

The Autodidact's Travel Guide to Mieke Bal's Narratology

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A Note

It's a great pleasure to see that a book primarily meant for students and colleagues, has opened up the ideas for everyone. What this person has done is extremely valuable. A glossary of terms, explaining briefly each of the key concepts of the book, enhances, indeed, the accessibility of the theory. The clarity does not damage the complexity - which is, for me, the key to a work like this. The book Mr Madd is "glossing" is the 4th edition of a book I revised every decade. The 5th one is currently in press. But the ideas have not really changed. The fact that this reader has seen the point of clarity is the greatest satisfaction for me as the author/thinker. The quality of the mediation is amazing.

- Mieke Bal; May 16, 2025

Preface

This work began as a proof of concept for two working-class people who met in the kinds of internet circles cringe-inducingly referred to as “underground theory” and “the liminal web.” These spaces are filled with a mixture of autodidacts and degree-holding academics who seem to share an equal fascination with and disdain for the Academy; such as it exists in this year, 2025. It’s a kind of intellectual diaspora for those who sense that they are in a condition of exile from a land that no longer resembles the home it probably never was.

We wanted to see if it was possible for guys like us—maybe a Bachelor of Arts and a half between us—to tackle a text like Mieke Bal’s *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative, 4th Edition* and make a meaningful contribution to our comrades on the scene. The original plan was to make a simple glossary of 20 or so of the more esoteric terms like ‘[focalization](#)’ and ‘[free indirect discourse](#).’ Nothing fancy, just a quick guide for other folks like us to use to get through some of the tougher material. That project was successful but toward the end, my partner, as often happens with our class of scholars, had to quit to focus on more pragmatic concerns. Some time after his exit, I realized I was benefitting much more from the process than I had anticipated. So I chose to expand the project to include everything listed in Bal’s Index of Terms. Over time, it became clear that there were a few terms not specifically listed but otherwise implicated by the rest and therefore also necessary to add. At final count, I found 262 worthy concepts to include in this work.

Somewhere along the way, my wonderful, caring wife couldn’t suppress her institutional instincts and tattled on me about my project of scholarly vandalism to its [author](#). To absolutely everyone’s surprise, Bal seemed to take it seriously and we have since developed a correspondence. I cannot fully convey the validation I felt at being CCed on a letter to her publisher about this work. I am not used to anyone besides my wife and my daughter taking me seriously. At any rate, that was the impetus behind and circumstances surrounding the conception of this project. I should now describe what this project is, what it isn’t, with some necessary notes for the reader about my process and considerations.

I hope for the reader to think of this as a kind of intellectual travel guide formatted as a glossary. Ideally, nobody reads a travel guide as if it is an authoritative description of its subject location. It is a given that at-best, it’s an expert’s subjective impression of what a traveler might want to know. I wrote this in that spirit, as a guide for fellow travelers—double entendre absolutely intended.

The formatting is optimized for a quick reference. I took pains to cross-link the first usages of terms that are also present in this work so that the [reader](#) can wander at will. Wherever I chose to subordinate one of Bal’s listed terms—“[define](#)” it within the entry for a superordinate term—I always keep that original term emphasized in **bold** font. Mieke Bal’s writing is fabulously European and yet I, as an ugly American, tend to use the vulgar variants of words like color (colour) and center (centre) and such. All uses of the title of the primary text will be emphasized in italics and shortened to *Narratology*. This saves pixels but also helps distinguish generic uses of the term: [narratology](#). Furthermore, to avoid confusion between Bal’s and my citations, any direct quote of her words will be followed by the relevant page number in *Narratology* sans brackets; her own citations will be bookended by quotation marks and page numbers bracketed. I will, from time to time, rephrase parts of

her passages made awkward by my own philistine writing and will indicate those instances with square brackets.

I try to keep the explicit or most generic “definition” towards the top of each entry. However, in many cases, for reasons ranging from personal taste through technical necessity to outright incompetence, the reader will find that “definition” well and truly buried if not absent entirely. Finally, the reader will be horrified to find [modal](#) phrases like “might” and “may” and “seems to be” abound in this work. This was a necessary conceit to the reality that some people simply might not be able to help themselves from seeing some [homology](#) between Bal’s intended words and the way I interpret them. I suppose that’s as good as any segue into what this work is not.

