



Notes on Narrative Embedding

Author(s): Mieke Bal and Eve Tavor

Source: *Poetics Today*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Narratology III: Narration and Perspective in Fiction (Winter, 1981), pp. 41-59

Published by: Duke University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1772189>

Accessed: 26-03-2018 13:30 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Duke University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Poetics Today*

NOTES ON NARRATIVE EMBEDDING*

MIEKE BAL

General and Comparative Literature, Utrecht

“Mais qu’est-il besoin de vous continuer plus longtemps le récit de cette histoire?” Bernadin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie* ed. Garnier, 154).

“I want you to *tell* me my way, not to *show* it,” Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1978:58).

1. INTRODUCTION

In the following pages, I will be taking up some narratological problems related to embedding.¹ I want to try and place them in a larger context, to reorganize them, and to make some tentative suggestions to clear up misunderstandings. The problems raised are:

1.1 *Meta*

First, the notion of metadiscourse as proposed by Genette (1972:239 e.s.). This notion has given rise to some interesting discussions. Many researchers have been of the opinion that Genette was wrong to use the term to mean the opposite of what it traditionally means. For if in the logico-linguistic tradition the prefix *meta*-indicates an activity having for its object an activity of the same class, the term metadiscourse should signify: discourse *on* the discourse, and metanarrative: a narrative *on* the narrative. The metadiscourse would then always have the function of commentary. Genette’s inversion — and I think it is less arbitrary than it appears to be — produces a more or less opposite

*Paper presented at *Synopsis 2*: “Narrative Theory and Poetics of Fiction,” an international symposium held at the Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, Tel Aviv University and the Van Leer Jerusalem Foundation, 16–22 June 1979. Translated from the French by Eve Tavor.

¹These note grew out of discussions held in a seminar on narrative embedding at the University of Utrecht. The enthusiastic cooperation of my students Simon Ophof, Marjan van Schaik and Ruud Teeuwen and their contribution to the development of the ideas in this paper leave me a little embarrassed and very, very grateful.

meaning: discourse *in* the discourse, narrative *in* the narrative. However, it is not a matter of a simple inversion. Going back from Genette's sense of the term, but in the right direction, metadiscourse becomes a discourse *in which* a discourse is embedded. This is not necessarily a metadiscourse with the function of commentary, a discourse *on* the discourse. It is in this latter sense that it is also used to designate the text's commentary on itself (Hamon, 1977). The misunderstanding is due to the prepositions. The antonym of *in* is *out*, whereas the antonym of *on* is *under*. Although the metaphors in these two prepositions are both spatial, they have different orientations.

1.2 *Implicit Author*

In the discussions following the publication of *Figures III*, one of the two poles of this misunderstood complex was stressed. Instead of working on embedded discourse, which is what Genette meant by the disputed term, interest was centered on metadiscourse in its traditional sense. This relates to another point of dispute: the complete omission in Genette's book of the notion of implicit author (see Rimmon, 1976a). This notion, disseminated by Booth (1961) and taken up by many others (see, e.g., Schmid, 1973) was very popular because it promised something which, in my view, it has not been able to deliver: it promised to account for the ideology of the text. This would have made it possible to condemn a text without condemning its author and vice versa — a very attractive proposition to the autonomists of the '60s. The notion of metadiscourse, which allows the text's commentary on itself to be taken into consideration, was introduced to bring back Genette's neglected implicit author. I will come back to this problem; but let me point out straight away that the meaning of the prefix *meta-* was broadened yet again: from a commentary on linguistic activity, it came to signify any commentary by the text on its own content, whether linguistic or not. That the term can be used in this way is not self-evident.

1.3 *Embedding*

The problem of *the discourse in the discourse* remains. Research in this area has proceeded on well-known lines: the analysis of indirect styles, sometimes considered as a more or less homogeneous whole (Genette does not distinguish indirect from free indirect styles within *transposed* discourse), sometimes considered as a continuum within which it is possible to define variants (McHale, 1978), and sometimes considered as two fundamentally different styles (Banfield, 1973; 1978b). Direct discourse has been treated rather like a poor relative, because its nature and characteristics seem so obvious (see especially Glowinski, 1976, and of course, Bakhtin and his school). Yet if people have been playing at inverting the point of view and at dealing with familiar issues from a new notion, the misunderstanding is very understandable. Genette's statement that he chose the term metadiscourse for purely practical reasons (Genette, 1972:239) seems to me to be only partly true. His alleged motive is at once attractive and provocative, since concern for

the simplicity of theoretical discourse is as necessary and appealing as it is dangerous. I have suggested elsewhere (Bal, 1977:35) that *meta-* in Genette's sense should be replaced by *hypo-* to enable us to enjoy the advantages of simplicity without any sacrifice of clarity. The simple term could thus be kept for the most frequent case (Genette, 1972:239) and the prefix could be used to indicate the dependence of the interrupting discourse. The prefix *meta-* would then be reserved for discourse which is properly speaking *on* the discourse. The conditions for its existence will be specified below.

2. EMBEDDING

In this paragraph, I will try to define embedding in the most general possible sense. I will then try to draw conclusions from the general concept, which will involve a typology of possible kinds of embedding. Capable of diversification, this typology will also enable us, later on, to reintegrate some well-known but poorly defined concepts. Whenever possible, the examples will be taken from *Wuthering Heights* (WH), a novel in which complex embedding is particularly striking and significant.

2.1 *Toward a Definition of Embedding*

The verb *to embed* is a synonym of *to insert*. It signifies: "to insert one thing into another in such a way as to incorporate it" (Petit Robert, 1972). Three criteria can be deduced from this rather vague definition. A phenomenon is embedded when there is:

1. *insertion*: the transition must be assured;
2. *subordination*: the two units must be ordered hierarchically;
3. *homogeneity*: the two units must belong to the same class.

