

## Narratological Praxis

Arnaud Schmitt

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

This English translation has not been published in printed form/Cette traduction anglaise n'a pas été publiée sous forme imprimée.

- <sup>1</sup> In *L'empire de la narratologie, ses défis et ses faiblesses* (The Empire of Narratology, Its Challenges and Weaknesses), Raphaël Baroni (2016) took on the formidable task of painting a detailed and comprehensive picture of the status of narratological studies today. His thorough knowledge of the subject enabled him to grasp the historical developments of a discipline that was not always considered as such, and describe its main challenges. Five key issues are highlighted: the definite decline of narratology at the turn of the 21st century, which followed a golden age in the seventies; the entropic development of narrative studies—which are much broader than narratology—mainly because of the ubiquity of the narrative as an object of multidisciplinary study (“the empire of narrative”); the undeniable ethical implications arising from entropic change; and lastly, the need for narratology to exist as an institutional space and discipline in its own right rather than a mere “toolbox.”
- <sup>2</sup> In my opinion, to dispense with a reflection on the five aspects highlighted by Baroni would amount to killing narratology off in the near or distant future, or at any rate restricting it to what it has practically become anyway: a field of research limited not because of a lack of scientific depth, but simply because of the few practitioners of the discipline. The investigation of narratology is valuable not least because of its timeliness, given that narrative theory, narrative studies and cognitive poetics seem to have relegated narratology and its inherent formalism to the status of a stale, obsolete discipline.
- <sup>3</sup> Rather than disputing the observations in Baroni's article, which I largely agree with anyway, I would like to elaborate on three of the five abovementioned themes: the historical dimension, changing frontiers and institutional identity of narratology.

## The extent and history of the narratology empire

- 4 Baroni's assertion that narratology "enjoyed its heyday during the structuralist movement, broadly between 1965 and 1975" (ibid.: 220) cannot be disputed, but requires clarification. First, we can agree on the fact that this comment applies predominantly to France. While narratology across the Atlantic emerged around the same time—the founding text of American narratology, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* by Wayne C. Booth, was published in 1961—it experienced a different dynamic and its fate was not tied to that of structuralism.<sup>1</sup> Accurately determining the chronology of a theoretical movement such as narratology is fraught with the usual difficulties that quickly arise when, for example, attempting to gage its intensity through time: should the emphasis be qualitative (major works published defining the contours of the discipline), or quantitative (number of relevant works published within a given period)?<sup>2</sup> There is also the corollary problem of accessing such data. As stated above, Baroni positions the peak in intensity around 1965–1975, when the first major works were published on the subject (by Tzvetan Todorov, Gérard Genette and Roland Barthes, among others). While this seems an obvious thing to do, it does suggest an emphasis on quality.
- 5 Another pitfall is the difficulty of comparing the development of narratology across countries, in particular because of the variability in the scope of research and differences in academic and editorial policies. The influence of the object studied on the narratological tools<sup>3</sup> used should also be taken into consideration, since it is often noted that narratology would probably have been different if Gérard Genette's literary ideal had not been the works of Marcel Proust. The narrative models inherent to American literature are different than those found in French literature, even though there are similarities of course. The means used to observe texts are determined by the texts themselves, as is obviously desirable. While I do not have specific data to support my argument, I would suggest that compared to France, the intensity reached by the development of narratology in the United States was somewhat lower, but more stable and continuous. In other words, narratology seems to have disseminated across the Atlantic at a sustained pace, but with lower intensity and through only a few academic institutions, including the University of Chicago and Ohio University, the International Society for the Study of Narrative (ISSN), whose identity has remained thoroughly American despite calling itself "international," and the journal *Narrative*. Moreover, even though American narratology has never lost sight of European narratological developments (Genette's concepts have been discussed by most renowned American narratologists, including James Phelan), American narratology soon carved its own path away from structuralism, facilitated in this by its founding work and proximity to other literary theories:
- "The keystone of this approach is the understanding that narrative is predominantly and essentially an act of communication. In the early stages of its development, that is in the 1960s and early 1970s, this approach clearly overlapped with Booth's influential *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) and so-called reader-response theories" (Segal, 2015: n.pag.).
- 6 Unsurprisingly, Phelan defined his own approach to narratology as essentially rhetorical. He is clear about Booth's legacy in his work and establishes a direct link between Booth's narratological approach and his own, which he describes as rhetorical narratology: "Viewing narrative as having the purpose of communicating knowledge,