This work is not an authorized companion glossary to Mieke Bal’s *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative, 4th Edition*; at least, it was not intended to be. So very crucial to understanding Bal’s work is recognizing—and respecting—the inextricably [ambiguous](#) nature of words. For some, those last two sentences are a dealbreaker, and so be it. For the rest of us, know this: ambiguity is the condition of freedom that allows us language beings to act historically. To have intellectual agency. To reach into the cold efficiency of logic and rip something truly novel, something transcendent into being. This work will be no consolation to those who require clean concepts on which to build publishable journal articles. This is a text written by a man who believes that the only clear distinction between fiction and non-fiction is the sincerity of the author. It’s a travel journal, a companion to you, not the text. You should fight with it. You should pry apart its flaws and hopefully use them to build your own understanding of narrative.

Acknowledgements

I am infinitely grateful to Jennifer, who tattled; Mieke, who listened; Dan, my comrade; and Luna, my light.

Terms

Abstract (Abstraction)

“...the difference between the more specific term character and the general, abstract term actor at issue in the next chapter will gradually become clearer.” 104

In *Narratology*, Bal will often use *abstract* as roughly synonymous with generalized or universalized. This could be due to the notion that—as opposed to concrete—an *abstract* concept allows for a high degree of [subjective interpretation](#) and maintains a strong observational distance. It facilitates a broad range of possible connections due to its loose or blurry contextual footing.

As an analytical method, abstraction risks a confusion between the particular connections it facilitates and their implications more broadly; however, that risk can be managed with careful wording and application.

Accumulation

“...the piling up of data...” 114

When facts, [traits](#), [actions](#), and other [characters’](#) viewpoints are gradually interpreted by the [reader](#) as a contiguous whole.

Along with [repetition](#), relations to other characters, and [transformations](#), *accumulation* is one of the “four different principles that work together to [construct](#) the image of the character.” page 114

Achronymy

“A deviation of time that cannot be analyzed further.” 85

An [aspect](#) of the [story](#) which manifests as unresolvable confusion in firmly detailing the [chronology](#)—sequence of events—in the [fabula](#).

This is opposed to [anachrony](#), where a deviation in time is used to enhance the reader’s understanding of the overall chronology.

Consider the *achronym*: “She spent a year in Dubai last week.” vs the anachrony, “Only last week she’d said she would never leave her county. Now look at her. Off on her way to Dubai for a year!”

Actant

“An actant is a class of [actors](#) who share a certain characteristic quality.” 166

Both within and beyond narratology, when telos—an overarching purpose or goal—is present, [agents](#) contribute toward or counteract its realization. An *actant* is an [element](#) of the [fabula](#), serving as a collective descriptor that categorizes agents based on their roles and their contributions to the fabula’s various teloi.

Act (Action)

“To act is defined here as to cause or to experience an [event](#).” 5

The fundamental basis for inferring [subjectivity](#). Readers may presume that for *action* to occur, the [character](#) must have some motivating logic preceding it.

“[Actors](#), in the [fabula](#), are the [subjects](#) of action. This attention paid to [agency](#) – and, hence, to subjectivity...” 10

Actor

“Actors are agents that perform actions. They are not necessarily human.” 5

The term for [agent](#) specific to the [analysis](#) of the [fabula](#). Bal shows both the relationship-to and distinctions-from *actors*’ counterparts in the [text](#) and [story](#) respectively in writing: “An example of this is the agent who performs the activities pertinent for each layer. This agent is called ‘[narrator](#)’ or ‘speaker’ in the study of the text, ‘[character](#)’ in the study of the story, and “actor” in the study of the fabula.” 8

Addressee

Addressee is used in two ways in *Narratology*. In its primary* use, it is synonymous with intended audience or [reader](#), and is therefore antonymous with [author](#). (Example on page 5)

In its secondary use, it reflects the inverse of a [focalizer’s](#) point of view—especially in dialogue. When the [character-bound narrator](#) describes something, that thing is the *addressee*. (Examples on pages 22, 42, 158)

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*It should be noted that we, and not Mieke Bal, made the primary/secondary distinction. Out of deference to the work, we chose primary and secondary on the arbitrary basis of their respective chronological introductions in the text. This is not meant to indicate any value judgement or [hierarchy](#).

Aesthetic

In only one case, Bal uses *aesthetic* in such a way as to tell the reader what she means by it:

“...the rationale for the collective description is rendered in a combined terminology of classification and aesthetics: ‘Although each was of *a type* absolutely different from the others, they all had *beauty*; ...’” 121 (emphasis Bal’s)

Regarding the above quote: from its order in the relationship with ‘classification’, to the order of Bal’s italicized terms we may presume the lay use of this word which means roughly ‘beautiful; of or relating to beauty’ in *Narratology*.