1. When two units are related by embedding, the transition between them must be perceptible or capable of becoming perceptible after adequate analysis. When the embedding is linguistic, for instance, the transition is accomplished by *attributive discourse* (Prince, 1978). This discourse indicates which embedded discourse is to be attributed to which actor described in the primary discourse. The transition may remain implicit; in this case, it can only be made explicit by superimposing explanatory phrases. This may be the case in discourse quoted without attributive discourse and also in embedded focalization. This criterion excludes cases in which the first unit cannot exist without the second, that is to say, cases in which the two units imply each other completely. One cannot say, for instance, that a signifier and a signified are embedded. In other terms, a *denotatum* cannot be embedded in the sign which denotes it, because they need each other at every moment of their existence. At no moment is any transition perceptible.

2. to say that two units must have a hierarchical relationship is not at all precise. There are all kinds of hierarchies. For example: hierarchies can be based on the master-servant relation; the one and the many, the whole and the parts; the valid and the useless; the important and the futile; subject and

object; container and contained, etc. Which choice should be made among these possibilities is less obvious than the fact that a choice has to be made. Once the possibilities which bear no relation to language are eliminated, we are left with subject-object, speech-content, whole-parts. Many misunderstandings derive from the implicit coexistence of these different interpretations of the notion of hierarchy.

This criterion excludes juxtaposition. There is no embedding even when a phenomenon is placed between two phenomena of the same class. Take, for example, a dialogue consisting of three diads. The first is spoken by Jean, the second by Mary, the third by Jean. Mary's diad is not embedded in those of Jean; it is surrounded by them.

3: The embedded units must be members of the same class. This criterion is implicit in the dictionary definition. It derives from the words "one thing [. . .] into another." The notion of *class*, which is central to structuralist thinking (see Ducrot, 1978), is a relative concept. The researcher, the subject of the analysis, determines the analytical level on which he will consider his object. Two sentences can belong to the same class if that class consists of all sentences, but not if that class consists of all German words while all the sentences are in French; or if the class consists of all the sentences uttered by Jean while one of the sentences is uttered by Mary. Since ours is a narratological perspective, we can say that a phenomenon is embedded whenever it is composed of two units which are subordinate to each other following a transition, and when these two units can be described in homogeneous narratological terms, which have yet to be specified. A sequence can thus be said to be embedded when it is inserted in another sequence, whether it be narrative, descriptive, brief, long, personal or impersonal. But one cannot say that a sentence is embedded in a bicycle or vice versa. Nor can one say that an event is embedded in a textual sequence.

This criterion excludes all heterogeneous units.

2.2 *The Hierarchy*

Having established the criteria which determine whether or not a phenomenon can be considered to be embedded, we must select a univocal concept of hierarchy. Our choice must be related to the domain of the object to be studied. The domain is narratology; the object, narrative texts. We must therefore make a preliminary choice of a narrative concept which is determined by the object. This preliminary choice is motivated by a basically pragmatic point of view. This point of view implies that the object is studied in a state of communication. The object is a message transmitted from an addresser to an addressee. The specific object (that is to say, every narrative text) is defined as a specifically narrative form of communication. Narrative communication is considered as a locutionary act. Within its own proper limits, narrative communication presents a narrative subject called the *narrator* who proffers sentences, the direct content of which is a vision. This vision or presentation is the act of another subject who is *contained* relative to the first subject (the narrator),

and this second subject is the focalizer. The identity of the focalizer can coincide with that of the narrator, but does not necessarily do so. As subject of its vision, this focalizer presents a history or diegesis. This history is the act of another subject, usually plural, which is the agent of the events which compose the history and whom we call the *actor*. The actor's identity can also coincide with that of one of the two other subjects, but does not necessarily do so either. If we simplify and leave out embedding, the following possibilities or narrative narrative situations:

1. X relates that Y sees that Z does ($N \neq F \neq A$)
2. X relates that X' sees that Y does ($N = F \neq A$)
3. X relates that X' sees that X'' does ($N = F = A$)
4. X relates that Y sees that Y' does ($N \neq F = A$)
5. X relates that Y sees that X' does ($F \neq N = A$)

An alternation of possibilities 2 and 3 is characteristic of autobiography. The alternation of possibilities 1 and 4 is characteristic of the so-called realist novel, where the principal character is occasionally allowed to present events from "his point of view" (for a justification of this model, see Bal, 1977:1–58). What is important here is that the narrative text is considered as a triple message, in which each level is defined by a *subject*, its *activity* and the *result* of this activity, and in which each activity has an object, its content, which is the next level. In other words, the narrator speaks the text whose content is the narrative; the focalizer presents the narrative, whose content is the history; the history is acted out by the actors.

Linking the concept of hierarchy to this overall concept of narrativity, I choose the subject-object relation as the basis for the hierarchy. There is embedding when a *narrative object* (as defined above) becomes the subject of the following level. The superior level now has an aspect which can be indicated by the prefix *meta-*. In other words, whenever a narrative subject becomes the object of a superior level, the superior level becomes a metalevel (metatext or metanarrative). I mean by narrative subject and object the subject and object of the narrative activities specified above: narrating, focalizing, acting.

The adjective *narrative* will indicate the denominator common to these different instances, subjects and objects.

2.3 Narrative Embedding

A typology of narrative embedding must be exhaustive, systematic and as simple as possible. The systematic character of this typology is guaranteed by the choice of a single criterion, as described above. Simplicity must derive from a system of notation which contains the minimum number of signs. This system is based on the idea that a narrative text (NT) is determined by a *narrative situation* (NS) linked to a history (H). The narrative situation implies a state of focalization (NS→SF). The narrative situation consists of the voice, the narrating subject (N) and the subject of focalization (F) narrated by the voice (NS→NF). The narrating subject (N) can have another narrative situation for its object (N→N[NS]). In this case, there is embedding.

