Story Schema, Narrative Rhetoric and the Discourse of Intimacy

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Revived interest in narrative theory—signaled by a spate of recent studies, including David Herman's *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (2004), James Phelan's *Experiencing Fiction: Judgments, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative* (2007), Richard Walsh's *The Rhetoric of Fictionality: Narrative Theory and the Idea of Fiction* (2007), and Rick Altman's *A Theory of Narrative* (2008)— would seem to suggest a return to the ambitious theoretical efforts of the nineteen-sixties, a moment when two major approaches to fictional story-telling were first formulated and generated wide interest: (1) a structuralist project which put forward a set of proposals for what was called 'grammar of narrative;' (2) a 'rhetoric of narrative,' which under the influence of Wayne Booth, sought to demonstrate how an author's beliefs were reflected in the stories he or she told. Structural theorists argued for the essentially systemic dimensions of narrative, a story being composed of 'elements' or 'functions' and a set of rules for combining these into coherent sequences. Questions of how a narrative stood in relation to some larger context—ideological, historical, cultural—were essentially bracketed, and the story-teller was in some critical sense relegated to a subordinate position relative to the system (a view that was to lead at one point to announcements of 'the death of the author'). Rhetorical theory upheld the primacy of the author and 'authorial intention' and sought to demonstrate how a writer's principles, conceived above all in Booth's account as a matter of ethical stance, shaped his or her fictions.

If the two approaches have, with various modifications, continued to define parameters within which discussion has evolved, they have for some time been at an impasse of sorts, partly because of claims posited for the scope and explanatory power of narrative. theory, which ought ideally be both broad-enough to delineate the field of texts read as 'stories' and sufficiently nuanced to identify the distinctiveness of a particular story. Despite its early promise—above all, that the telling of a story (like the formulation of a 'sentence') could be understood as a matter of a restricted, specifiable set of terms and operations—the move away from structuralist theory was inevitable given its reductive notions of language, its a-historicism, and its rigidly schematic notions of story. Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, Julia Kristeva and others proposed a succession of schemata which were widely acknowledged and commented on, but failed in basic ways to achieve their goals of defining story as a distinctive discourse form, at least in such ways as achieved a consensus of any sort. Thus, Gerald Prince, who was to propose his own 'grammar of narrative,' suggested that the discursive dimensions of story-telling (by which he meant the use of particular syntactic forms) could not be used to define what did and did not make for a 'story' (13). Jonathan Culler bluntly asserted that the study of narrative "cannot be a study of the ways in which sentences are combined, for two versions of the same plot need have no sentences in common, nor need they, perhaps, have any linguistic deep structures in common" (205). Allen Tilley was to remind us that Barthes had himself rejected his own attempts at a theory of narrative and had "predicated his *S/Z* on the idea that, since literary works are so various, a critical apparatus for describing plot should be designed for one work only" (1). For

Barthes, any theory of plot or story which sought to systematize a finite set of elements and operations was already "fraudulent, a cheat; we had not found the underlying order of plot because there was none"(cited Tilley, 1).

If the work of first-wave narrative theorists was met with skepticism, its failures were attended by not a few ironies. Partly as a consequence of hopes fuelled by early theoretical work, partly as a consequence of the failure to secure agreement as to what did and did not constitute 'story,' the term 'narrative' —perhaps beginning with Hayden White's notion of 'history' as narrative and Jean Lyotard's formulation of the concept of 'master narratives' —as well as introduction of the term into the fields of psychology, law and medicine, has suggested that broad ranges of text and discourse have come to be seen to constitute, in some still unspecified way, 'narrative.' The ever greater latitude with which the term has been used would culminate in assertions like that of Hans and Shulamith Kreitler who spoke of 'narrative' comprising "any body of contents expressed by verbal or nonverbal means of communication conveying in some organized form information about something actual, ideational or fictional" (217) or Paul Ricoeur's slightly more modest identification of narrative with any textual form which took up "the temporal character of human experience"(52).