feelings, values and beliefs is viewing narrative as rhetoric” (Phelan, 1996: 18). It is quite likely that Genette himself shared this vision—to which he came paradoxically closest in his diptych study<sup>4</sup> on art—although for the most part, his own narratological studies, whether formal or diachronic (specifically the history of narratological attributes), do not reflect this view. Moreover, whether such an essential work in the American narratological landscape as Peter J. Rabinowitz’s *Before Reading* (1987) really belongs to narratology according to Genette’s approach is open to question. It may fit in better with the Constance school theories. For French narratologists, what is commonly known as reader-oriented narratology bears more resemblance to reader-response theory than to the formal study of a text’s narratological processes. American and structuralist<sup>5</sup> narratology should thus be viewed as distinct—rather than opposed—and the attention placed by American narratology on reader responses may have contributed to the emergence of cognitive poetics, since the exploration of reading and its impact on a text is likely to lead to discussing cognition. I will come back to this key point further on.

- 7 We can thus assume that there is not one but several approaches to narratology, which does not make summarizing its history any easier. This has recently led some scholars to question the historical dichotomy perceived by many practitioners of this discipline:
- “We think that the problems that arise with the classical/postclassical distinction can hardly be resolved by refining the dichotomy in any particular way and that there are limits to its theoretical soundness and applications. Indeed, the features that qualify the difference between classical and postclassical are also markers of the problems encountered by such a distinction: (1) definitional looseness of the terms; (2) lack of theoretical insight [...]”(Passalacqua, Pianzola, 2016: 196)
- 8 From a practical perspective, as I have come to realize, particularly at conferences, these two terms refer to different domains of narratology depending on the speaker. However, this dichotomy is not so loosely defined as Franco Passalacqua and Federico Pianzola suggest; instead, it oscillates predominately between two currents: a chronological definition (classical structuralist narratology and all forms of narratology from the 1980s onwards) and a methodological definition (structuralist narratology and narratology that collides with reader responses, in simplistic terms). As already stated, Booth was somewhat postclassical at a time when classicism did not yet exist in narratology. Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik (2010: 2) present a similar argument in the introduction to *Postclassical Narratology*, a book they edited: “Yet, one could argue that these representatives of classical narratology [Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, Claude Bremond and Tzvetan Todorov, as well as Algirdas J. Greimas, Gerald Prince and Seymour Chatman] already started to drift away from the structuralist model, if ever so slightly and imperceptibly.” Returning to David Herman’s concept, they nevertheless argue that postclassical narratology differs from classical narratology in four ways, thus affirming the merits of the distinction: 1) it refers to works that address the possible flaws in the original paradigm; 2) it suggests methodological (e.g., linguistic or psychoanalytical) extensions to the classical model; 3) thematic extensions (e.g., feminist or postcolonial); 4) or even media extensions (e.g., film or the graphic novel) (ibid.: 3). Though these categories are actual directions for investigation, they raise the obvious question of why they should not simply be referred to as narratology. Some of them offer or apply openly structuralist models of analysis, but even when they do not, they sometimes seem far removed from the concerns of classical and even postclassical narratology as it is commonly understood.

While Alber and Fludernik offer convincing arguments, these appear in the introduction to a book that, as its name suggests, emphasizes the difference between these two periods, or more accurately, these two paradigms of narratology. Again, however, these developments in narratology could well be considered to be *integrated*. Instead of elaborating further on this dichotomy, which has been extensively commented on, I would like to come back to the definitional uncertainty of which it is the symptom, and which has led to concern about whether narratology is able to absorb other disciplines without losing its identity, or at any rate, its cohesiveness as a discipline. I would first like to return to the history of narratology one last time, and indirectly, to its definition. As I have said, the history of narratology cannot simply be described in geographical terms (even though it has geographical coherence as I have shown) or in terms of classicism versus postclassicism. It can, however, be represented along a disciplinary axis between two poles consisting of structuralist and formalistic narratology, and reader-oriented narratology (which I am reluctant, in view of the way in which it has evolved, to restrict to the American continent, given that a scholar such as Baroni seems to fit this current perfectly). These two poles are far from being opposites. According to dialectical logic, they qualify what the academic community understands to be narratology, enabling a range of approaches while maintaining a paradigmatic cohesiveness. Unfortunately, these two poles sometimes struggle to contain innovative and extremely promising theoretical forays, which in my opinion, calls into question the concept of narratology itself.

