Narratology Re-revisited

"NARRATOLOGY is a theory of narrative". This ‘definition’ of narratology beginning the ‘narratology’ entry in the John Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism needs to be explained further. It is a theory of narrative and not the theory of narrative. This implies that there are theories of narrative that are not narratological. It is a theory of narrative. But there are poetics of narrative (Rimmon-Kenan, Pavel), rhetoric of narrative (Booth), logics of narrative (Hamburger, Bremond), models of narrative (Ryan), grammars of narrative (Prince), narratological methods (Genette), and narratological criticism (Bal, Lanser). In so far as narratology is a theory of narrative, and in so far as these scholars are narratologists, the word ‘theory’ is understood in various very different ways.

A theory of narrative can be a speculative or conjectural view on narrative as such. A poetics of narrative will look for universal principles of narrative - it is concerned
with the differentia specifica of narrative, it understands narrative as something in itself, and it gets its concepts from this object. A rhetoric of narrative can be either a study of the techniques of using language effectively (in which case literary narrative is seen as a kind of rhetoric) or it can be a study of tropes and figures. A logic of narrative will be concerned with establishing a formal logical system of axioms and rules of inference that apply for narrative in general. A model of narrative will use a different language to create more or less simplified representations of narrative structures. A grammar of narrative can use a metalanguage (linguistics) as a means of explaining the elementary principles of narrative. A narratological method can be seen as a systematic way of doing something, a how-to-read-a-narrative manual. Narratological criticism will analyze or evaluate specific narratives.

These tentative descriptions of what narratology may be considered as show differences not only in focus but also in the understanding of what narratology can be used for. To see narratology as a theoretical discipline is obviously quite different from seeing it as a branch of poetics, which is again different from seeing it as a method - which can perhaps be used for criticism.

Herman says that narratology is a study of narrative, but then again not all studies of narrative are narratological. As a study of narrative narratology is more correctly a study of narrative qua narrative which, as Prince puts it in the above mentioned entry (though he still holds on to narratology being a 'theory'), "(...) examines what all narratives, and only narratives, have in common as well as what enables them to differ from one another qua narratives, and it aims to describe the narrative-specific system of rules presiding over narrative production and processing".

This still does not lead to an unambiguous definition of either narratology or narratives - for what exactly is it that narratives, and only narratives, have in common? Does it make sense, at all, to look for universal narrative elements? Even if narrative is restricted to mean literary narrative, where there may be a general agreement that 'plot structure', 'temporal relations', and 'narrative situations' are specific to narrative, there are other elements which are more difficult to fix, such as tone and style, which are not specific to narrative. Without this restriction it becomes even more difficult to establish these specific characteristics.

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9 David Herman (ed.), Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999
10 Prince in The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism
Despite these open questions concerning both its own status and its object of study, narratology has been extremely influential in many areas, literary and other, and books devoted to or inspired by narratology keep appearing in large numbers (7767 hits on ‘narrative’ or ‘narratology’ between 1989-1999 in WorldCat illustrate this). The scope for narratological analysis has expanded and now includes not only (and perhaps not even primarily) literary narrative, but also film, journalism, painting, music, theories of identity (both personal and group identity in terms of gender, nations, race, regions, etc.), history, economics, and others. It is therefore difficult (and not very rewarding) to think of narratology as a thing of the past, a part of ‘that unfulfilled dream of objectivity’ dreamt by structuralism as some have done.\textsuperscript{11} Concerning what we may call ‘literary narratology’ Currie says:

Whatever revolutionary moment structuralist narratology may have inhabited in its heyday in the 1960s, the impact of narratological method was certainly greater in literary studies at large in the 1980s, when it was operating alongside new critical developments from deconstruction and various new historicisms, cultural materialism and rejuvenated Marxisms …\textsuperscript{12}

As a specific ‘discipline’, narratology did have its roots in structuralism, and I will get back to that below.