The embedded narrative situation can differ from the first in two ways: either the narrator remains the same and the focalizer changes (NS→NF), in which case the entire narrative situation is NS→N1F1[F2]. This is what we find when the first focalizer, which is external to the story, hands the focalization over to a diegetical actor. Secondly, the narrator can change; this necessarily leads to a change in the focalizing subject: NS→N1F1[F2F2]. This is what we find when a direct discourse is embedded. The basic system of the narrative text (TN) is thus:

simple text

NT→NS+H

NS→FS

NS→NF

text with embedding

N→N

1st NS→NF:

NS→N1F1[N1F2]

2nd NS→NF:

NS→N1F1[N2F2]

N.B. The number indicates the narrative level

2.4 *Complex Embedding*

These two basic types of embedding can be broadened. This makes it possible to account for complex embedding, which is, in principle, unlimited. Some examples from *Wuthering Heights* (WH) will illustrate a few possibilities.

1. *simple embedding:*

“Before I came to live here, she commenced, waiting no further invitation to her story” (WH 76). Lockwood relates that Ellen Dean relates . . . : this is the basic narrative situation in this novel, simple embedding NS→N1F1[N2F2] or N1F1=Lockwood and N2F2=Ellen Dean.

2. *complex embedding of the focalization:*

“This time, I remembered I was lying in the oak closet, and I heard distinctly the gusty wind, and the driving of the snow” (WH 66). Lockwood relates that Lockwood remembered the night before that Lockwood heard in a dream from which he had just awoken . . . : complex embedding of the focalization only: NS→N1F1[F2[F3]], or N1F1=Lockwood writing in his private diary; F2=Lockwood the day before, just after waking; and F3=Lockwood in his dream.

3. *complex embedding of mixed focalization:*

“He evidently wished no repetition of my intrusion” (WH 50). Lockwood relates that Lockwood sees (“evidently”) that Heathcliff sees (“wished”): NS→N1F1[F2[F3]], or N1F1=Lockwood writing in his diary, F2=Lockwood interpreting the expression on Heathcliff’s face, and F3=Heathcliff wishing inside himself that Lockwood would not repeat his visit.

4. *simple embedding of mixed narration via complex embedding of mixed focalization:*

“‘Thou art the man,’ cried Jabes, after a solemn pause, leaning over his cushion” (WH 66). Lockwood relates that Lockwood recalls the night before that Lockwood sees and hears in a dream Jabes relating that Jabes sees Lockwood. The quotation is part of the dream. NS→N1F1[F2[F3[N2F4]]], or N1F1=Lockwood writing in his diary, F2=Lockwood awake after the dream, F3=Lockwood in his dream, N2F4=Jabes, an actor in the dream who is doubly fictive.

These examples show the simplicity and exhaustiveness of the system of notation. The difference between the embedding of the focalizer and the less complex embedding of the narrator is immediately evident. It would be easy to find examples of the opposite, that is of embedding of the narrator only. But since this is a more classical situation (*1001 Nights*), I thought it would be more interesting to deal with asymmetrical cases which also illustrate the pertinence of the distinction between narrator and focalizer.

3. SPECIFICATIONS

It goes without saying that the system proposed here is merely the basis for a typology; to be complete, it would have to be elaborated in several respects. The three principal points are:

1. the status of the narrative subjects with respect to the history.
2. the nature of the embedded units.
3. the nature and attribution of the various levels.

3.1 *The Diegetical Status of Narrative Subjects*

Subjects have an identity which can be described. If the subject has no diegetical name, that is to say if his identity is not that of an actor in the story, he is considered external (ex). If, on the other hand, he bears the name of an actor in the story, he is internal (in). This status is relative to the story directly signified by the narrative. Thus Lockwood is (in) relative to 1) the history of his visits to Wuthering Heights, 2) his dreams, 3) his discussions with Ellen Dean. He is however (ex) relative to the history which Ellen Dean relates: the events which occurred at Wuthering Heights and at Thrushhold Grange before Lockwood's arrival.

The identity of the subjects can also be described relative to time and space. We have seen that the subjects of examples 2 and 4 go back in time; this is what happens in most “classical” novels. But it is also possible for embedding to bear upon the future. As soon as the sequence becomes predictive, the narrator and/or the embedded focalizer is situated beyond the primary subjects. The spatial situation can only be described for internal subjects. In the third example, F2 and F3, both internal, are close to each other. But F2 is the stranger, F3 the proprietor of the domain in which they are both placed as actors. And this difference matters: it gives the verb *wished* a weightier meaning. The activity of the focalizer F2 is understandable from this spatial position. As a stranger, curious and frightened by the savage approach of the proprietor,

Lockwood's desire to interpret the expression on Heathcliff's face is motivated. This is why he *attributes* a thought to him. The spatial position of the internal subjects, who are on both sides of the fence, is pertinent to the interpretation.

3.2 *Nature and Function of the Complete Hypo-unit*

The nature of the hypo-unit offers a very large field of research, and I can only touch on it. An embedded unit is by definition subordinate to the unit which embeds it; but it can acquire relative independence. This is the case when it can be defined as a specimen of a more or less well-delimited genre. It then has a more or less complete signification. This is enriched, set off, even radically transformed by its relation with the embedding unit, but it has absolutely no need of it to be coherent. For example, there are embedded poems by known poets which are, ultimately and by the intermediary of internal attribution, attributable to a poet who is outside the text. This phenomenon is a form of intertextuality. Yet the poem is still a hypo-text, and the attribution is given by the mediation of narrative subjects. The cited poem could just as well have remained intratextual and have been attributed to a narrative object.

The embedding of a narrative text or of a narrative is more common. Specimens of each are to be found in *Wuthering Heights*. Ellen Dean's narrative activity produces a narrative text which critics tend to consider independent. The basic narrative situation is thus: $NS \rightarrow N_1F_1[N_2F_2[N_3F_3 \text{ opt}]]$ or $N_1F_1 =$ Lockwood writing his impressions of *Wuthering Heights* in his diary; $N_2F_2 =$ Ellen Dean relating to Lockwood her vision of the events which occurred at *Wuthering Heights*, and $N_3F_3 \text{ opt} =$ the narrative subjects of the units embedded in Mrs. Dean's text. Lockwood's dreams as presented in the text of his diary (WH 65–67) are two examples of relatively independent hypo-narratives. The events given in these dreams are coherent, strange as they may seem when considered outside their diegetical relation to the embedding story; they are coherent in spite of their strangeness or perhaps because of it. Similarly, certain analeptic interior monologues — flashbacks — can acquire a certain measure of independence and qualify as complete hypo-narratives.