As a point of consideration however, for many of its uses in this text, *aesthetic* is much more [ambiguous](#). In many cases the term is merely juxtaposed against other terms which, unfortunately, do not line up in such a way that should give the reader a definite sense of what Bal might intend—even if the reader may sense what she thinks the word *doesn’t* mean. (i.e. “...moving, disgusting, pleasing, or aesthetic” 7; “ideological or aesthetic” 8; “[ideological](#) and aesthetic” 26; “logically and aesthetically” 34; “aesthetic or [psychological](#)” 69; “observation or aesthetic appreciation” 107; “aesthetic and epistemological” 120)

This feels appropriate to the general use of this term outside of *Narratology*—even in professional philosophical discourse—which is to say extremely idiosyncratic.

Agency (Agent)

The potential for making a willful [action](#). To exercise [agency](#) in the narratological sense is to extend [subjective](#) power to color the [fabula](#); ultimately determining that [aspect](#) of the [story](#).

An entity with *agency* is an *agent*. Importantly, an *agent* may be part of the fabula (called an [actor](#)), part of the story (called a [character](#)) or external to it entirely (called a narrator) as Bal notes: “We can then indicate by means of the term [external focalization](#) that an anonymous agent, situated outside the fabula, is functioning as focalizer.” 136

Allegory

“In yet another way, [mythical](#) and allegorical [characters](#) fit a pattern of expectation, established in the basis of our [frame of reference](#).” 109

The [symbolic](#) re-presentation*—within a [text](#)—of a phenomenon familiar to readers’ lived experiences. This is a literary strategy to unite the reader’s frame of reference with the author’s. In connecting common understandings to the [story](#), it can develop [determination](#) in characters and [themes](#).

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*We intend re-presentation (i.e., a stylistic contextualizing metaphor)—as opposed to a representation (i.e., a realistic reproduction akin to direct simile).

Ambiguity

A conceptual condition where multiple—in some cases contradictory—meanings are possible. Chronologically, ambiguity could be the result of [achrony](#). In dialogue with Bal, she remarks on the narrative utility of ambiguity which “allows punning, and also reflecting more on meanings.”

Wherever the author writes ambiguity into the elements in the fabula, she cultivates opportunities for readers to apply their own subjective valences to the narrative. If it is given that “[authority](#) is the prerogative to determine what is or is not the case,” then ambiguity could be considered a literary device which places some responsibility for narrative authority on the reader.

Anachrony

A break—an intervention—in the ordered [chronological](#) sequence of events on the [fabula](#). One example would be [retroversion](#), where a [character-bound narrator](#) relates something from their past (e.g., “Back when I was young...”). Another would be [anticipation](#), where a character might [hint](#) at or outright announce what is to come later in the fabula. Each of these examples, respectively, is a temporary movement backward or forward in the chronology of the fabula.

In this text, Bal further distinguishes anachrony as a [temporal](#) break that, upon [analysis](#), provides greater clarity regarding the arrangement of events in the fabula. In contrast, see [achrony](#), where such breaks create confusion.

“There is yet another way of considering anachronies in terms of their spans: by distinguishing between **punctual** and **durative** anachronies.” 80

When analyzing a specific break in the chronology of the fabula, one aspect of focus could be the length of time that break represents. *Narratology* presents this as an antimony between a brief, discrete moment in time—**punctual anachrony**—and one which is longer and more spread out—**durative anachrony**.

The span of time covered in anachrony shouldn't be confused with the completeness of a given scene, as Bal notes: "But **durative** and complete do not by any means always coincide." 80

To what degree this is employed can give insight into the temporal timbre the author intends for the reader. There is a kind of counterintuitive negative correlation between the length of an anachrony and the level of its relevance.

Consider that: "When **durative** retroversions are dominant, the reader quickly gets the impression that nothing particularly spectacular is happening. The narrative appears to be a succession of inevitable situations." 81

As opposed to: "Often, a **punctual** anachrony recalls a brief but significant event; that significance then justifies the anachrony, despite its short span." 80

Analepsis

Bal includes analepsis in her index of concepts but never specifically uses it within the text itself. This term, of Greek origin, means *recovery*, *retrieval* or *taking up* and is narratologically synonymous with [retroversion](#) and antonymous with [anticipation](#).