If progressively extending the term to encompass an ever-wider range of texts may have brought into question the conceptual usefulness of the term, this development accorded with broader trends within the textual sciences, which, in the wake of deconstruction, displayed increasing reluctance to classify texts in traditional generic terms and, indeed, put to question the tenability

of generic distinctions of any sort. In some instances this led to the positing of an equivalence between narrativity and the discursive at the very highest levels of theoretical abstraction. Paul de Man could write that "all denominative discourse" must be regarded as "narrative" but, by the same token, that any narrative could simply be reduced to a set of grammatical functions. In suggesting that narrative constitutes a structure "universal to action" Irmengard Rauch observed—in a comment which further underscored the conceptual difficulties which follow when terms assume such broad definitional scope—that having moved onto this level of generalization, "it necessarily follows that a narrative-nonnarrative opposition is impossible"(174).

In one sense, the studies by David Herman, James Phelan, Richard Walsh and Rick Altman represent something like an effort to get back to 'basics' and to re-focus discussion on narrative in its specifically fictional forms. Herman, Phelan, Walsh and Altman all share the view that fictional story-telling constitutes a textual mode which readers routinely distinguish from the broader spectrum of text forms, albeit in Herman's study the question of what actually "makes a narrative a narrative"(*SL* 49) remains open. [1] While each of these theorists comes out with distinct proposals with respect to how narrative and its functioning can be best characterized, each demonstrates renewed interest in the question of 'experience,' both the kinds of 'experience' incorporated into story-telling and the experience readers undergo in their encounter with story-telling texts. Reasserting the integrity of story-telling as discourse form, they seek to counter not only doubts voiced about the value of

'narratology,' but the claims advanced by a succession of theoretical movements－deconstruction, feminism, postmodernism in the seventies; new historicism, gender and cultural studies in the eighties; postcolonial theory in the nineties－which in various ways subordinated story-telling to larger cultural forces (rather than seeing 'culture' or its agents as appropriating the resources of story for their own particular ends).

Altman's discussion opens with the question of how a reader recognizes a particular text (including film or visual texts) as narrative, something he argues occurs virtually on a first encounter (17), and goes on to suggest that this has to do with something more than a reader's or viewer's perception of some schematic or sequential element at work (even the most rudimentary one of an action with 'beginning,' 'middle,' and 'end'). Rather, Altman asserts that "our tendency to read texts as narratives" can be seen in terms of what he calls a "narrative drive," an impulse on the part of the reader which "can derive from many sources: personal interests, professional mandates, or social expectations" (19). In characterizing more precisely what readers do in acting on this 'narrative drive,' he introduces the notion of 'following, a term used in the almost literal sense of a reader pursuing (or being led to pursue) a particular character as he or she moves through the narrative: a reader can be characterized as 'tailing' or 'in pursuit' of a figure about whom the reader has developed an intense curiosity－in other words, we come to have some 'personal' interest in the actions of a character and seek to 'know more' about that figure.

While the notion of 'following' (and of how readers are induced to 'follow' one character at one point and another at a subsequent point in the course of a story) introduces a dynamic element into

any understanding of readerly activity, Altman nonetheless makes clear that 'following' is a matter of maintaining (or, when warranted, switching) 'focus,' and on this basis he puts forward a sweeping set of claims: how (or 'who') readers follow is determined by whether a narrative is 'single,' 'dual,' or 'multiple' -focus in character, a framework conceived in broad-enough terms as to permit classification of virtually any narrative text. In certain respects his notion of 'narrative drive' thus reverts to a familiar set of concerns connected with 'point-of-view' and, with Altman's invocation of Bakhtin, the distinction among monologic, dialogic and polyphonic textual forms. Of particular significance here, however, is the way in which Altman establishes a notion of 'proximity' between reader and character, and how ultimately it is this wish for closeness or intimacy (if only in the sense of being privy to knowledge of a sort not customarily revealed to a wider public) which underlies his notion of 'narrative drive.'

