My Narratology

An Interview with Gerald Prince

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

Prince: That's a difficult question to answer. I suppose it would be bad form to mention one of my own pieces and there are so many other good ones. I'll pick Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (supplemented by *Narrative Discourse Revisited*). I also like Tzvetan Todorov's *Grammaire du Décaméron*, *The Poetics of Prose*, and *Introduction to Poetics* as well as Roland Barthes's *S/Z*. The latter dismisses the attempt to describe narrative *langue* as exhausting and silly but contains wonderful bits about plot, character, description, narrativity, and more. Before Genette, there's Vladimir Y. Propp, there's Jean Pouillon's *Temps et récit*, there's Eberhart Lämmert's *Bauformen des Erzählens*, there's Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, and several excellent pieces by Boris Ejxenbaum, Victor Shklovsky, and Boris Tomashevsky. After Genette, there are works like Seymour Chatman's *Story and Discourse*, Susan S. Lanser's *The Narrative Act*, Marie-Laure Ryan's *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*, David Herman's *Story Logic*, and Sylvie Patron's *Le Narrateur* (which I don't quite agree with but which I find remarkably precise and well informed).

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

Prince: That's another difficult question. Would I have access to the Internet or to a DVD player? How long would I be there? I might take Jorge Luis Borges's "Pierre Ménard, Author of the Quixote" and try to compose it or, perhaps, Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights*, or *The Gold Rush*, or Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins's *A Short History of Philosophy*, or, if I had enough room, Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*.

DIEGESIS: Why narratology?

Prince: Narratology is about narrative and narrative is about what happens or what can happen. It articulates experiences, devises and explores (space)time, illuminates self and other, individual and group, practices and possibilities. Besides, I enjoy studying the formal aspects of narrative worlds and nothing comes close to narratology for doing that. I like its powers of generalization and modelization.

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

Prince: I'm really interested in all the recent narratological trends I know of. But some trends I find more interesting than others. For example, I attended a couple of good sessions on critical race narratology at the recent International Conference on Narrative (Montreal, April 2018). How is a category like race constructed in narratives? More generally, do certain relations obtain between particular narrative forms or narrative devices and particular ideologies? I also find geographical narratology attractive. Not only the study of space in narrative (I recently published a piece in *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature* on that topic and on relations of order, frequency, and scale between the spaces of the narrating, the narrated, the narrator, and the narratee) but also the study of narrative in space, which sheds light on the interaction between text and context as well as on the links between form and function, and the study of the connections between geographic areas or elements and narratological categories or features. I will add that I want to learn more about computational narratology and that I like the many examples provided by "unnatural" narratology.

DIEGESIS: What is the future of narratology?

Prince: I imagine that narratology will increasingly involve different corpora (more nonliterary, nonfictional, nonverbal narratives) and that it will seek new disciplinary partners and foreground new concerns. For instance, I have been trying to develop a humoristic (or humorish) narratology and I am writing an article consisting of jokes about narratological features and categories. But who will publish it?

I hope that narratology will include the insights of different cultural traditions and that it will exploit computational tools and approaches not only to generate narratives and to account for narrative structures but also to explore narrative understanding and to investigate the circulation of narratives and the distribution of narrative kinds.

DIEGESIS: What other question would you like to answer?

Prince: Here is one that I've been asking myself for some time and that I would love to answer: what language do narrators and characters use? I think the answer is complicated.

Gerald Prince is Professor of Romance Languages at the University of Pennsylvania. The author of several books – including *Métaphysique et technique dans l'œuvre romanesque de Sartre; A Grammar of Stories; Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative; A Dictionary of Narratology; Narrative as Theme;* and *Guide du roman de langue française (1901-1950)* –, Prince has recently completed *Guide du roman de langue française (1951-2000).*

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