The more independent and complete the hypo-unit, the more problematic can its relation to the embedding unit become. If this relation is not explanatory, it may merely consist in a thematic analogy. Psychoanalytical theory is often useful in detecting these hidden or metaphorized analogies. Its efficiency, obvious in the case of dreams, extends to the analysis of the relations between hypo-narratives or hypo-texts and the level above them. Verhoeff (1979) interpreted embedding in Corneille's *L'illusion comique* in this way. In *Wuthering Heights*, a whole network of themes links the diegesis of the first level (the ups and downs of the actor Lockwood) to that of the hypo-text. In considering Lockwood a mere puppet whose function is simply to preserve the realism of the narrative situation, critics have underestimated the importance of the first level. For Lockwood, like Heathcliff, is a *stranger* and therefore qualified to gauge the vast chasm which separates the world of *Wuthering Heights*, the world of passion, from the ordered, hierarchical world where everything has

its place. Lockwood compares himself to Heathcliff several times on his visits to Wuthering Heights. He is himself considered uncouth by his friends:

By this curious turn of disposition I have gained the reputation of deliberate heartlessness, how undeserved, I alone can appreciate (WH 48).

This comparison gains him enough indulgence to keep the interest and curiosity which justify the narrative strategem. Nor does this narrative function occur only once. Lockwood's comparison of himself to Heathcliff may be surprising in this present instance, but there are implications to be drawn from it. It is only by identifying with Heathcliff that Lockwood can have the dream about Cathy which shows Heathcliff's cruelty, when he is lying on Heathcliff's bed. It is only by identifying with Heathcliff that he can separate himself from the latter sufficiently to set off Heathcliff's deterioration. It is only by identifying with Heathcliff that Lockwood can take on the function of his opponent.

There is also another very interesting more or less complete hypo-text at the other end of the narrative chain, on the third level. I am thinking of the story Heathcliff tells when he is rescued from Thrushcross Grange. In addition to the thematic relation here, there is an iconic relationship between the structure of the embedding and the conflict established in the embedded story. For Edgar is clearly the other opponent, and a much more important opponent than Lockwood, because he acts in the story of which Lockwood is only an indirect spectator, doomed to passivity. The conflict of order and passion is fought out between these two lovers of Cathy. It is interesting to follow the way the image of Edgar is presented and developed. In a work where the narrative structure is so full of *mediations*, it is noteworthy that the picture of Edgar should first be given directly by his antagonist. According to Van Zoest (1979), part of the signification of the novel derives from the conflict between the two worlds distinguished by Bataille: the world of work and the world of sovereignty. In his view, this conflict is somewhat mitigated by the distribution of roles: Heathcliff dominates the action, Nelly censures the narration. At one of the rare points at which Heathcliff can express his feelings himself, at which he is himself the focalizer, Edgar is the object focalized:

Edgar stood on the hearth weeping silently and "We laughed at the petted things, we did despise them" (WH 89).

It is this negative image of Edgar which is first presented to Ellen Dean and through her to Lockwood and then to the reader. Strangely enough, in this same embedded narration of Heathcliff's, a picture of Heathcliff himself is given by the Lintons in a doubly embedded discourse. This is also the first time (in the chronology of the story) that Heathcliff is focalized by representatives of the outside world, namely by the Lintons, all of whom will die as a result of their contact with the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights. In the narrative related by Heathcliff, Edgar is presented as contemptible, and Heathcliff reports that others see him, Heathcliff, both as an object (*it*) and as a satan, and therefore as an unacceptable person who is to be banished. This first

confrontation already makes them irreconcilable. The three levels of embedding (Lockwood relates that Nelly relates that Heathcliff relates that the Lintons relate) do not serve to mediate the conflict but to establish its existence. Nelly Dean holds the power over the narrative: she can dole out and censure the messages which come from the other world of passion, but since her understanding is limited, she cannot effectively repress the expressions of Heathcliff's inward seething. As the rather lame comparison of Lockwood to Heathcliff underlines their insuperable difference, so the inadequacy of Nelly's moral reactions to Heathcliff's effusions of love and hate underlines the latter's deterioration and the forcefulness of the servant's report.

The *letter* is an intermediate form between the independent hypo-unit and the hypo-unit which is completely buried in the level above it. It is undeniably a complete text. But its relation with the first text is often diegetic. The content of the letter, not its writing, usually determines the way the first diegesis unfolds. The interior monologue (hypo-narrative) or spoken monologue (hypo-text) can also have varying degrees of relative independence.

3.3 *Nature and Function of Incomplete Hypo-units*

Other embedded units are incomprehensible independently of the unit which embeds them. Such are dialogues whose diads derive their meaning from each other and from the initial attributive discourse. Harweg (1971) enumerates the possible relations among the diads of a dialogue. In a narrative text, these relations can occur only if the first narrator attributes the narration to secondary narrators, either implicitly (attribution indicated by dashes, quotation marks, italics, etc.) or explicitly (by declaratory discourse). In dialogue, the narrative situation is thus: NS→N1F1[N2F2].

A dialogue's diads can be characterized by their relations to the diads which precede and follow them. Four types of diads occur most frequently: information, commentary, question and order. The former two are weak from the perlocutionary point of view; they require no reaction from the addressee. They are often themselves a reaction to a previous diad. Information, whose function is primarily referential, will be given in reaction to a question, or without any relation to any preceding diad. Commentary has an expressive function; it gives an addressee's reaction to a preceding piece of information. The two other types of diad require a reaction from the addressee. Their perlocutionary aspect is dominant. A question requires information; it therefore requires at least one other diad. An order (request or prohibition) provokes an action by the addressee, whether linguistic or not.