Richard Walsh proposes a major overhaul of the rhetorical approach, one which discards all talk of 'narrators' and asserts that authors are themselves only 'readers' of the stories they tell. Thus, in Walsh's account, authors are implicated in a larger world of characters and events which, in a once-widespread understanding of story-telling, 'take on a life of their own.' Reaffirming in particular the affective dimensions of narrative, he sees 'emotion' both as something writers attempt to represent and what they seek to elicit in their readers. Like Altman and Herman, who explore the relation between cognitive function and narrative form, Walsh sees narrative as something more than simply a 'discourse.' : 'Narrative' is built into our mental functioning and is essential to how we 'make sense' of the world; "the narrative process" is "a basic,

essential human sense-making activity"and not simply one among many"tool(s) of sense-making." Asserting that"making sense of stories is making sense of sense-making"(106), Walsh sees 'sense-making' in terms of a 're-humanized' account of narrative as "inherently anthropocentric":"not because stories are about people (though they usually are) but because they are *by* people" and "their frame of reference is human experientiality"(105-106). But when he stresses the importance of the 'anthropocentric' and 'experientiality,' it is clear that his notion of 'making sense' would entail, above all, recognition of the specifically affective dimension of 'experience' incorporated into fictional narrative.

Among the texts he considers in closer detail, Charles Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* merits attention because the character of Little Nell, and in particular the episode recounting her death, had an enormous emotional impact on the reading public. While aware that the novel and the Little Nell section represent a limit case of sorts, Walsh notes, "Dickens's success in engaging the emotions of his readers with Little Nell was not based on a crude manipulation of vulgar sentimental clichés, but on his ability to shape a rhetorical argument to the end of a powerful achieved sentiment"(168). In reasserting the central place of 'emotion' within a reader's experience, and as that which authors seek above all both to represent and to elicit, contributes to a more precise understanding of what distinguishes fictional narrative from other orders of discourse, albeit it is never altogether clear from Walsh's account what range of circumstances or interactions (or perspectives on such interactions) elicit the sort of response Walsh would ascribe story-telling. Although Walsh himself never makes the point, emotional response to a 'death' normally presupposes a high degree

of proximity or intimacy: the reader is 'witness' to or participates in an event which under normal circumstances would only be experienced by those most closely related to the figure.

Like Altman and Walsh, James Phelan is at pains to re-assert the 'experiential' dimensions of fiction, albeit, following Wayne Booth, the 'experiential' is understood above all in terms of the moral impact of choices characters make and how readers themselves judge such choices. Phelan refers to "narrative's ability to explore the ethical dimensions of human behavior through the concrete particulars of characters in action." Phelan, however, goes somewhat further in his account of what constitutes the 'experiential': "Fiction's advantage... is that it can get beyond the abstract meanings and black-and-white implications of ethical categories to the complexities and the nuances of ethical choices within the detailed contexts of human lives" (94-95). Implied here is narrative as a means of exercising or testing a reader's powers of judgment, but more significant for the discussion here is Phelan's reference to "the detailed contexts of human lives" as the ground in which both text and reader response are rooted. Phelan refers to an "audience's emotional and other investments in characters," an echo of statements by Altman and Walsh, but for Phelan it is clear that the ultimate goal of 'emotional investments,' and of 'experience' in some more general sense, is their use "in the service of meaningful instruction" (95).

David Herman shares with Walsh and Phelan the determination to address the issue of the 'experiential,' and on this basis he seeks "not simply new ways of getting at old problems in narrative analysis but a re-articulation of the problems themselves, including

the root problem of how to define stories"(*SL* 113). Given the richness and complexity of what he calls the 'storyworld,' and the experiences readers undergo once they enter this 'world,' Herman regards what he calls the 'immersive potential' (*SL* 16) of the story-telling text as key to any renewed attempts to get at the nature of fictional narrative which, as Herman makes clear, must recognize both the experience readers undergo and the rhetorical means writers use to elicit response. Offering a sweeping review of narrative theory to date, Herman's *Story Logic* allows us in certain respects to measure the progress theorists have made (or have failed to make) since the inception of narrative studies as a field of inquiry forty years ago.

