forms of narrative were concerned and one could rely on tradition (i.e. historical poetics) to define the corpus. Even movies were part of this tradition; other audiovisual media fit in less easily. Herman’s *Basic Elements of Narrative* (2009) gives examples from a short story by Ernest Hemingway alongside others from David Clowes’ popular graphic novel *Ghost World*, Terry Zwigoff’s adaptation of that novel and a transcription of oral storytelling. Again, the student (and scholar) is challenged by this corpus, which might look familiar and accessible, but conceals a load of hermeneutic problems. In order to understand a graphic novel or movie, for example, narratological skills and knowledge are not enough. Unless one wishes to return to the general semiotics of the 1960s or dwell on “natural” narratology with its roots in human experience (Fludernik 2006, 73, 122), the enlarged corpus requires additional expertise in the domain of arts history, film, linguistics, cognitive science, psychosociology etc. This, in turn, makes it improbable that non-narratologists will ever put this theory into practice. “Heterodiegesis” (Genette 1972, 251-259) is more difficult to pronounce than to find in a given text; “positioning” (Herman 2006, 55) sounds familiar, but demands serious background knowledge in order to apply it.

However obvious a point, most classical introductions are written by experts and contain authentic contributions to scholarship. Of course, accents have shifted from the art of discourse to the function of storytelling or narrativity. Schmid (2005) and Revaz (2009) epitomize this shift, as well as the complementarity of classical and postclassical approaches to text analysis. At the center of Schmid's book is the question of poetic quality, and he follows in the footsteps of the great Soviet theorists when he asks for "skaz" and the interference of discourses. In fact, his long chapter on that matter offers probably one of the clearest explanations of formalist narratology and its afterlife in recent theory. Revaz (2009), on the contrary, focuses on narrative action, motivation and narrativity – all of which had been neglected by the old-school discussion on the style and art of narration. Her corpus skillfully combines literary fictions such as Jean-Philippe Toussaint's novels with examples taken from journalism. Along with a comprehensive case study of Toussaint (Revaz 2009, 141-166), her book includes an inspiring chapter on feature narratives in the printed press (Revaz 2009, 167-192). Of course, the argument begins at a very complex level, with the question whether stories belong to human art or human cognition. Her own answer is complex, and her narrow definition of story demands solid knowledge of philosophy and poetics. Even if they do not call for further and more elementary introductions (as other post-classics do), both Schmid (2005) and Revaz (2009) aim at the advanced student; and one must become a scholar to imitate their elaborate and subtle case studies.

The second context in which new questions are asked consists in imported theory (and information) from neighboring disciplines such as linguistics, cognitive sciences, sociology, gender studies, media studies and cultural anthropology. So these enhanced theories challenge the narratologist's interdisciplinary knowledge and skills. Nünning / Nünning's (2004) book is an interesting attempt at rewriting narratology from the point of view of gender studies. Indeed, most concepts had been developed without any regard to gender, although storytelling, authorship, reliability, character etc. necessarily imply cultural biases or a discourse touching on what is male or female, masculine or feminine. The theoretical sophistication of this collective work contrasts with Mahne (2007), who pretends to write on intermediality and does not bother with media studies at all: her introduction simply offers advice on how to apply narratological criticism to various arts, from film to hyperfiction. It includes nice examples, especially for the graphic novel, and reads well. However many classical concepts, such as "metalepsis" (Mahne 2007, 31, 74) are not explained properly, and their use seems oversimplified when compared to the state of the art in current narratology.⁸ Still, there is a useful body of references for further reading that would allow the student to catch up. In fact Nünning / Nünning (2004) and Mahne (2007) are supplementary introductions; both of them need an additional, "classical" manual if they are to be properly understood.