In an essay from 1990 Prince explains the success of narratology as a result of two things which both concern the status of the discipline itself. First he argues that narrative is a particular mode of knowledge (the etymology of the word ‘narrative’ shows a relation to the Latin Graurus - ‘knowing’, ‘expert’, ‘acquainted with’, which derives from the Indo-European gna, ‘to know’):

…narratology has helped to show how narrative is a structure and practice that illuminates temporality and human beings as temporal beings. Indeed, to speak more generally, narratology does have crucial implications for our self-understanding. To study the nature of narratives, to examine how and why it is that we can construct them, memorize them, paraphrase them, summarize and expand them, or organize them in terms of such categories as plot, narrator, narratee, and character is to study one of the fundamental ways - and a singularly human one at that - in which we make sense.\textsuperscript{13}

Second he discusses the ‘undeniable usefulness of narratological instruments for the description, classification, and interpretation of literary narratives’ (2). In other words narratology is also a practical instrument or method for literary analysis and interpretation.

\textsuperscript{11} Christine Brooke-Rose, ‘Whatever Happened to Narratology?’. Poetics Today, vol. 11, no. 2, 1990 Summer
(This also underlies Currie's view - he speaks of a 'narratological method'). In so far as narratology is concerned with the study of narrative qua narrative (that is, with what allows narrative to have meaning rather than what meaning a particular narrative may have) there could be problems connected with the use of narratology understood as an instrument for interpretation of specific texts. The problems here concern the relation between 'literary theory' and 'literary criticism'.

In an essay from the same year as Prince's essay Seymour Chatman speaks of the 'hard-won distinction between literary theory and literary criticism'.\textsuperscript{14} Originally narratology (with its strstructuralist basis) played an important part "in the assault against viewing literary studies as devoted above all to the interpretation of texts".\textsuperscript{15} In spite of this original wish for narratology to be an autonomous branch of poetics rather than an instrument and foundation for criticism, it has resulted in quite a few important works on narratological criticism (such as Lanser's and Bal's). Prince himself agrees with this critical use of narratology. (This may at the same time be to justify the raison d'être of narratology at all in the 1990s, where the universalizing and scientific aspirations of structuralist narratology do indeed seem a thing of the past, as Brooke-Rose's attitude indicates). Concerning the status of narratology in relation to theory and criticism it needs to be viewed in a historical light, and I will get back to the question when considering the recent developments of narratology.

Narratology's object of study, 'narrative' has also been approached in various ways - different differentia specifica have in other words been emphasized. In an essay from 1980, originally a paper presented at the 1979 conference in Tel Aviv, David Lodge points out three different narratological foci.\textsuperscript{16} These are the narrated (story), the narrating (discourse), and the relationship between these (story and discourse). According to Lodge, the early works on narratology saw narrative as defined by its objects/events - that is, by its story - regardless of what medium it occurs in and the way in which it is narrated. These works were narrative grammar studies (Bremond, Greimas, Barthes, Todorov). Other narratologists saw narrative as a mode of presentation and therefore focused on the narrating. These narratologists emphasized the rhetorical analysis of fiction. Finally there were those narratologists who were interested in the relationship between story and discourse,

\textsuperscript{14} Seymour Chatman, 'What Can We Learn from Contextualist Narratology?'. Poetics Today, vol. 11, no. 2, 1990 Summer
\textsuperscript{15} Prince, 1990, 2
\textsuperscript{16} David Lodge, 'Analysis and Interpretation of the Realist Text' in Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (eds.), Modern Literary Theory: A Reader. 3rd ed., London; New York; Sydney; Auckland: Arnold, 1996
between the narrating and the narrated, and who tried to set up a poetics of fiction. It is difficult to distinguish between especially the last two foci (discourse and discourse/story), which can be seen from the fact that Lodge places Genette’s Narrative Discourse in the story-discourse camp, whereas Prince says that “Genette is perhaps the most eminent representative of this [narrative as narrative discourse] narratological tendency”.