In placing emphasis on the notion of 'immersive potential,' Herman's study can be seen as breaking significantly from his earlier work, which was essentially an attempt to radicalize (and thus salvage) the structuralist project. In *Universal Grammar and Narrative Form* Herman had sought to rehabilitate the claim advanced in Tzvetan Todorov's *Grammaire du Decaméron* that systematic inquiry into narrative could yield progress towards a more philosophically satisfying notion of grammaticality. Citing the early Barthes, Herman speaks of narrative grammar as "forming a second linguistics" (*UG* 31).[2] Working from these assumptions, Herman sought to isolate what he called 'combinatory mechanisms' : "the syntactic dimensions of narrative discourse comprise rules by which the constituent elements of narrative are (re)combined into well-formed sequences and structures" (*UG* 53). Thus, to cite one example of this approach, in an analysis of Leopold Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses,* Herman draws attention to "the series of constructions which the name acquires in the course of the narrative,"

what he calls "morphologi-cal signatures that are specific to the grammar of personal and relative pronouns;" Herman notes that "English, being an uninflected as opposed to inflected language does not ordinarily assign case marking to nouns except in the genitive case. By contrast, both personal pronouns (he, his, him) and relative pronouns (who, whose, whom) take case markings according to their various syntactic functions (*UG* 57). Herman goes on to observe, however, that Joyce's novel "elides the difference between English nouns and pronouns by assigning case markings to (variants of) the proper noun Bloom" (*UG* 57): e.g."the nominative case in 'Bloowho went by ' (*UG* 86), the genitive in the utterance 'Bloowhose dar ey read Aaron Figater's name' (*UG* 149), and the dative in 'Winsomely she on Bloohimwho smile' " (*UG* 57). With this series of transformations, Herman suggests, "The narrative brings our attention to bear on the combinatorial logic(s) pertaining to words, phrases, and sentences" (*UG* 58).

But if Joyce's novel foregrounds a 'logic' we identify with syntax, it also "resolves words and phrase constructions─morphological and syntactic structures─back into the more elementary units from which those structures derive... (reducing) words to their morphemic (and phonemic) constituents" (*UG* 75). What Herman calls the "piecemeal disintegration of syntactic structure" (*UG* 79) underscores a subversion of the verbal construction and coherence on which any narrative would necessarily depend, but Herman argues that Joyce's "inventory of textually disruptive/deformative devices" consistently foreground the linguistic and verbal elements, and they do so in such a way as reflects what Herman, with reference to the character of Bloom calls"the grammar of thought" (*UG* 80). Herman concludes his

remarks on Bloom's predicament by noting that "Eventually, the effort to conceive and verbally represent the lover's tryst becomes intolerable.　Bloom's monologues are then left with the merest remnants of syntactic structure, phrases... frozen in an agony of inner speech" (*UG* 82).

　　In demonstrating how the generation of 'meaning' is a function both of particular syntactical operations and disruptions of syntax which serve to highlight the radical discursiveness of Joyce's text, Herman notes that the narrative "rearranges or rather disintegrates both morphological and syntactic structures in a... bid to highlight through the mechanisms of narrative discourse itself, the 'underlying structures' of the linguistic materials on which the discourse operates" (*UG* 85).　For Herman, Leopold Bloom－in whatever other terms we might want to characterize him－is a "grammatical actant" (*UG* 91): "To the extent that it reprocesses prior verbal material through a secondary grammatical machinery anchored in the mind of Bloom, Joyce's text unfolds an ongoing correlation of actual utterances (the surface structure of the narrative) with a more abstract sequence of elementary operations (the deep structure of the narrative)" (*UG* 86). Herman speaks of Joyce's narrative as one which "generates syntactic structures" (*UG* 64). Herman thus asserts that "the abstract underlying organization of the discourse"－in contrast to conventional mythopoetic readings of the novel－"constitutes the deep structure of the narrative" (*UG* 85).