## The frontiers of narratology

- 9 Can narratology be cognitive? Is there such a category as cognitive narratology? Could cognitive narratology even merge with neuroesthetics? The fact that I can ask these questions—and they are legitimate questions to ask since the concept of cognitive narratology appears in a large number of publications as shown by a quick internet search—suggests that the many methodological extensions that characterize postclassical narratology in the opinion of Alber and Fludernik, do exist; if it still qualifies as such, narratology defined in this way is often postformalist. This impression of dispersion seems to be shared by Jan C. Meister (2013) who, in his definition of narratology for *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, stresses the importance of both thematic and methodological extensions. For Meister, the historical development of narratology is mainly characterized by its study of increasingly varied narrative patterns, especially in fields other than literature:

“Dominated by structuralist approaches at its beginning, narratology has evolved into a variety of theories, concepts, and analytic procedures. Its concepts and models are widely used as heuristic tools, and narratological theorems play a central role in the exploration and modeling of our ability to produce and process narratives in a multitude of forms, media, contexts, and communicative practices.”

- 10 The above notion of dispersion obviously has negative connotations, and while it does imply a definite shift in the methodological and thematic boundaries of narratology as they were envisioned by its founders, there are no such reservations in Meister’s quote. Despite its brevity, his definition emphasizes the versatility of narratology as a tool. The fact that narratology can be used *elsewhere* (as part of other methods or for other themes) could actually be its main strength as well as its salvation. Its use elsewhere is an issue in that for narratology to be exportable, it has to accept the possibility of being

just a “toolbox”—a problematic aspect highlighted by Baroni (2016: 227). We cannot categorically say whether the transformation of narratology from being a discipline in itself to a set of tools ready for use by other disciplines is a good or bad thing. Both aspects could coexist, which seems to me to be the case for now: narratology could then tolerate a degree of adulteration to some of its tools since it would still retain a so-called historical disciplinary core. However, this “exportability” could ultimately backfire, and when combined with methodological or thematic dispersion, it could kill narratology as a unified concept (which survives for the time being despite the split into two historical periods, as mentioned above), leaving behind just a few narratological tools. This is a real threat. But, there is another, greater one, also highlighted by Baroni: the dominance of the narrative turn. This poses the opposite issue: the propensity of narratology not to export its tools, but to import different ones.

- 11 Narrative is now everywhere, and has been for the last twenty years. However, its influence is not as great as was once thought, at least according to some theorists. Baroni cites as an example Galen Strawson’s famous article *Against Narrativity* (2004: 430), in which Strawson makes a distinction between narrative and episodic ‘self-experience’; he claims to be an episodic person and admits that he did not tend to see life in narrative terms. Paul Bloom (2012) adopts a different reasoning, but reaches similar conclusions, while also expressing skepticism about the alleged central role played by narrative in the construction of identity and our everyday cognitive actions. Bloom echoes several of Jonathan Kramnick’s (2011) criticisms (while also highlighting certain flaws in his reasoning) against “literary Darwinism”—a version of narrativity in which narrative, and literature more generally, is viewed as an integral part of our metaphysical structure—stressing the lack of scientific basis for the notion that our capacity for narrative is a result of the evolution of human thought, especially in its most extreme version, which sees narrative everywhere (ibid.: 391). Similarly, Steven Pinker (1994: 57–58) attacked the linguistic turn, condemning the <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/02/09/magazine/the-tyranny-of-the-yale-critics.html> impulsion towards a sovereignty of language, which had become the obligatory cognitive basis of any act of knowledge, and restoring the fundamental difference between thought and language. The abovementioned literary Darwinism proceeds from a similar reductionist approach. In an essential article “*Narratologie et sciences cognitives: une relation problématique*” (Narratology and Cognitive Science: A Problematic Relation), Marie-Laure Ryan (2015) discusses this kind of reductionist approach and looks back on three decades of incursions by the literary field into what was until then totally unfamiliar scientific territory. She also discusses this determination to see narratives everywhere, which she calls “inflationary”:

“According to the inflationary theories, it is the innate possession of a narrative faculty, something equivalent to Chomsky’s idea of a universal grammar, that allows us to have a self, build a folk psychology, store memories, or capture the felt quality—the *qualia*, to use philosophical jargon—of personal experience.” (ibid.: 9)

- 12 Ryan goes beyond highlighting the narrative inflationary trend; she emphasizes the evident limits of what is commonly known as cognitive poetics, stressing the naivety of the humanities in relation to scientific data and their interpretation, to summarize her point briefly, as well as our inability to assess the validity of the scientific findings that we still use in our publications. She then explicitly discusses cognitive narratology, a theme of particular interest in this article and which she judges equally harshly:

“But this borrowing from the right side [scientific concepts] does not go as far as adopting the rigors of experimentation: the kind of work that passes as ‘cognitive’ narratology remains in spirit strictly speculative, and many narratologists interested in questions of cognition claim to be totally bored with experimental approaches.” (ibid.: 6)

- 13 I find Ryan’s arguments to be convincing despite the fact that I have supported the idea that cognitive science has an undeniable contribution to make to literary theory (Schmitt, 2012). In this particular case, however, she switches her attention from cognitive poetics to cognitive narratology. We will briefly come back to the distinction between these two fields. Even though they are often interchangeable in the minds of those who use the terms, Ryan rightly makes a distinction between them. She goes on to demonstrate another limit of cognitive narratology:

“Furthermore, unlike the ‘hard’ versions of cognitive science, cognitive narratology does not want to sacrifice an interest in texts, even though it often treats them as a ‘tutor texts’, that is, as an instrument for the demonstration of ideas borrowed from the right side.” (ibid: 6)

- 14 Such obstacles are both undeniable and substantial. However, in my opinion, the most important thing is the inaccessibility of scientific data, the only thing that could give a cohesiveness to cognitive narratology. It would be valuable, for example, to measure the cognitive or emotional impact in a reader of such things as a change in narrative procedure or focus, a sudden change from homodiegetic to heterodiegetic narration, or the reading of the same passage narrated successively according to these two forms of narration. Such scientific experiments would give cognitive narratology a genuine disciplinary cohesiveness: the subject of study would still unquestionably pertain to cognitive narratology, and the scientific aspect would allow a deeper investigation into what I have called the reader-response pole of the narratological axis, which would retain its integrity.
- 15 Like Ryan (2015: 6), I believe that importing cognitive science into literary theory is a kind of “interdisciplinary bricolage that takes ideas from the right and the left.”<sup>6</sup> But, unlike her, I remain convinced that this is not a problem in itself; or at least, that the risk is worth taking. “Interdisciplinary bricolage” can sometimes teach us things that disciplinary cohesiveness is no longer able to provide. We just have to accept that the conclusions that we potentially derive from cognitive poetics remain, initially at least, relative or less certain than, say, those reached through the study of different narration modes as carried out by Genette; in any case, the issues and objectives are different. The important thing here is to renew the scope of literary study, even if this means carrying out a little “bricolage.”
- 16 Nevertheless, many aspects of cognitive poetics or so-called narrative theory do not, in my opinion, fall within the scope of narratology—and this is where my analysis differs from that of Baroni, who uses narratology and narrative theory interchangeably—even if in some cases it is difficult to see the difference. One example is the study of visualization processes during reading. This essential area, which is not at all narratological, has long been neglected by literary study, despite its influence and interference with a text’s meaning and content. Another example is the phenomena of attention and inattention and the areas of high and low intensity in a narrative, as well as, to quote Baroni (2016: 221) again, “the use of fiction, the immersive experience in the narrated world, the empathy felt for characters, the ethical assessment of their actions, etc.” Moreover, I remain skeptical about the possible narratological

applications of the very broad notion of narrative typification—inspired by the work of Alfred Schutz (1962), Roger Schank and Robert Abelson (1977) (and their schema and scripts) as well as George Lakoff (1987) (with his idealized cognitive models), to name but a few examples—since typification is often cultural and escapes the narrow limits of the narrative being read. Many other aspects of cognitive poetics (one of which is the study of the feelings inspired by diegetic structures) confirm the field's outward perspective. However, narratology's essential trait and irreducible core is its inbound perspective: the close reading of the text. Narratology remains shackled to the close reading of the text. Therein lie its strength and limitations, which Phelan and Rabinowitz fully grasped when they adopted theory practice as a method of analysis, and which Phelan (1996: 89) eloquently described: "That is, rather than simply invoke rhetorical theory to 'solve' the interpretive problems of the story, I would like the theory itself to be open to revision or complication by Hemingway's story [which Phelan studied in this chapter]." The close interpretation of a passage no longer serves only to illustrate a particular theoretical strategy, but this interpretation can also be deployed to revise the theory applied to the reading of the story; practice and theory thus influence each other. At a time when the identity of narratology was directly threatened by the rise of cross-disciplinary practices and the increasing reach of narrative theory, Phelan and Rabinowitz reinforced the very specificity of narratological practice, while allowing it to transcend formalist study, including by giving it a rhetorical dimension.