These different foci arise from different traditions. The narratologists focusing on story were inspired by for instance the Russian theorist Propp and his work on the Russian folk tale. Those interested in narrative as narrative discourse could draw on the existing work on literary narrative including the studies of point of view done in the Anglo-American tradition by Henry James and Percy Lubbock and up to Wayne Booth, and by Käthe Friedemann and up to Käte Hamburger and Stanzel’s works in the 1950s from the German tradition. Lodge suggests that the works on narratology in the 60s and 70s were results of a ‘knowledge explosion’ resulting from the meeting of Anglo-American text-based New Criticism with European structuralist criticism. This explosion was felt in all three domains of narratology outlined above. The idea that narratology relies so much on the meeting of different traditions and theories from different parts of the world is important to keep in mind when considering the development of narratology over the last four decades. The story of Franz Stanzel is illustrative here.

In a lecture held on November 16, 1990 in Erlangen, Germany, Stanzel dates his initiation into a theoretically founded ‘Litteraturwissenschaft’ to 1950 when he discussed Wellek and Warren’s Theory of Literature from 1949 with students at Harvard. Together with his reading of German theorists like Käte Hamburger and Wolfgang Kayser this set off his career as a narratologist (‘Erzähltheoretiker’). In 1955 Stanzel published his Die typischen Erzählsituationen im Roman, which anticipated many of the insights to appear 15 to 20 years later in other parts of the world. This book was translated into English in 1971 as Narrative Situations in the Novel, which meant that it reached a larger group in the Anglo-American and French communities. In 1979 Théorie des Erzählens appeared, and in a review article in 1981 American theorist Dorrit Cohn brought this book into interplay with Genette’s Narrative Discourse, which had just been translated into English in 1980 from the original French

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17 Prince in The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism
Discours du récit, a part of Figures III from 1972.\textsuperscript{21} Théorie des Erzählers appeared in English as A Theory of Narrative in 1984, and in 1987 Seymour Chatman wrote a review essay on that.\textsuperscript{22} As Chatman points out in this essay, Stanzel’s contributions to narratology in the Anglo-American spheres were not widely acknowledged until 25 years after the first publication of Die typischen Erzählssituationen im Roman. The same goes for the knowledge of Stanzel in French theory. As Dorrit Cohn (who is obviously competent in English, French, and German) reflects:

When understood correctly, the nuclear typology of 1955 turns out to anticipate some basic ideas on narrative discourse developed by the Poétique group over a decade later, including the essential differentiation (universally credited to Genette) between vision and voice (‘who sees?’ versus ‘who speaks?’). Accordingly, those of us who had been working with Stanzel’s system prior to the publication of Communication 8 in 1966 had something of a sense of déjà vu, perhaps even of Beserwissen, as we watched the flowering of this discourse-oriented branch of the nouvelle critique - admiration for its outstanding analytic skills, elegance, and lucidity notwithstanding. (158)\textsuperscript{23}

In Narrative Discourse Revisited (published in French in 1983 and translated into English in 1988) Genette acknowledges that an attentive reading of Stanzel’s first book could have spared some ‘belated discoveries’ in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{24}

All this to show both the importance of German ‘Erzählforschung’ for the branch of narratology interested in narrative as narrative discourse,\textsuperscript{25} and the temporal displacements caused by the time span between the original publication of a theoretical work, its translation(s) and its critical response.\textsuperscript{26} When wanting to outline the history of narratology, especially in its early phases, it is clearly not enough to simply look at the dates of publication. (This is obviously not the case only for the discipline of narratology.) Research done within both the German, French and Anglo-American traditions have in various ways influenced the development of narratology.