The last characteristic, which refers to the manifold dialectics of theory and practice, is the ratio of case studies to self-reflecting meta-theory. Postclassical introductions allow for both detailed readings and general considerations of

the use of narratology. Fludernik's book (2006) offers not only a comprehensive survey of current postclassical trends (Fludernik 2006, 103-123), but also an interesting list of contexts already addressed and those still pending (Fludernik 2006, 129-133). The explicit goal of the latter section is to foster awareness of the discipline's limits and opportunities. Together with these meta-theoretical insights and prospects, the book also offers the student model readings of well-known German texts (Fludernik 2006, 134-152). A similar ratio can be found in Herman (2011), although case studies and meta-theory do not fall here into different sections. Despite its clear structure, which confirms the title's claim to "elementary" discourse, the book encourages continuous reading, as the argument entwines at least three different threads: the practical application of its main examples (Hemingway, Clowes and Zwigoff), inter-theory considerations explaining how and why concepts from linguistics, sociology, communication theory etc. can and should be introduced to narratology, and finally the model of analysis itself. While "those using the book in classroom settings may wish to test its possibilities and limitations by examining other narrative case studies" (Herman 2011, XI), this has ceased to be the main purpose, for the argument of recent introductions has in general shifted toward theory. And while the 1980s debate found common ground in various concepts such as "focalization", "implicit author" etc., current scholarship has few disciplinary issues: "narrativity" sticks out of the word cloud.

In conclusion, there is in this body of work a true diversity and a number of choices. While classical introductions formed a web of mutual acknowledgements, the recent growth of the discipline has increased the number of introductions and made exhaustive cross-reference difficult. Obviously, the current pluralism of narratologies requires a plurality of introductions. Not only the "boom" of narratology and the "narrative turn" in literary studies (Fludernik 2006, 21-22), but also the very nature of recent scholarship in this field makes it almost impossible to map the whole of it. The two trends towards an "applied" theory are part of the problem as well as of its solution. Hence the conclusion of the present survey must be that the increasingly "practical" approach tends to reduce classical narratology to a "toolkit" (which is not the intention of the scholars who created its concepts), while postclassical narratology tends to insist on a diversity of contexts that barely communicate with each other (one can discuss fiction's politics, gender and media together, but there is no systematic need to do so). It can be said, therefore, that recent introductions open various more or less comfortable entrances to the maze of narratives and theories and give more or less helpful instructions on how to find one or several possible exits. But none of them can be used as an exhaustive map. Of course, this problem does not make the maze less attractive – quite on the contrary. And the two very different types of applied narratology appear to agree that no single book can tell what way leads best through the labyrinth. One has to come in to find out.