- 17 The foundation of narratology rests as much (if not more) in practice as in theory. It should be content with the study of specific texts; in other words, it should be specific. This may limit its interest in some cases, when say, at a conference, we attend the presentation of the study of a text that we have not read and whose issues we are not familiar with, or whose narrative features cannot be transferred to our own literary area. Admittedly, an analysis can be admired for its brilliance, but if it is not useful for our own research, it can be difficult to stay focused.
- 18 The field of narratology remains narrow and so it should because to put it simply, the practice of it is narrow. Narratological theory is underpinned by narratological *praxis*. At a time when transdisciplinary initiatives are encouraged (a good thing, in my opinion), it may seem less appealing because of the extent to which it is determined by the text—its *raison d'être* since its origins—by a text in particular, with its innate narrative structure, invariably different from one text to another (even though general tendencies can always be identified, with the loss of precision that this implies). Narrative theory, which can ultimately be applied to all the likely fields, can afford to take the risk of generalization, working on broad narrative models, and non-specific cognitive patterns in the case of cognitive poetics. Taking occasional examples to illustrate an analytical approach differs from the narrow analysis described above, as we all know that such examples are selected for a specific purpose dictated by what we want to say, rather than the other way around. This approach is necessarily more inclusive, allowing more scholars to adopt it and preventing scientific debate from being constrained or impeded by the idiosyncrasies of a particular narrative form. Theory practice places these idiosyncrasies at the center of narratological practice, for any theoretical elaboration is conditioned by close observation of the narrative attributes of a particular text. I am convinced that Phelan and Rabinowitz have thus captured the essence of classical and postclassical narratology.



- 19 Lastly, the threats facing narratology as described by Baroni (2016: 220) in the first part of his article are very real and can be summed up in these terms: resisting the “narrative wave” and refusing to engage with other fields at a time when narrative analysis reaches beyond literary boundaries to other narrative forms—the so-called “empire of narrative” (ibid.: 221)—is perilous, but it is just as dangerous to lose sight of its primary focus, the literary text (I include the graphic novel in this category) and the practice of its close reading.

## The teaching of narratology in universities

- 20 I would like to end this discussion on a more subjective point mainly informed by my personal feelings and experiences and which concerns the institutional status of narratology. While exceptions exist mainly on an international level (ISSN and the European Narratology Network (ENN)), but also in France (École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS) and the Laboratoire interdisciplinaire récits, cultures, sociétés (LIRCES) in Nice), as listed by Baroni, it is also true that a relatively young discipline like narratology is showing signs of running out of steam. Does this mean, however, that it has “receded into the limbo reserved for academic fads, becoming an abandoned territory that is visited only as part of a cruise down the river of past ideas?” (ibid.: 220) This is probably true for France despite the few pockets of resistance mentioned above, but not necessarily for other European countries. There are indeed a few vibrant exceptions, such as Germany, Denmark and Switzerland. Narratology seems to have reached a cruising speed in the United States, advancing not at breakneck speed, but at a steady pace, as I have said. Any reduction in that pace would mainly be due to a lack of interest in literature in general, rather than in narratology itself. Again, we should not forget that at present the fate of narratology is bound to the literary object, the study of which remains its original purpose. While it may of course be applied to visual and audiovisual narratives as shown by the emergence of transmedial narratology, potentially allowing it to survive, for the time being it is difficult to imagine narratology without literature.
- 21 Phelan’s comments as quoted by Baroni seem to me to describe the context in France perfectly. Whatever method of analysis we support (narratology or another method), the study of literature is mainly carried out in universities, specifically in the modern literature, classics or modern languages departments of their humanities faculties. As is happening across the Atlantic and in most countries offering university education, “literature departments remain tied to the paradigm of literary history as the primary principle for organizing knowledge” (Phelan, *in*: Baroni, 2016: 220). A literature scholar in France is identified first by a geographical area and second by a historical period. A specific example is provided by my own situation: I am a scholar in contemporary American literature (in French, “littérature américaine contemporaine”), American literature is thus the first criterion to define my specialty, and contemporary is the second. This classification suggests that there is bound to be a stronger link between two American authors, even if one comes from the West Coast and the other from the East Coast or if they are separated by several decades, than between a British author and an American author belonging to the same generation and connected to the same literary movement (e.g., John Barth and John Fowles for postmodernism). In my opinion, despite this logic being badly flawed, it still dictates the way in which