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\textsuperscript{24} Gérard Genette, Narrative Discourse Revisited, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988, 114 (tr. of Nouveau discours du récit, 1983)
\textsuperscript{25} In Stanzel’s ‘Rückblick’ Wolfgang Kayser is likewise credited for the important insight in 1955 of the ‘Nichtidentität von Autor und fiktionalem Erzähler’ – a theoretical differentiation often credited to Wayne Booth in the Anglo-American world.
\textsuperscript{26} Käte Hamburger is another example of this. Die Logik der Dichtung was published in German in 1957, revised and expanded in 1966, translated to English (The Logic of Literature) in 1973 (the 1968 edition), to French (Logique des genres littéraires) in 1986 with a preface by Genette, which (the preface) was then translated into English by Dorrit Cohn to appear in the 1993 American edition.
Even though there will probably always be some kind of ‘delay’ in the spreading of new ideas, the more recent developments of narratology seem to spread faster and to cross continents and oceans more easily. This may partly be a result of the globalization that has taken place in recent years and the increasing use of electronic means of communication. The huge databases now available from most parts of the world make it easier to become aware of new ideas within the field and its neighboring disciplines. Together with the general emphasis on Theory which Culler outlines in his very short introduction to literary theory,\(^\text{27}\) this may be one of the reasons for what Herman in the introduction to *Narratology* calls ‘the second narratological knowledge explosion’, where narratology has “evolved, become intertwined, affected surrounding critico-theoretical trends and in turn been affected by them.”\(^\text{28}\) Whereas classical narratology can now be defined as a result of the first narratological knowledge explosion, and as such as the meeting of Anglo-American New Criticism and continental structuralism, post-classical narratology cannot as easily be defined as the meeting between two specific trends. Rather post-classical narratology must be considered as the meeting between classical narratology (with its different foci) and ‘something else’. This something else covers a wide range of disciplines, theories and approaches, as can be seen from the diversity in the essays in Herman’s anthology. Hence the plural narratologies in the title.

Herman does not date the second narratological knowledge explosion but it has been suggested that some important changes happened in and around 1984.\(^\text{29}\) From the French camp Hamon mentions this year as a year of change because of Paul Ricoeur, whose philosophical essays on time show a narratological approach. In *Time and Narrative* narratology meets philosophy and history. 1984 was also the year Peter Brooks published *Reading for the Plot*, a book in which narratology and Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis meet. This expansion of narratology into other fields of study does not mean that narrative or narratology still aspires for the universality connected with classical narratology. Hamon suggests that ‘The narratological hegemony’ of the period 1975-1980 (In France?) has been replaced by an understanding that “narrative is one mode of structural organization of semiotic objects among others; everything is not narrative; everything is not semiotics, and the same semiotic object can be ruled by several principles (descriptive, narrative, etc.)


\(^{28}\) David Herman (ed.), *Narratology: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999, 8

\(^{29}\) Philippe Hamon, ‘Narratology: Status and Outlook’. *Style*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1992 fall
according to dominants, or floating hierarchies to be defined." Concerning ‘literary narratology’ the interesting thing about this second narratological knowledge explosion is whether the interweaving of narratology with other fields of study will bring back to literary studies a more sophisticated narratology.

Herman’s 1999 anthology bears the title, Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis. In this book ‘Narratology’ has become ‘narratologies’ and classical narratology has become ‘post-classical narratology’. This is symptomatic of the recent development within narrative studies. Prince speaks of ‘modern narratology’ as different from classical narratology, and in his 1998 book Currie speaks of the transition from the formalist and structuralist narratology to ‘the new narratologies’. There seems to be a wish to reinvent the discipline, to sum up its achievements and goals and place them in a new framework (as also indicated by the title of Prince’s 1990s essay).

One can only guess at the reasons for these many attempts to (re-) discover the discipline. Hamon suggests that the present period (since the mid-80s) is a transitional period, an ‘Age of Audit’, an ‘Era of Critical Reexamination’; a period concerned with the rethinking of fundamental and underlying problems such as ‘literature’, ‘beauty’, ‘time’, etc. rather than with proposing new ideas to specific problems. The focus on narrative and narratology follows this pattern. In a similar way Prince reflects that perhaps the abundance of narratology-centered works since the mid-80s is a mere end-of-century symptom; a ‘stock-taking activity’.