The distribution of types of diads among the actor-locutors is pertinent to the interpretation. It will often give a picture of the power relations among the actors in the story and of their different functions. In *Wuthering Heights*, for instance, Heathcliff's diads are for a large part either orders or comments; Nelly's are for a large part questions and comments. Hindley, a rare speaker, for the most part gives orders.

3.4 *The Narrative Dialogue as Unit*

The demarcation of dialogues as textual units is a well-known problem which holds *a fortiori* for narrative dialogues, especially when these are interrupted by the attributive discourse. If we leave this aside for the moment, it is possible to define the unit of narrative dialogue provisionally. First of all, narrative dialogue requires at least *two speakers* who are diegetical actors. The *minimum number* of diads is two. *Continuous contact* between the speakers is necessary; they must be in a temporal and spatial continuum together. The speakers must recognize each other as partners in conversation, and that they do so must be indicated in the text (see Harweg, 1971). Recognition is determined by the way in which the diads are *directed*; it is specified by the first speaker when he demands a reaction or by the second when he reacts to the previous diad.

Since the speakers are sufficient for a dialogue, a change in the course of the dialogue is possible; a third speaker can join the first two. This third speaker enables one of the first two to withdraw from the dialogue. Take, for example, a case where the speakers A.B/A.B.C/B.C/B.C.D/C.D/: a dialogue of this nature remains a single unit. It does not remain a single unit when the continuity of the dialogue between two speakers is interrupted: A.B/B.C. Here there is no longer one dialogue only. But the two units cannot be considered entirely distinct either. In this case, to distinguish this figure from completely separate dialogues, we can speak of compound dialogues. A compound dialogue consists of several diads by several speakers; the diads are all at the same level of embedding; the spatial and temporal contact among the speakers is continuous; but only one speaker at a time is permanent. Given the speakers A.B/A.C/C.D/D.A: the dialogue consists of four coordinated parts. By way of example, here is a brief analysis of a compound dialogue. It takes place at the dramatic moment preceding Cathy's death (WH 192–200). The dialogue itself is thus at the third level of embedding. *Grosso modo*, the successive diads can be characterized as follows:

1. Nelly: information
 suggestive question requiring a positive response:
 "Shall I break the seal?"
 "Must I read it, ma'am?"

Cathy: positive response

Nelly: information.

Interruption by the embedding discourse which recounts Heathcliff's entrance. Nelly no longer participates in the dialogue; she reassumes the function of embedding narrative subject. She focalizes the dialogue, and this is sometimes underlined in her metadiscursive commentary.

2. Heathcliff: information (the rhetorical question is information)
 "O, Cathy, Oh, my life! How can I bear it?"

Cathy: information

Heathcliff: information

order (interdiction)

suggestive questions requiring negative response

Cathy: information

- “I’m not wishing you greater torment than I have”
 order
 Heathcliff: information (refusal)
 Diegetic interruption: they embrace
 Heathcliff: question: “Why did you betray your own heart?”
 information “[. . .] nothing [. . .] would have parted us, *you* [. . .]
 did it.”
 question
 information (rhetorical counter-question)
 Cathy: order “forgive me!”
 Heathcliff: information=positive response
 information=rhetorical question
 Diegetic interruption: they embrace.
 3. Nelly:repeated order: she asks Heathcliff to leave because Edgar is returning.
 4. Heathcliff: information “I must go.”
 Cathy: order “you shall not!”
 Heathcliffe: information “I’ll stay!”
 Diegetic interruption: Cathy faints.

This dialogue consists of four parts: Nelly-Cathy/Cathy-Heathcliff/Nelly-Heathcliffe/Cathy-Heathcliffe. Even if Heathcliffe does not respond to Nelly’s representation, she addresses him (order) and he reacts (by beginning a new part of the dialogue which constitutes a refusal to leave). This compound dialogue forms a unit with four coordinated parts because one speaker in continuous, as is the spatio-temporal contact among the actors-speakers. The distribution of types of diads is as follows:

- order: 5 (Nelly 1, Cathy 3, Heathcliff 1)
 question: 4 (Nelly 1, Cathy-, Heathcliffe 3)
 information: 11 (Nelly 2, Cathy 2, Heathcliff 7).

It goes without saying that this analysis is interpretive; but what matters here is to note the complexity of the dialogue and the admittedly aggregate but nevertheless significant distribution of the diads among the speakers.

Embedded units whose narration situation is asymmetrical NS→N1F1[F₂] are even more difficult to analyze; yet it is precisely such fine points (“He evidently wished no repetition of my intrusion”) which decisively influence the signification. For a detailed analysis of embedded focalization, see my analysis of *La Chatte* (Bal, 1977:39–55).

3.5 Attribution

Embedding is produced by a textual unit which makes explicit the transition from the utterance or perception of one subject to that of another. This transition is irreversible. Consequently, it is sometimes difficult to indicate the end of the hypo-unit precisely, especially where there is embedded focalization. Prince (1978) analyzed a large number of instances of such discourse. Attributive discourse (paradigm: *he says*) can be extended or contracted. Dashes, quotation marks or colons are sufficiently clear indicators of the embedding of

the embedded subject. Here there is no attributive discourse properly speaking. This possibility also holds *a fortiori* for asymmetrical embedding. The transition from the first to the second focalizer often remains implicit; it can only be postulated when an index of embedding is present. The word *evidently* in the sentence quoted above is such an index.

Attributive discourse, on the other hand, will often be extended in form. Sentences, or even whole sequences, can modulate the transition. The fact that attributive discourse can be extended enables it to convey in some detail the status (real of fictional, true or false) of the embedded discourse in relation to the first discourse. Insofar as the latter has the embedded discourse for its object, it can be considered metadiscourse. If it goes beyond this and tells us something not about the subject's manner of speaking but about the *content* of his utterances, then it is not metadiscourse.

A clear distinction therefore needs to be made between the metadiscourse constituent parts of extended narrative discourse and its narrative parts. Indeed, the narrative functions of attributive discourse never cease.