　　If Herman stresses the central significance of syntax, he nevertheless acknowledges, however momentarily, an 'experiential' dimension to Joyce's narrative, and indeed, a highly specific realm of experience denoted by signifiers referring to a restricted order of relationship: i.e. those which refer to personal life, sexuality and

emotions we associate with the most intimate of human encounters. In having recourse to expressions like "access of anguish," "overly painful," the "intolerable" and "agony" (*UG* 81-82)—all terms denominating the emotional pain Bloom suffers as he contemplates his wife's adultery—to account for the significance of syntactic distortion, Herman moves his discussion onto an essentially different conceptual plane where response to character and events is conditioned by readers' experience or representations of love, marriage, fidelity, or, in this instance, the collapse of a marriage. Syntax here is under particularly intense forms of stress, which, while ascribable on the one level to Joyce's ludic impulses, is meant in Herman's account to convey something more urgent, namely, the suffering experienced when ties of intimacy, here associated with marriage, are broken. Strictly speaking, this is not something the words or syntax themselves 'contain.' While access to such experience can be gained, in the case of fiction, only through the medium of language, the larger significance of what the text is referring to is determined by something irreducible to the purely verbal or linguistic.

In part, Herman's reopening of the question in *Story Logic* of how 'syntax' stands in relation to the 'experiential' (in the case of Bloom an experience of pain; in the case of the reader, perhaps one of identification or sympathy) points to renewed recognition both of the kind of experience fictional texts deal in and the impact these texts can have on readers. While Herman's effort to develop an approach which accounts more fully for readerly experience continues to work from structuralist premises, he embraces here the rhetorical theory of Booth and recent work in cognitive science

with its notions of 'mental models' to propose some key modifications. Drawing initially on the work of the French structuralist A. J. Greimas, Herman observes: "a story or tale can be analyzed into a set of actants whose specific deeds... encode a more abstract pattern of actantial roles—a pattern formed by... linking particular acts performed over the course of the narrative" (*SL* 93). [3] Following an established line of argument, he asserts that actions come to constitute stories only once they are set in some sort of coherent sequence, although, as he notes, "a succession of acting situations need not have the structure of a story" (*SL* 76). Herman observes that "the analyst is interested not in any particular action but in a more or less extended span of actions, interpretable as elements of an emergent whole" or "singular actions identifiable as components of the action sequences that can be viewed as the backbone of any story" (*SL* 81).

But here Herman also underscores how the reader in responding to a character's action is also in a position to envision the possibility of actions other than those which explicitly occur. It is precisely in an imaginative act by the reader that the specific course pursued by a character assumes its meaning: "paths chosen by storyworld participants acquire their significance from the place they occupy within a network of paths *not* chosen" (*SL* 57-58). The stress on the 'contingent' and on what the story omits suggests one means by which readers 'enter' into the 'minds' of characters and the engagement of readers is secured, in the sense that readers are prompted to imagine what a character might have done or, perhaps, what readers themselves would have done in the place of the character.

But, beyond this, Herman goes on to assert that "syntagmatic

chains," "action structures" or "higher order narrative units" are perceived as such only by a reader's "inferences about participants' beliefs, desires, and intentions" (*SL* 83). In stressing the degree to which an understanding of 'beliefs,' 'desires,' 'intentions' enables the reader to grasp what links one action to another (and the ultimate goals characters may be pursuing), Herman recognizes the essentially 'human' dimensions of what a story describes. Following Claude Bremond, he speaks of "the most general forms of human behavior" corresponding to "the elementary narrative types," and how "the semiology of narrative draws its very existence from its roots in anthropology": (*SL* 96-97; citing Bremond 406). Indeed, in terms which echo those of Walsh, Herman goes so far as to claim "strings of sentences representing actions and events can be interpreted as stories only insofar as they are embedded in global semantic frameworks subtending all thought, speech, and behavior" (*SL* 99-100). It is on this basis that he argues for the necessity of a "fuller investigation of narrativity" which would "use the resources of cognitive science to study how the expression side of stories interacts with their content side" (*SL* 104).