The 1979 Tel Aviv conference, ‘Synopsis 2: Narrative Theory and Poetics of Fiction’ – has later been described by Bal as a turning point in the discipline of narratology. Many of the papers presented at that conference appeared in Poetics Today 1980-1981. Approximately ten years after this conference, two special issues of Poetics Today (11:2 summer 1990 and 11:4 winter 1990) titled ‘Narratology Revisited’ appeared. In these issues various suggestions were made concerning the status and future of narratology. Today, ten years later with Herman’s anthology published in the magic year of 1999, this need for stocktaking seems indeed to be there. The ‘Narratology Revisited’ editions of Poetics Today in 1990 were very much an examination of the status of narratology-ten-years-after (the conference in 1979), and Herman’s anthology seems to function in the same way, only that

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30 Ibid. 364
32 Prince, 1990, 4
the focus is now narratology-twenty-years-after.34 (In Germany another anthology has just been published, Grenzüberschreitungen: Narratologie im Kontext.35)

The most interesting thing about this reinvention or rethinking of classical narratology is that it does not only lament or rejoice the ‘death of narratology’ but proposes new ways of thinking about narrative influenced by ‘the second narratological knowledge explosion’. These new ways of thinking, these new narratologies, differ significantly from each other depending on what it is that classical narratology (in its different forms) has met with.

Despite the plurality of post-classical narratology (or -ies) Herman still sees one ‘broader reconfiguration of the narratological landscape’ that reappears in the different versions of it. This reconfiguration concerns a change from text-centered and formal models to models that are both formal and functional, a change from form to form-in-context (This reconfiguration is also seen in the title of the German anthology). This means that narrative interpretation has been included into post-classical narratologies, and the focus has shifted from form alone to “a complex interplay between narrative form and the contexts of narrative interpretation, broadly construed” (8). There are various ways in which these interpretative strategies can be approached (feminist, ideological, philosophical, ethical, etc.), but they all show the interdependence of the three narratological areas outlined by Lodge, “It is not that Lodge confused categorically distinct approaches. To the contrary: his tripartite scheme divides up research tasks whose interconnectedness it is easier to see now than when Lodge was writing.”36 Hence, this shift in post-classical narratology erases the distinction between a story-based narratology and discourse-based narratology. These two categories are useful with a view to an understanding of the history of narratology, but their autonomy no longer exists (if it ever did).

Currie suggests three underlying characteristics of what he here calls ‘contemporary narratology’: diversification, deconstruction, and politicization. These three characteristics have been important for the development of narratology since the mid-1980s, and they can help explain the configuration Herman describes. The diversification of narratology into other areas than literary studies has been touched upon already. The deconstruction and politicization of narratology are explained by Currie as a transition from

34 Herman’s use of Lodge’s 1980 article, originally presented as a paper at the Tel Aviv conference, is an illustration of this.
35 Walter Grünzweig and Andreas Solbach (eds.), Grenzüberschreitungen: Narratologie im Kontext = Transcending boundaries narratology in context. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1999
36 Herman, 8-9
discovery to invention, from coherence to complexity, and from poetics to politics. The transition from discovery to invention shows a move away from the scientific assumption of narratology as an objective science towards recognition that any reading affects or constructs its object. This affects not only the status of narratology as a discipline but also the conception of narrative. Narrative is no longer considered a structure that can be approached objectively, but something constructed. Currie mentions the way in which the building metaphor for narrative found in classical narratology has been replaced by movement metaphors (such as structuration, structuring, process, play and difference) in contemporary narratology.

The transition from coherence to complexity likewise shows a change from an understanding of narrative as coherent and stable towards an understanding of narrative as contradictory and complex. Contemporary narratology refuses to reduce narrative to a coherent system and instead focuses on the contradictory aspects of narrative. The transition from poetics to politics concerns primarily the opposition between formalism and historicism. Currie explains how historicism has always been at war with formalism in the US, and how historicists saw deconstruction in 1966 as “the next incarnation of the anti-historicist approach” despite the fact that there were common denominators between historicist and deconstructive approaches, such as the conception of the subject as part of larger social systems. Furthermore, deconstruction was based on a critique of structuralism’s synchronic and ahistorical analysis. These transitions show how standardization has been replaced by pluralism.