4. EPILOGUE ON A PREFIX

4.1 *Meta and Three Other Meta-*

The problem of embedding requires us to think about metalanguage. First, the metalingual status of attributive discourse must be determined. This is given in the most widespread and precise definition of metalanguage: “[. . .] the language we are using to investigate the object language is called the metalanguage” (Allwood, 1977:45). For attributive discourse

- is a discourse
- whose object is a discourse.

The declarative verb and everything which accompanies it comments on the embedded statement. This concept of *meta-* is essentially relative: a unit can be called *meta-* only in relation to the unit which it defines, its *object*. Similarly, an embedded unit is *hypo-* in relation to the meta-unit of which it is the object. The parallel between the two prefixes stops here. There is hypodiscourse or hyponarrative only where there is embedding. Since the prefix *hypo-* indicates dependence, it follows that this type of discourse is always accompanied by that on which it depends. Meta-discourse is also necessarily accompanied by its object, but this object is not always the act of another subject. The metalinguistic subject can also comment on his own discourse. In this case there is no embedding and the metadiscourse is not attributive; hence the dissymmetry of the two prefixes. To distinguish clearly the strict use of the prefix from other uses of it, I will discuss some different uses which I consider characteristic of specific schools of thought.

First, Pelc's logical approach provides arguments in Genette's favor. The functionalist approach is broader and, in my view, less efficient; it extends the concept of metalanguage out of all proportion. A third approach seems to me to abuse the prefix. I am thinking of the concept which makes metalanguage

synonymous with *commentary* itself. This concept is often associated with Genette's theory of narratology, and the latter is also misunderstood. I will therefore discuss each of these three uses of the prefix in turn. The first differs from the primary sense, the second is broader and the third erroneous.

4.2 *Logic and Interpretation*

There is one defensible argument for using *meta-* in Genette's sense, and it is suggested by Pelc (1971). By limiting himself to strictly logical reasoning, Pelc comes to consider quoted discourse as metalinguistic in relation to the embedding discourse and he does so from the slant of a specific concept of fictionality.

The embedding discourse is also called primary discourse. The question is whether technical priority is also chronological and importance-primacy. One could view the quoted discourse as an *interruption* of the primary discourse: this is what might be called the common sense view (see also Glowinski, 1976). The reader might in fact find himself forgetting the primary discourse if the quoted discourse is long enough, and if the reader is to go on taking the first level of communication into account, some attempt must be made to recall it to him. This is what happens in *Wuthering Heights*, where a very dull discourse between Lockwood and Ellen Dean serves to remind the reader of the status of the commentators. In *1001 Nights*, these reminders (the noting of the sunrise which is a sign of temporary security of Scheherazade) fail to achieve their narrative object because the two discourses bear so little relation to each other. Glowinski therefore distinguishes among degrees of interruption, and thus explains the reader's, shall we say "spontaneous," interpretation. Logically, however, the linguistic subject on the second level does not have independent status. He depends on the first subject's willingness to quote its utterances. And quoting means taking responsibility for the utterance. In view of this, there is no question of the narrator *allowing* the second subject to speak, or even of his *lending* him voice; he *quotes* him in his own voice. The first subject can *invent* the utterances he quotes. The real or fictional status of the second subject's utterances is inscribed in the first discourse; it is thus outside the second discourse. Selected, interpreted, or even invented, the second subject is in principle *fictive*, its discourse fictional, in relation to the first subject. (In this respect I am slightly modifying my analysis of discourse and embedded focalization [Bal, 1977] where the permanent status of the first narrator was left implicit. The verbs *allow* and *lend* which I used there now seem to me to have been ill-chosen.) Since, in the last analysis, the discourse in quotation marks is proffered by the first subject and not be the second, which is merely quoted, it can be considered a metadiscourse: a discourse on the fictive discourse.

Pelc's argument is logical, Glowinski's is reasonable. It seems to me that Pelc enables us to define quoted discourse, but that he does not enable us to analyse it or to interpret its function in the narrative text. With Glowinski, we run the risk of distorting the theoretical perspective and of being unable to explain what is happening when we read a text with several labels. The solution, it

seems to me, is to follow Pelc in defining the theoretical status of this strange discourse including the quotation marks as implicit *metadiscourse*; but at the same time to consider the content of the discourse between quotation marks, but considered without them, as hypo-discourse, which is stated, but by a second subject on the second level.

4.3 *Meta- and Functionalism*

Functionalism, which has been prolific since Jakobson, provides another argument for using the prefix to indicate the quoted discourse. Functionalist structuralism attributes a function to every unit analyzed. The quoted discourse has to perform a function in relation to the discourse which embeds it. Among other things, this function can be that of *commentary*. This is often the case in *mise en abyme* (Dällenbach, 1977), which sometimes takes the form of embedded narrative discourse. If this is the case, it will be shown by a detailed stylistic and thematic analysis. The commentary can bear on the diegesis. In this case, it is neither metanarrative nor metalinguistic. It is so only when the commentary (always implicit and almost always metaphorical) bears on the *language* on the embedding text. This is what may happen in *mise en abyme* (Dällenbach, 1977:123). The metaphorical nature of commentary mediated by diegesis, as Dällenbach himself says, invites scepticism. Hamon (1977) analyzes literary metalanguage very successfully. His functionalist point of view enables him to perceive the sometimes concealed metalinguistic function of statements whose manifest function is quite different. His synthetic view, and the number and variety of the examples he adduces, shows the need for a distinction between metalanguage and a secondary metalinguistic *aspect*. Bakhtin's school, recently criticized by Morson (1978), brought this out. For Bakhtin and his disciples, the prefix does not indicate specific units, but a specific aspect of each unit. However justified this view appears, if the functionalist bias is taken too far, the prefix *meta-* may lose its analytical usefulness.