When he asserts that "action structures" or "higher order narrative units" are perceived as such by a reader's "inferences about participants' beliefs, desires, and intentions (which) are, in turn, closely connected with participants' beliefs about the world" (*SL* 83), Herman would seem in fact to suggest that readers enter a 'storyworld' on the basis of their own pre-existing beliefs: readers "do not merely reconstruct a sequence of events and a set of existents but imaginatively (emotionally, viscerally) inhabit a world in which, besides happening and existing, things matter, agitate, exalt, repulse, provide grounds for laughter and grief, and so on"(*SL*

16). The term 'storyworld' suggests not merely the fullness of what readers experience when they 'enter' into the world a narrative creates but the order of mental act that is required to experience the narrative fully. For Herman "storyworlds are mentally and emotionally projected environments;" once the reader has entered this 'projection,' he or she in "live(s) out complex blends of cognitive and imaginative response, encompassing sympathy, the drawing of causal inferences, identification, evaluation, suspense, and so on" (*SL* 16-17).

In seeking to describe with more precision this notion of story as 'projected environment,' Herman has recourse to the concept of 'mental models' which, drawing on the work of cognitive theorists, he compares to 'scripts' or the "most elementary paradigms of action" (*SL* 106): "scripts and stories are in some sense mutually constitutive; recipients' ability to process a narrative depends on the way it anchors itself in—but also plays itself off—knowledge representations of various sorts" (*SL* 113). But Herman also suggests such 'scripts' are in some sense programmed, insofar as they are the product of an already existing corpus of stories with which we are familiar (or whose plot lines we can predict) and the production of subsequent, innovative stories involves a modification or rewriting of already existing scripts. Instances cited include how *Don Quixote* opens with "a semicomic indictment of the delusive power... of chivalric romance" (*SL* 107) or how *La Princesse de Cléves* "displaces action sequences from the public to the private realm, recentering world models around the affective domain... and the complexities and vicissitudes of male-female relationships" (*SL* 108). But if the concepts of 'mental models' and 'scripts' (including 'scripts' we create about our own lives) allows Herman to re-open the

question of how readers experience and respond to story-telling texts, he would also seem to argue that the issue of beliefs or 'experience' is itself in some sense textually-grounded, a matter of 'narrative.' He is at some pains to make clear─in a continuing effort to overcome what he perceives as the artificially drawn boundaries between story and discourse─that scripts imply the use of particular registers, a lexicon, varying levels of verbal exchange or forms of dialogue. Insofar as the language of which a story is constructed shapes our experience of characters and their actions, as well, ultimately, as the meaning of the story, readers can never simply differentiate between two fundamentally different ontological realms (i.e. that of 'action,' and that of 'language').

In demonstrating how we might understand his proposed synthesis of action and language, Herman looks in some detail at Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth.* Wharton's novel centers on the twenty-nine year old Lily Bart, "an aspirant to the social and financial security that could be hers if she were to marry into the upper echelons of Old New York Society─however stultifying the marriageable representatives of Old Money prove themselves to be" (*SL* 198). Lily is an independent woman who seeks to maintain her 'respectability' within a gender system which limited women's freedoms, but she is repeatedly placed in compromising situations by men she encounters. As Herman makes clear, the novel is an indictment of 'the double standard;' of special interest here, however, is the degree to which the reader's perception of Wharton's characters is less a matter of what characters actually 'do' than of how they speak. It is the mode of speech to which the reader responds most 'viscerally' and the basis on which readers ultimately respond to a particular character's actions and desires. Readers

sympathize with the heroine in accord with a principle which holds, in Herman's account, that "a reported utterance is evaluated more negatively the more it differs from the degree of formality, type of speech, variety, and mode of situational appearance appropriateness of the style in the report is couched"and thus"the style adopted by the narrator… works to align recipients with Lily" (*SL* 201). When Gus Trenor seeks to persuade Lily to join him on what would be perceived as a morally-dubious outing, he does so"in an offensively direct, slang-laden style" (*SL* 203).　 Thus, to a certain extent, language—or a particular use of language—is not simply an expression of intentions, but, in this instance, constitutes the basis on which readers experience and judge character.