university teachers and researchers in literature are recruited in France; this corresponds to Baroni's "monological identity" (ibid.: 229). Moreover, when our identity is tied to the geographical area of a specific profile for which we were recruited, it can be quite complicated to be considered for positions with other profiles. The current context, with fewer teacher and researcher positions available combined with the dwindling interest in literature, is not conducive to greater flexibility in the specification of profiles and competencies. Sadly, narratology appears unimportant in comparison with these concerns, and being identified as a narratologist is a luxury, as Phelan goes on to say, or a secondary matter in my opinion, when considering the progression of a career in the humanities. The fact that the study of literature in France at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is still governed by geographical considerations rather by how this study is carried out may be cause for pessimism about the future of narratology.

- 22 I have never felt that there has been a golden age for narratology (though I began studying literature when it was supposed to have entered a decline at the start of the nineties). But for places of excellence such as the Collège de France or the EHESS, which do not have to follow the segmented system of the French National Board of Universities (CNU) and, as a result, enjoy a great deal of freedom in matters of theory, it is rare to attend a literature conference in France on any theme and have the opportunity to listen to a literary analysis guided by narratology principles. Indisputably, the main analytical strategy in France for literary study remains the archetypal and thematic approach, combined with context-based historical considerations for more classic works. A few years ago, I co-organized a conference on mad narrators—a theme typical of narratology—with the reference text addressing the often discussed issue of the reliability of the narrative agent; yet, surprisingly, very few participants tackled the subject from a narratological perspective. The *modus operandi* of such scientific events is invariably the same since the beginning of my academic career and consists of applying the conference theme to our own research area, by which I mean a geographical area, or simply to an author or a literary movement.

## Conclusion

- 23 Being known as a narratologist is a bit of a lost cause in terms of professional visibility or more pragmatically, for getting a job as a university teacher and researcher. It is far more preferable to be seen as an expert in a particular author or specific period in a country's literary history. This has always struck me as peculiar because such specialization in no way guarantees a thorough knowledge of the narratological mechanisms within a given work nor of the meaning, affects and percepts it generates; in my opinion, even a thematic approach should include a narratological strategy. Obviously, many colleagues disagree with this statement. Is this opposition growing? While it is a difficult to answer this question, one thing seems certain: narratological approaches are rare outside the places and publications already mentioned, even though there are numerous conferences and day events on the study of literature, and fiction more generally. Moreover, the relative lack of interest towards literature, including among younger generations, may create tension within the community of literary scholars, prompting them to simplify the strategies used for analyzing texts and focus on what they may perceive as fundamental: the requirements of the

competitive examinations for teaching in secondary education, which focus on a historical and thematic approach to literature (bar a few exceptions).