4.4 *Meta- and Narrative Commentary*

Whether different (Pelc) or extended, these first two senses of the prefix are correct. The third is based on a misunderstanding: *Meta-* is extended to all commentary. There can be commentary on any object. If the object is linguistic, the commentary is metalinguistic. This is the case in attributive discourse. It is also the case in certain "authorial intrusions" (a notion which needs to be rethought). But every intrusion cannot be said to be metalinguistic; here too the narrator's commentary must bear on his own narration. Here is an example of "intrusion":

However, if I am to follow my story in true gossip's fashion, I had better go on (WH 103).

This sentence is metalinguistic or, to be more precise, metanarrative. This is not true of the next sentence, although it too is commentary:

He complained so seldom, indeed, of such stirs as these, that I really thought him not vindictive. I was deceived, completely, as you will hear (WH 81).

In the second example, the commentary bears on elements of the diegesis, on actors and events. Some critics extend the meaning of *meta-* to this too. The prefix then no longer designates anything specific and is likely to become a meaningless blanket term. An example of such unjustified extensions of the prefix can be found in a recent article by Bronzwaer (1978) — I am using it because the author is present at the conference and is therefore able to defend himself. His analysis of a specific passage from *Great Expectations* shows that the critic has overlooked the distinction between commentary on the text and commentary on the diegesis. Another step, and he will be unable to distinguish metalinguistic commentary from narrative language. Here are the last two sentences of the passage quoted by Bronzwaer:

I had pretended with myself that there was nothing of this taint in the arrangement; but when I went up to my little room on this last night, I felt compelled to admit that it might be done so, and had an impulse upon me to go down again and entreat Joe to walk with me in the morning. I did not (quoted by Bronzwaer, 1978:5).

Bronzwaer claims that the little phrase “I did not” is ambiguous. According to him, it can be interpreted as metalinguistic or diegetic. In the first case, it can be paraphrased: “I know now that I did not”; in the second, “I decided not to.” The analysis of these two paraphrases shows that Bronzwaer wants to explain the discursive (cf. Benveniste) and narrative aspects of the phrase. Instead of bringing in an additional action (*decided*), a correct paraphrase should have brought out the diegetical status of the event related: “It happened that I did not do it.” Moreover the first paraphrase given is strictly reversible (e.g., “I know now that I decided not to”) and extendable (e.g., “I know now that I felt compelled to” for the previous sentence). The difference between these two interpretations of the phrase has nothing to do with the narrative labels defined by Genette which Bronzwaer refers to. Nor does it have anything to do with metalanguage in any of its senses. If there is a difference here, it is that between “personal” (Tamir, 1976) and “impersonal” narration. In both cases, an action is reported. In both cases there is therefore, simply, narration. Narrativity consists in specifying the relations among narrating subject, vocalizer and actor. In the first interpretation, the narrating subject identifies itself; in the second, it remains implicit.

4.5 *Back to Genette*

The misunderstanding derives from an erroneous interpretation of *Figures III*. Although I may be stating the obvious, I think it necessary to reexamine the basis of Genette’s theory. Its importance is generally acknowledged, but it is too often misinterpreted.

Rimmon (1976a) begins her analysis of *Figures III* with a very clear description of five distinctions made by structuralist narratology. One is the distinction between narrative (story) and *discourse*. Unfortunately, Rimmon does not show the difference between this distinction and that proposed by Benveniste. And it is the confusion between these two distinctions which has given rise to so

many misunderstandings. The first distinction above serves to localize two different analytical procedures: examination of the hypothetical *actions* which constitute the *content* of a text, and examination of the way this content is uttered. The second distinction is concerned with two kinds of statement or with two aspects of statement in general. Furthermore, the first is hierarchical, while the second is not. This apparent omission is not really an omission because Benveniste's distinction falls outside Genette's range of concerns. But it reappears in work inspired by Genette, and it is here that it creates confusion.

Two other distinctions, also frequently confused, might be more clearly differentiated as well. Genette's model is based on two distinct hierarchies which Bronzwaer confuses. And he is not the only one to do so. Genette's text lends itself to this kind of misunderstanding by not making the fact that his model contains two models sufficiently clear; the risk of terminological interference derives from this.

The first model is one of simple narrativity. It is binary in Genette, triple in my interpretation. Genette distinguishes between narrative and story, or in other words between the narrative text and the diegesis (note: the terminological interference with Barthes, Todorov and Benveniste which Rimmon blames Genette for (1976a:60) is inevitable; Genette cannot help it; it is a matter of making a choice and of being consistent. The interference is not due to Genette whose model is consistent, but to his disciples who misinterpret him.) This hierarchy, which is to be found both in formalism and in structuralism, has its faults. Rimmon (1976a:59) criticizes it lucidly when she says:

focalization depends on the narrator and on the amount of information imparted to the reader by the narrator.

But this does not go to the heart of it. Genette does indeed fail to place focalization; he implicitly associates it with the narrative level of the text, without preserving the distinction between narrative and focalization that he had so brilliantly established. I corrected the model in this respect (Bal, 1977:31–39). The hierarchy which I have briefly explained here is based on the criterion of the relation between subject and object. The narrative text is a complex signifier having for its immediate and implicit signified the narrative which is the localized diegesis or focalized story. The latter is the immediate signified of the narrative and at the same time, the mediate signified of the text. If we speak of *levels* in this sense, we are speaking of semantic levels which are inseparable, except perhaps theoretically and for the duration of the analysis. The diegetic level, for instance, consists of a series of events; it is not linguistic in nature, even though it is known by means of language. The expression "diegetic voice" (Bronzwaer, 1978:6) therefore has no meaning for cases of simple narration. The subject of the diegetic level is the actor, its activity, the action. The other hierarchy in Genette's model is that of *narrative levels*. This hierarchy must account for embedding. It is superimposed on the first hierarchy. The narrative text can be "interrupted" (Głowiński, 1976) by an embedded text uttered by another subject which is usually an actor in the

diegetic universe of the first text. In this case the different levels have a relatively more independent status, and the subjects of each level can both be considered *voices*. The subject of the first level is the *extradiegetic* narrator in Genette's terminology, but only in relation to the diegesis presented in the text it proffers; it may well be at the same time intradiegetic in relation to a higher level where it may be an actor.