　　Herman concludes by asserting the necessity of what he calls 'contextual anchoring.' A narrative cannot be truly understood until its relation to a readership and the sorts of conditions which determine the responses of readers have been clarified.　 In his comments on *The House of Mirth,* Herman recognizes that 'style' is a reflection of a larger set of cultural forces which determine expectations with regard to class position and gender role in late-nineteenth American society.　 But he goes on to suggest, in an analysis of Edna O'Brien's novel *A Pagan Place,* a novel in which the protagonist is referred to in the second person, a 'you' who is also the narrator, that the 'anchoring' process in its most immediate sense has to do with how a narrative functions in relation to a reader. Herman's interest in second-person narration has to do with the multiple ways the 'you' can be understood rhetorically: (1) as speaker addressing herself as an 'other'; (2) as a mode of general reference; or (3) as mode of addressing a reader directly—i.e. the reference to 'you,' as a form of address, places the reader in the

position of immediate interlocutor or dialogic partner. It is in this latter sense that a narrator can appear to presume knowledge of the reader who, from one perspective, becomes in fact the object of what is narrated (and is, in this sense, absorbed by and thereby 'immersed' in the text). When read in this way (and Herman suggests that even where the narrative becomes clear about who is speaking), the use of the second person form achieves a degree of intimacy between narrator and reader over and above what more conventional first- and third-person narratives are normally ascribed. .

But the issue of 'intimacy' ─and that of the degree to which fictional narrative can itself be characterized as a 'discourse of intimacy' ─is critical not simply from the rhetorical point of view but also, ultimately, from the standpoint of the 'underlying materials' and the range of experience narrative deals with, in particular the emotions it both inscribes and elicits. Herman points to something here I would take to be true of fictional narrative more generally. This is the sense of 'proximity,' of 'being there,' of what readers are privy to when they enter what Herman calls the 'storyworld": the experience that one is being let in on intimate knowledge, 'secrets,' as in the case of confessional narrative (where a first-person narrator 'reveals' what social convention typically prohibits a subject from referring to in public) or, as in the case of third-person narrative where what can frequently seem to be a voyeuristic perspective makes visible or accessible actions or words and thoughts of characters in contravention of prohibitions regulating our relation to the personal lives of others. Herman's emphasis on the sorts of 'immersion,' with its implication that what is ultimately at issue is connected with an experience of 'intimacy,' and what can

and cannot be said about intimate matters, brings us, I think, tantalizingly close to what could mark a major reorientation in the conceptualizing of fictional narrative and its relation both to other orders of discourse and the cultural domain in some larger sense.

In suggesting that fictional narrative does not simply deal with 'experience' but with a specific order of 'experience' occurring within or in proximity to the realm of the personal, the private and the 'intimate,' I would point to the work of Cesare Segre who, in his "Analysis of the Tale, Narrative Logic, and Time," advanced an early critique of the level of abstraction at which notions of 'event,' 'character,' 'sequence' had been conceptualized in narrative theory. In a discussion of Todorov's *Grammaire du Décaméron,* Segre had noted that mixed into Todorov's syntactic categories were semantic elements not rigorously differentiated as to order or kind. Segre observes that the verbs "modify," "sin," "punish"－which Todorov took as paradigmatic of narrative action－are "not located at a single level of generalization," "do not constitute a single coherent semantic system," and thus are "not capable of grouping together under their aegis even the actions which really are described in the *The Décaméron*"(31).[4]

In proposing a tentative corrective, Segre refers to what he calls "real functions which already belong to the diegesis" (formulated "at a much reduced level of abstraction") which include "falling in love, promise of marriage or such"(29). Segre speaks of "the promise of marriage," "delaying misfortune," "obstacles to overcome," "means of overcoming the obstacles," "obstacles overcome," "marriage" as "fit(ting) hundreds of texts, from Alexandrian romances to *I promessi sposi* to sentimental love stories." Arguing for

a relatively supple notion of the 'function,' he conceives each marriage-related event moving in a variety of possible directions and in accord with what he calls "progressively narrower groupings." He argues that "the function 'falling-in-love' would be particularly rich in developments: A first distinguishing feature will be the preexistence of a marriage or its absence; the second such feature the intention of consummating the affair or not, etc. Hence the presence or absence of a function 'adultery,' which may then be considered as conclusive (as a goal reached) or interlocutory with respect to subsequent developments"(29-30). Segre's identification of 'love,' 'courtship,' and 'marriage' as the generative foci of story-telling assumes added significance in light of Todorov's remarks concerning the place of the 'adulterous liaison' in Boccaccio's tales or Gerald Prince's specification of 'man-meeting-woman' as the paradigmatic story proposition.