Though a more common synonym would be *flashback*, Bal explicitly refuses to use that term "because of [its] vagueness and psychological connotations." 71

Analysis

The approach to discourse that adheres to a [structured](#) interpretation of facts, aiming to facilitate authentic argumentation about a subject. This should not be confused with merely "collecting and organizing facts" or "finding the objective truth" about the subject of *analysis*.

Bal's overarching purpose with *Narratology* is to empower [readers](#) to communicate their *analyses* in a way that fosters fruitful argument. Her intention with *Narratology* relies heavily on her precise views about analysis itself, as she emphasizes the need for making interpretations arguable:

"...a systematic theory is helpful, not to eliminate or bracket [interpretation](#) but to make it arguable. An interpretation is a proposal. If a proposal is to be accepted, it must be well founded. If it is based on a precise description it can be discussed, even if, in practice, the intuitive interpretation preceded the analysis. The theory presented here is an instrument for making descriptions, and hence interpretations, discussable. That, not objectivity or certainty, 'being right' or 'proving wrong,' is the point." 10

Anthropomorphism

The tendency, specifically within *Narratology*, to confuse literary [characters](#) (not exclusively humans; could be animals, inanimate objects, forces of nature, etc.) with real humans, going so far as attributing to them feelings and emotions not explicitly included in the text by the [author](#). This constitutes both a necessary feature of an immersive [story](#) (i.e., [character-effect](#)) for a lay [reader](#), and an analytical fallacy to be avoided in scholarly reading. The latter of these phenomena we might call anthropomorphic reification; as in, to presume an immaterial thing to have materiality.

Anticipation

Where there is an [anachrony](#)—an intervention in the [chronological](#) ordering of [events](#) in the [fabula](#)—there will follow a new sequence where the [narrative](#) moves either to the past or the future. *Anticipation* is the forward-looking type, where [narrative](#) moves to the future, as opposed to [retroversion](#) which looks back to the past. Just as *retroversion*, “[a]nticipations, too, can be grouped as **internal** or **external**.” 84 (Emphasis ours)

As with retroversion, the boundary of interiority/exteriority in anticipation is the timeline of the primary fabula. Wherever the span of the *anticipation* crosses that boundary, Bal refers to it as ‘**mixed anticipation**,’ in her summary of this nomenclature:

“Whenever a retroversion takes place completely outside the time span of the primary fabula, we refer to an **external retroversion**. If the retroversion occurs within the time span of the primary fabula, then we refer to an **internal retroversion**. If the retroversion begins outside the primary time span and ends within it, we refer to a **mixed retroversion**. The same applies to anticipations...” 76-77 (Emphasis ours)

An application of internal anticipation could be to preemptively fill-in what will later be skipped over, as Bal notes: “**Internal anticipations** frequently complement a future [ellipsis](#) or [paralipsis](#): things are made clear now so that later on they can be skipped or only mentioned in passing.” 84 This might be done to accommodate, ahead of time, a fast-paced [scene](#) which would be otherwise bogged down by the inclusion of those details.

An **external anticipation** seems to imply that the primary fabula for that [text](#) was, after all, a subordinate fabula to an overarching [story](#) which will play out over a series of texts. We should note, this last statement was an inference made upon reading the section on *anticipation* and not explicitly stated by Bal.

See [Hint](#), [Iterative Anticipation](#), [Analepsis](#)

Apostrophe

The direct address of an abstract or absent entity within a text. In this sense, it is often used in lyrical poetry to speak to someone or something not present and should not be confused with directly addressing the reader themselves. As an example, see the emphasized phrases: “**O death**, where is **thy** sting? **O grave**, where is **thy** victory?” 1 Corinthians 15:55 KJV

Application

“The [analysis](#) is based not on the application of a concept that is, like a master code, beyond questioning, but rather on a confrontation between theoretical concept and [narrative text](#) that is mutually illuminating.” 70

A unilateral, arbitrary objective manifestation of authority. While intended as analysis, it is received as judgment. This approach precludes dialogue and dismisses [subjective](#) qualities deemed irrelevant by the application, thus making argument impossible, which is entirely antithetical to the purpose of *Narratology*.

Arbitrariness

A condition brought about through caprice, fiat, whim. To the degree that an *arbitrary* distinction is used in [analysis](#), it must balance its [communicative](#) utility to the analysis

against the danger of implicit, unaddressed personal bias masquerading as objective authority.