Bibliography

- Adam, Jean-Michel / Revaz, Françoise (1996): *L'Analyse des récits*. Paris.
- Bal, Mieke (1978): *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Toronto 1985 [English translation by Christine van Boheemen].
- , (1985): *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Third Edition. Toronto 2009.
- Barthes, Roland (1964): “Éléments de sémiologie”. In: *Communications* 4, pp. 91-135.
- , (1966): “Introduction à l’analyse structurale de récits”. In: Roland Barthes (Ed.), *Poétique du récit*, Paris 1977, pp. 7-57.
- Bonnafeous, Alain / Clément, Michèle (2011): “Le reflux du structuralisme en économie et dans la critique littéraire”. In: Alain Bonnafeous / Laurence Bouleau-Berger (Eds.), *Académiquement correct*. Lyon, pp. 171-193.
- Brooks, Peter (1984): *Reading for the Plot. Design and Intention in Narrative*. New York.
- Chatman, Seymour (1978): *Story and Discourse. Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca, NY.
- , (1990): *Coming to Terms. The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca, NY.
- Fludernik, Monika (2006): *Erzähltheorie. Eine Einführung*. Darmstadt.
- Genette, Gérard (1972): “Discours du récit”. In: Gérard Genette (Ed.), *Figures III*. Paris.
- , (1983): *Nouveau discours du récit*. Paris.
- , (1991): *Fiction et diction*. Paris.
- , (1994): *Die Erzählung*. München [German translation by Andreas Knop].
- , (2004): *Métalepse. De la figure à la fiction*. Paris.
- Gross, Sabine (2008): “Surveying Narratology”. In: *Monatshefte* 100 (No. 4), pp. 534-559.
- Herman, David (1997): “Scripts, Sequences, and Stories. Elements of a Postclassical Narratology”. *PMLA* 112 (No. 5), pp. 1046-1059.
- , (1999) (Ed.): *Narratologies. New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*. Columbus, OH.
- Herman, Luc / Vervaeck, Bart (2001): *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*. Lincoln 2005 [English translation by Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck].
- Lahn, Silke / Meister, Jan Christoph (2008): *Einführung in die Erzähltextanalyse*. Stuttgart.
- Lanser, Susan Sniader (1981): *The Narrative Act. Point of View in Prose Fiction*. Princeton.
- Mahne, Nicole (2007): *Transmediale Erzähltheorie. Eine Einführung*. Göttingen.
- Martínez, Matías / Scheffel, Michael (1999): *Einführung in die Erzähltheorie*. Ninth Revised Edition. München 2012.
- Nünning, Ansgar / Nünning, Vera (2002) (Eds.): *Neue Ansätze in der Erzähltheorie*. Trier.
- , (2004) (Eds.): *Erzähltextanalyse und Gender Studies*. Stuttgart.
- Pier, John / Schaeffer, Jean-Marie (2005) (Eds.): *Métalepses. Entorses au pacte de la représentation*. Paris.
- Pouillon, Jean (1946): *Temps et Roman*. Paris.
- Prince, Gerald (2006): “Narratologie classique et narratologie post-classique”. In: *Vox-poetica. Lettres et sciences humaines*. URL: <http://www.vox-poetica.org/t/articles/prince.html> (28.09.2012).
- Reuter, Yves (2001): *L'analyse du récit*. Paris 2011.
- Revaz, Françoise (2009): *Introduction à la narratologie. Action et Narration*. Louvain-la-Neuve.
- Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith (1983): *Narrative Fiction. Contemporary Poetics*, London 1988.
- Schmid, Wolf (2005): *Elemente der Narratologie*. Berlin.
- Todorov, Tzvetan (1969): *Grammaire du Décaméron*. Paris / La Hague.
- Toolan, Michael J. (1988): *Narrative. A Critical Linguistic Introduction*. Second Edition. London 2001.
- Vogt, Jochen (1972): *Aspekte erzählender Prosa*. München 2008.
- , (2011): *Wie analysiere ich eine Erzählung? Ein Leitfaden mit Beispielen*. Paderborn.
- Wenzel, Peter (2004) (Ed.): *Einführung in die Erzähltextanalyse*. Trier.

Prof. Dr. Matei Chihaia
 Bergische Universität Wuppertal
 Fachbereich A:
 Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften
 Romanistik
 Gaußstraße 20

42119 Wuppertal

E-mail: chihaia@uni-wuppertal.de

Sie können den Text in folgender Weise zitieren / How to cite this article:

Chihaia, Matei: „Introductions to Narratology. Theory, Practice and the Afterlife of Structuralism“. In: *DIEGESIS. Interdisziplinäres E-Journal für Erzählforschung / Interdisciplinary E-Journal for Narrative Research* 1.1. (2012). 15-31.

URN: [urn:nbn:de:hbz:468-20121031-145005-0](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:468-20121031-145005-0)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

¹ The term “postclassical narratology” was coined by David Herman in the late 90s (Herman 1997).

² This process might also explain my own misreading of Barthes’ title, given that the “elements” which he meant to be axiomatic had by the early 90s become part of the “elementary” terms and views every student had to know before he got to the serious stuff, i.e. the essays of Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler or Frederick Jameson.

³ “Pour interpréter le texte, il faut le préalable méthodologique de l’analyse structurale, qui est un très bon préalable, qui permet justement de mettre à distance ses préjugés. [...] On ne réintroduira le contexte qu’ensuite.”

⁴ I have thus excluded all introductions to the analysis or theory of the novel from this survey; they deserve a review of their own.

⁵ “[L]es concepts de l’analyse narratologique ne sont pas contradictoires avec ceux d’autres théories interprétatives.”

⁶ “Was lässt eventuell auf eine mangelnde Glaubwürdigkeit des Erzählers schließen? (Vgl. Kap. 6.3)”

⁷ “La narratologie classique essayait d’écarter certaines questions. La narratologie post-classique cède peut-être trop facilement à la tentation de les poser toutes.”

⁸ Genette 2004 and Pier / Schaeffer 2005 both have sections on media.