It is here I would argue that any return to the notion of narrative as discursive field or rhetorical mode would necessarily take the form of a synthesis incorporating some more recent approaches to narrative－in particular those articulated in feminist, family-systems, gay, and gender approaches to narrative, which is to say, perspectives which have underscored, albeit often from highly critical perspectives, how fictional story centers on a particular experience encompassed by relationships defined by 'love,' 'courtship,' 'intimacy,' 'marriage,' 'kinship,' 'family' and how characters implicated in a 'field' defined by such terms draw the reader into what Herman has called the 'storyworld.'

To view narrative as a special form of what might be called the 'discourse of intimacy' can serve to clarify where fictional story-telling is situated not only with regard to the larger array of

discourse forms but in relation to a particular set of institutional practices relating to sexuality, courtship, coupling, marriage, family, parenting. In proposing what I would call a 'structural reciprocity' between fictional story and a particular domain within the larger body of practices referred to as 'culture,' one begins to lend semantic content to notions like Jonathan Culler's "autonomous level of plot structure underlying the actual linguistic manifestations;" or Teun van Dijk's positing of "a separate system of rules" regulating "the action and event structure" of narrative. In taking cognizance of the historical and cultural variability of personal life, and of the complex ways in which, for instance, the 'couple' or 'family' unit, while reflecting and shaped by larger cultural forces, imposes its own specific demands upon discourse and the social, Segre's work begins to recognize the degree to which narrative is a discourse centered on intimate life, e.g.. particular relational axes within the family (parent-child, brother-brother, sister-sister, etc.) or within the couple unit (in particular where a third party intervenes in one form or another), and how this concern informs and shapes fictional plots.[5] Segre's schemata identify a range of configurations and sequences structuring fictional story, and for specifying how core configurations and sequences around which stories are generated can be deployed to endorse or to critique other-than familial agencies and identities marked in terms, for instance, of class, nationality, race or ethnicity.

Notes

1. Reference to David Herman's *Story Logic* will be indicated parenthetically within the text by the abbreviation *SL* and page number; references to Herman's *Universal Grammar and the Form of Fiction* will be indicated similarly by the abbreviation *UG* and page number.

2. Citing Todorov, Herman notes that we "search for this... universal grammar by studying other symbolic activities besides natural language" and went on to propose that "a theory of narrative will contribute .. to the knowledge of this grammar, insofar as narrative is such a symbolic activity"(*UG* 29; orig. Todorov 108-9).

3. Greimas's notion of the 'actant,' derived from Propp's concept of the narrative 'function,' which, as defined by Propp, was to be "understood as an act of character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action"(93; citing Propp, 21),

4. Segre argued that verbs denoting 'transgression"or"punishment" presuppose the existence of ordering operations beyond the syntactic and define a relational sphere and a set of norms (elsewhere Segre speaks of "cultural modeling systems") of immediate relevance to the notion of story, even if Todorov is not conceptually prepared to address the questions explicitly. Segre's critique, of course, anticipates the possibility of coming to some more forthright account ("the actions which really are described") of the semantic properties of story, and on this basis, of criteria for distinguishing story from other orders of discourse.

5. Segre himself does not spell out the range of story-telling his

diegesis-derived functions might cover, nor the extent to which such functions define the specificity of fictional story-telling. In earlier work, I have suggested a six-phase modeling of story sequences which might be of use in conceptualizing the orders/modes of intimacy in which stories are implicated: (1) the childhood plot centered on intra-familial interaction as experienced by the child; (2) the transit plot, recounting the departure of child from family-of-origin; (3) the courtship plot as actants enter into couple configurations; (4) the conjugal or marriage plot, focused on spousal relationships; (5) the parenting plot centered on parents in relation to child; (6) limit sequences in which figures, usually but not necessarily generationally-marked as older, confront death and are represented as incapable of reproducing or supporting the family unit (See Jonnes).

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