“Conceived as a set of tools, as a means to express and specify one’s interpretative reactions to a text, the theory presented here holds no claim to certainty. It is not from a positivistic desire for absolute, empirical knowledge that this theory and its instrumental character should be considered to have been generated. It is, quite the opposite, conceived as it is because interpretation, although not absolutely arbitrary since it does, or should, interact with a text, is in practice unlimited and free. Hence, I find, the need for a discourse that makes each interpretation expressible, accessible, communicable.” viii

Argumentative

“Argumentative [textual](#) passages do not refer to an [element](#) ([process](#) or object) of the [fabula](#), but to an external topic.” 24

One of the three textual forms identified by *Narratology*. What distinguishes this form is that while the other two (i.e. [descriptive](#) and [narrative](#)) deal strictly within the [context](#) of the fabula, argumentative text breaches the boundary between the reader’s own reality and that of the story’s in a way which seems designed to impact the reader’s opinion.

“Because the division between opinions and facts is difficult to draw, it makes sense to consider ‘argumentative’ statements that refer to something of general knowledge outside the fabula.” 25

Bal is clear that while *argumentative* text—with its rhetorical timbre—often seems [ideological](#), it is not the only writing form with that quality:

“It would be naive to suppose that only argumentative parts of the text communicate ideology. This happens equally in descriptive and narrative parts of the text; but the manner in which it happens is different.” 25

And it is crucial to remember that the purpose of *argumentative* text is not always to communicate ideology:

“The argumentative parts of the text often give explicit information about the ideology of a text. It is, however, quite possible that such explicit statements are treated ironically in other parts of the text, or are contradicted by descriptive or narrative parts of the text to such an extent that the reader must distance herself from them. If we want to evaluate the ideological tenor of a text, an analysis of the relationship between these three textual forms within the totality of the entire text is a crucial element.” 26

Though both concepts are extra-textual, narrative *argumentation* is contrasted with *argumentative* [commentary](#) by virtue of the former addressing the audience while the latter addresses the text itself.

See [Commentary](#) for a more detailed discussion.

Articulation

To make clear and precise distinctions among concepts. In narrative analysis, articulation involves carefully distinguishing ideas, [themes](#), [aspects](#), or [elements](#) within a [text](#) prior to [interpretation](#). Bal describes *articulation* as the second of three steps in composing a basic analytical [binary opposition](#). 116

Aspect

“those features that distinguish the structured [story](#) from, on the one hand, the [text](#), and on the other, the [fabula](#).” 65

The key [nomenclature](#)—sub-themes—of interpretive distinctions. As such, they relate to the story in a way roughly equivalent to how [elements](#) relate to the fabula. Succinctly, as elements compose a fabula, aspects compose a story.

That these distinctions exist or are meaningful at all seems utterly dependant on the interplay of [readerly](#) expectations and [authorial](#) delivery which Bal implies by writing: “Depending on how classical, [realist](#), [modernist](#), [postmodernist](#) or otherwise experimental a narrative is, readers expect certain consistencies in [time](#), [place](#), [focalization](#); and they are annoyed when unexplained jumps occur.” 66

In other words, *aspects* seem to arise from the author’s [manipulation](#) of the reader’s expectations—themselves a component of their [frame of reference](#). Expectations can be thematically arranged and therefore *aspects* can be thus structured sufficiently to generate reasonable arguments which is, notably, the central principle of Bal’s project in *Narratology*.

Attribution

To assign a quality or characteristic to an object. *Attribution* can be accomplished overtly (e.g. The rifle was a family heirloom), subtly (e.g. The rifle had been passed from father to son for generations), or anywhere in between. A common injunction regarding this phenomenon is the cliché often heard in writer’s groups: “Show, don’t tell.” The extent to which a textual passage might be considered within the realistic tradition seems largely a question of how subtly *attribution* is accomplished.

“Within the realistic tradition, description has always been considered problematic. In the Republic, Plato tried to rewrite fragments of Homer so that they would be “truly” narrative. The first elements to be discarded were the descriptions. Even Homer himself attempted to avoid, or at least to disguise, descriptions by framing them as narrative. Achilles’s shield is described as it is in the process of being made, Agamemnon’s armour as he puts it on.” 27

Attributive sign

What designates the point of origin—the locus—of [focalization](#). Because this locus can shift dynamically throughout a [narrative](#), *Narratology* discusses it in cardinal terms of successive levels (i.e. first, second, third...) Often, the [author](#) may clarify precisely which [actor](#) occupies that center of focalization with an *attributive sign* (e.g. “saw”, “heard”, “found” etc.). “Such markers of shifts in level we call attributive signs. These are signs that indicate the shift from one level to another.” 143

Importantly, not all *attributive signs* are so obvious: “These signs can remain implicit. Sometimes we can only deduce them from other, less clear information.” 143

Author

The originator of a [narrative](#), having constructed a [text](#) with a series of [events](#), arguments, or ideas that are interpreted as a [story](#). The *author’s* will is implicit in shaping the [fabula](#) and story. However, this is distinct from the [narrating voice](#), whose arguments are constructed within the text itself. *Narratology* argues that the *author* is not solely responsible for the ultimate interpretation of the story. In each case, interpretation will come about through a

dialectical interaction amongst the text itself, the reader's reception of that text, and the implicit social-cultural weighting of any and all aspects, arguments and contexts within it.