Narratology has changed exactly because the values of standardisation have been replaced in literary studies by the values of pluralism and irreducible difference: not only difference between texts but difference between readers.

So what’s the point of this (or these) post-classical narratology (-ies)? The answer to this question ultimately depends on the ways in which the contexts of narrative interpretation mentioned by Hermon are approached. Regardless of these, however, post-classical narratology will always in one way or another relate to classical narratology. Herman suggests three ways it can do so. Postclassical narratologies can 1. test the possibilities/limits of classical narratologies regarding what sort of narrative it can and cannot illuminate (that is, they examine the corpus of narratives composing the object for narratology) , 2. enrich, when necessary, the classical models with post-classical models (with the aim of coming to

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37 Currie, 4
38 Currie, 14
terms with aspects of narrative discourse that classical narratology could not account for). 3. show their relevance “not just for the study of literary and narrative theory, but also for critical practice at large”. 39

The first kind of relation concerns the diversification of post-classical narratology, and it allows for a broadening of the definition of narrative into not only other media such as film, painting, and music, but also disciplines such as history, psychology, philosophy, linguistics, anthropology and sociology, economics, medicine, etc. “Anthropologists and sociologists, sources of our earliest insights into stories, returned with a new perspective gained from the narratology they originally inspired”. 40 At the same time this relationship also questions how broadly ‘narrative’ can be understood without losing its relevance, if Hamon’s notion that not all is narrative is accepted. Within the category of narrative as verbal narrative there may also be texts that cannot be accounted for using the classical models, and this ‘problem’ leads onto relationship 2.

In order to solve the problems where aspects of narrative discourse are left unexplained (and perhaps unexplainable) by classical narratology it may be necessary to rethink some of the classical models in the light of what was referred to above as the second narratological knowledge explosion. To do so, it may also be necessary to reexamine some of the (explicit or implicit) theoretical assumptions underlying the classical models. The need for this rethinking of classical models can be seen as a result of the transition from coherence to complexity.

Finally there is relationship 3. Post-classical narratology should be relevant not only for the theories of narrative but for the reading of narrative as well. This critical dimension is important to several narratologists such as Stanzel in the 1990s, Bal and Rimmon-Kenan in the 1990s, though important in different ways. The emphasis on the critical dimension of post-classical narratology may be seen as a break with classical narratology, which, at least in some of its forms, attempted a theory which was significantly not a criticism. But to some the victory of theory over criticism simply seems to have gone a step too far. 41 This issue of theory and criticism is obviously related to the more general question of the status of Theory within the field of literary studies – and of literature within the field of Theory. The important thing to notice in this relation is that post-classical

39 Herman, 3
41 Stanzel, 1990
narratology seems to want to distance itself from this Überdruss an Theorie that has come to characterize parts of literary studies and be of relevance for both theory and criticism.

The methodology applied in this project is post-classical narratology as it is introduced here. It relies on and re-examines aspects of classical narratology in the light of insight from recent primarily philosophical and linguistic theories (even though the distinction between the various disciplines is difficult to maintain) of the subject and the self. It agrees with the shift in focus from ‘form-only’ to a focus on the interplay between form and the act of reading and interpretation. Concerning Herman’s first kind of relation regarding the broadening of the definition of narrative this project offers little challenge. The novels dealt with here are canonized works within literary studies. The second kind of relation is more interesting here. There are aspects of these novels that classical narratology cannot account for. The first-person narrator and the use of self-reflexivity are crucial for the production of meaning in these novels, and the relationship between them cannot really be grasped with a classical narratological approach. The third kind of relation is evident in this project I hope. The aim of the theoretic-methodological considerations is not only a to reflect theoretically on the genre of the self-reflexive first-person novel, but also to establish a method for reading a particular kind of novel. In other words, this project’s aim is both theoretical and critical, as Stanzel understands these words, and narratology is considered both a way of showing how narrative is a particular mode of knowledge and a method for analysis and interpretation.