It is a simple matter to number narrative levels; numbers have meaning only to indicate the levels of embedding. The "priority" of the first level is neither chronological (the text can begin with a hypo-text) nor primary in importance. Rimmon (1976a:59–60) prudently raises the question and then quite rightly corrects herself (1976b:499). Bronzwaer is mistaken about the relativity of the notion of extradiegetic narrator (Bronzwaer, 1978:2) and he wrongly links the extradiegetic character of M. de Renoncourt (*Manon Lescaut*) to his secondary role, which is "irrelevant" to the novel as a whole. This interpretation is inadequate because it is based not only on a confusion of Genette's two hierarchies (narrative level and diegetic function) but also on a normative concept of hierarchy (importance vs. irrelevance). M. de Renoncourt is a primary narrative subject which attributes the secondary text to Des Grieux (this is his principal function). Renoncourt is intradiegetic (an acting actor) in the diegesis of the primary text, where the encounter between Renoncourt and Des Grieux is given; he is an integral diegetic *narrator* because he has the power of attribution, and he uses it to produce the secondary text in relation to which he is extradiegetic. One cannot therefore say that "Des Grieux' narrative constitutes the diegetic level" (Bronzwaer, 1978:2); it is the narrative act, the act of narrating, which brings the diegetic level (first hierarchy) of the primary text (brief and irrelevant) into existence, whereas the text which Des Grieux produces constitutes the second narrative level (second hierarchy), and this in turn can be analyzed into three levels (text, narrative, story or diegesis in the terms of the first hierarchy). The very term *extradiegesis*, used to indicate a primary narrative level, shows the confusion. In Genette's model, the very substantive "extradiegesis" would be contradictory. To come back to the example of "I did not": this phrase is part of the narrative discourse, and as an utterance, it is extradiegetic by definition; the action presented by this utterance, that is the thought, can be attributed to the narrator-focalizer (extradiegetic) or to an actor-focalizer (intradiegetic) whose *spokesman* is the narrator. In the first case, the phrase might perhaps be called "discursive" (Benveniste); in the second, it is certainly narrative; in both cases, it is part of the whole consisting of discourse and narration which constitutes the narrative text (Genette, 1969).

The confusion is partly due to the lack of precision of the English terms which Bronzwaer does not define more precisely. This is quite clear when he says (1978:1, 2) that the extradiegetic narrator "can speak *about* the story he is telling" although the scheme (10) of narrative communication places the extradiegetic narrator inside the *story*. Similarly, *narrative* and *narration* are used in the same sense as *story*.

The narrator's commentary on diegetic events is therefore not metalinguistic. It is part of the simple narrative text, which is never pure, but always 'diegetic' because its overall content is a diegesis. The notion of metalanguage can be linked to Genette's second hierarchy, the hierarchy of narrative embedding.

REFERENCES

- ALLWOOD, J., et al., 1977. *Logic in Linguistics* (Cambridge UP).
- BAL, MIEKE, 1977. *Narratologie. Essais sur la signification narrative dans quatre romans modernes* (Paris: Klincksieck).
- BANFIELD, ANN, 1973. "Narrative Style and the Grammar of Direct and Indirect Speech," *Foundations of Language* 10, 1–39.
- 1978a "The Formal Coherence of Represented Speech and Thought," *PTL* 3, 289–314.
- 1978b "Where Epistemology, Style and Grammar Meet Literary History: The Development of Represented Speech and Thought," *New Literary History* 9, 415–454.
- BENVENISTE, EMILE, 1966. *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris, Gallimard).
- BOOTH, WAYNE C., 1961. *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago UP).
- BRONTË, EMILY, 1978 (1847). *Wuthering Heights* (Harmondsworth-New York: Penguin).
- BRONZWAER, W., 1978. "Implied Author, Extradiegetic Narrator and Public Reader: Gérard Genette's narratological model and the reading version of *Great Expectations*," *Neophilologus* 62, 1–18.
- DÄLLENBACH, LUCIEN, 1977. *Le récit spéculaire: Essai sur la mise en abyme* (Paris: Seuil).
- DUCROT, OSWALD, 1978. "Structuralisme, énonciation et sémantique," *Poétique* 33, 107–128.
- GENETTE, GÉRARD, 1969. "Frontières du récit," *Figures II* (Paris: Seuil), 49–70.
- 1972 *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil).
- GLOWIŃSKI, MICHAIL, 1976. "Der Dialog im Roman," *Poetica*, 1–16.
- HAMON, PHILIPPE, 1977. "Texte littéraire et métalangage," *Poétique* 31, 261–284.
- HARWEG, ROLAND, 1971. "Quelques aspects de la constitution monologue et dialogique des textes," *Semiotica* 4, 127–148.
- MCHALE, BRIAN, 1978. "Free Indirect Discourse: A Survey of Recent Accounts," *PTL* 3, 249–287.
- MORSON, GARY SAUL, 1978. "The Heresiarch of *Meta*," *PTL* 3, 407–428.
- PELC, JERZY, 1971. "On the Concept of Narration," *Semiotica* 3, 1–19.
- PRINCE, GERALD, 1978. "Le discours attributif et le récit," *Poétique* 35, 305–313.
- RIMMON, SHLOMITH, 1976a. "A Comprehensive Theory of Narrative: Genette's *Figures III* and the Structuralist Study of Fiction," *PTL* 1, 33–62.
- 1976b "Vladimir Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*," *PTL*, 1, 489–512.
- SCHMID, WOLF, 1973. *Der Textaufbau in den Erzählungen Dostoevskys* (München: Wilhelm Fink).
- TAMIR, NOMI, 1976. "Personal Narrative and Its Linguistic Foundation," *PTL* 1, 403–430.
- VERHOEFF, HAN, 1979. *Les comédies de Corneille: Une psycholecture* (Paris: Klincksieck).
- ZOEST, AART VAN, 1979. "Structure narrative et signification: Le cas de *Wuthering Heights*," in: IX^e Congrès de l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée (Innsbruck).