- 24 The question, therefore, comes down to how we should ensure that there is room for narratology in the French academic landscape for the humanities and social sciences. Baroni's remedies are essential: creating a section within CNU for literary theory, or if this is not possible, creating teacher and researcher positions with profiles in literary theory within existing sections and including narratological aspects in the requirements of competitive examinations. If these steps are not taken, there are grounds to be pessimistic about the future of this discipline, which continues to offer a few scholars in France and many more in other countries not so much a purpose as a reason for their inquiry. Undeniably, the fate of narratology remains tied to university politics, and this may be its chief limitation. While this may seem to apply to many other subjects, disciplines and theories taught in universities, I am not convinced that it does. While it is true that the sciences simplistically referred to as "hard" require command of a language utterly different than doxastic language and can only spread through *doxa* by being popularized or radically simplified, the humanities have succeeded in maintaining a degree of contact with a non-academic audience without heinous concessions. This is evidenced by the popularity occasionally enjoyed by history or sociology books and literary or philosophical essays, which summarize a body of research to make it more palatable and understandable. While their scientific status is far from being unanimously recognized, the humanities have retained the privilege of being able to engage with *doxa* in a shared language and export some of their concepts. Unfortunately for narratology, it has one of the lowest potentials for exportability of all the disciplines that make up the humanities, for the following reasons: its purpose is not to reflect on the society we live in, and its discourse on literary attributes is not thematic, and cannot be easily generalized; its vocabulary is more technical than other approaches to literary analysis; and, beyond producing ideas, it develops concepts with a pragmatic purpose and which can only be applied to the study of literary texts (and recently, fiction in a broad sense). In other words, narratology is predominantly an (academic) practice, which for all the reasons mentioned above and in Baroni's article, is running out of steam. Its influence is constrained by the current academic landscape, which in France at least, is not particularly auspicious. For this reason, we can be somewhat pessimistic about its future.

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## NOTES

1. The deconstruction wave that swept through Yale and later through other leading American universities in the 1970s and 1980s, along with the "French theory" label lumping together philosophers and literature theorists, led to a notable difference in the perception of narratology in the United States and in Europe, or at least to a blurring of boundaries.
2. This creates another hurdle because of the lack of disciplinary clarity of a number of theoretical works.

3. “Genette’s *Discours du récit* (Narrative Discourse), which applies exclusively to the works of Proust, is an attempt to build a ‘technology of narrative discourse’ in Genette’s own words (O’Kelly, 2012: n.pag.).
  4. *L’Œuvre de l’art : immanence et transcendance* (The Work of Art: Immanence and Transcendence, 1994) and *L’Œuvre de l’art : la relation esthétique* (The Work of Art: the Aesthetic Relation, 1997).
  5. In my opinion, it is preferable to define this second current by its formalist approach rather than according to geographical criteria, since European narratology seems to be less consistent in its approach than its American counterpart.
  6. Here Ryan seems to refer ironically to what David Herman (2003: 5) called “the cross-disciplinary narrative turn.”
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## ABSTRACTS

In this article, I would like to comment on three aspects developed by Raphaël Baroni in his article “L’Empire de la narratologie, ses défis et ses faiblesses” (The Empire of Narratology, Its Challenges and Weaknesses), namely narratology’s historical background, borders and influence within (mostly French) universities. First, it is my contention that, rather than being geographical, narratology’s historical evolution is bipolar: since its origins, it has oscillated between two poles that determine its existence: formalism and reader-response theory. I then suggest that the reader-oriented narratology pole has led the discipline to extend its boundaries to import new analytical tools from other fields, such as cognitive studies. However, to maintain a certain cohesiveness, narratology must not stray away from the practice that established its existence: the close reading of the text. Lastly, I demonstrate that for structural reasons, as mentioned at the end of the article, the influence of narratology in the French humanities has never been so precarious, and is threatened by the “geographical logic” structuring literary studies in France.

Je reviens sur trois aspects développés par Raphaël Baroni dans « L’Empire de la narratologie, ses défis et ses faiblesses » : l’histoire de cette discipline, ses frontières et sa place à l’université (principalement française). Dans un premier temps, je m’efforce de démontrer que plus que géographique, sa logique historique est bipolaire ; selon moi, la narratologie est définie par les deux pôles qui déterminent sa cohérence disciplinaire depuis plusieurs décennies : elle oscille en effet, selon l’approche que l’on revendique, entre le formalisme et la théorie de la réception. J’avance ensuite que ce pôle appelé par les américains « *reader-oriented* » est celui qui a mené la narratologie à élargir ses frontières afin d’intégrer des outils d’analyse provenant d’autres champs, telles que les sciences cognitives. Néanmoins, afin de ne pas perdre sa cohérence disciplinaire, la narratologie ne doit pas perdre de vue la *praxis* qui la sous-tend, l’analyse étroite du texte. Enfin, je démontre que, pour diverses raisons structurelles, la place de la narratologie française à l’Université n’a jamais été aussi fragile, et reste menacée par la « logique géographique » qui structure les études littéraires en France.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** narratologie, théorie littéraire, formalisme, théorie de la réception, enseignement de la narratologie

**Keywords:** narratology, literary theory, formalism, reader-oriented narratology, teaching of narratology

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