Author-Function

As the [point of view](#) is to the [focalizer](#), the *author-function* would be to the [story](#). As a mere concept—a consideration—it is unassailable. The [author](#) certainly has her own interpretation of her work. As a reification that concretely centers an analysis, it is bankrupt. The inevitable result of that arrangement would be the conclusion that there is a singular, most appropriate way to interpret the story (i.e., “the pure intent of the [author](#)”), which leads to a deeply ramified series of unresolvable problems beyond the scope of this work.

In *Narratology*, *author-function* is only mentioned to be invalidated as a reified thing. 61

Bal's position seems to be that there is no uncontroversial way to determine a discrete unit representing the ‘correct’ [interpretation](#) of the story because there is no such thing as a ‘correct’ interpretation.

“The theory presented here is an instrument for making descriptions, and hence interpretations, discussable. That, not objectivity or certainty, “being right” or “proving wrong,” is the point.” 10

Authority

The prerogative to determine what is and what is not the case. In a [narratological](#) sense, to have *authority* would be to determine the correct way to interpret the [narrative](#). Bal's position in *Narratology* is that there is no single authority or arbiter of narrative.

“The appeal to the [author](#) to authenticate [interpretations](#) is an argument of authority – the two words “author” and “authority” are not coincidentally linked. But to confer all interpretive power to the reader also has its problems. The [reader](#) is surely indispensable in an interactive view of narrative. But the reader is neither alone in this, nor omnipotent. The social [embedding](#) of reading, the cultural commonplaces that influence how we read, make the individualistic view that each reader does it all, untenable.” 11

Autobiography

A [narrative text](#) where the [fabula](#) is constructed of facts about the [focalizer](#) who is both the [narrator](#) and central figure of the [story](#).

Bible (biblical)

In *Narratology*, most explicit biblical references seem to be pointing at [stories](#) from both Jewish (specifically the Torah) and Christian (Old Testament, itself partly composed of the Jewish Torah) traditions. The only exception is on page 184 wherein “heaven and hell” is referenced; indicating a strictly Christian context.

Character

An [aspect](#) of the [story](#)—in particular, an [agent](#)—which manifests as “the [anthropomorphic](#) figure[s] provided with specifying features the [narrator](#) tells us about.” 105

Narratology distinguishes three distinct layers whose interface is responsible for the [reader's interpretation](#); those being the [text](#), story, and [fabula](#) respectively. The *character* is “the agent who performs the activities pertinent for” the story layer. 8

For wider context: “This agent is called “narrator” or “speaker” in the study of the text, “character” in the study of the story, and “actor” in the study of the fabula.” 8

There is a rational dissonance to precisely defining a specific *character* as-such. Since its existence is phenomenal—experienced uniquely by each reader—there could be no way to conclusively resolve a precise universal definition. Perhaps it is for that reason that Bal aims “not to determine (define) the characters (who are they?), but to characterize them (what are they?, and how do we find out?).” 105

Character-Bound Focalizer (CF)

“CF can vary. It can shift from one [character](#) to another, even if the [narrator](#) remains constant.” 136

“When [focalization](#) lies with one character that participates in the [fabula](#) as an [actor](#), we can refer to internal focalization.” 136

Focalization, being responsible for imbuing the [elements](#) of the fabula with [subjectivity](#), therefore necessitates a position from which that subjectivity may be observed.

Character-bound focalization—in the above quote also called internal focalization—can be observed in a [text](#) where the [focalized object](#) is described from the character’s particular viewpoint. In this way, the reader can interpret information not only specific to the object, but also how the character views it as well as their world in general.

Character-Bound Narrator

See [Narrator](#)

Character-Effect

A bleeding into reality of imaginary figures developed sufficiently in a [text](#) that the [reader](#) might fail to mark the distinction between the [fabula](#) and their own [extra-textual situation](#).

“The character-effect occurs when the resemblance between human beings and fabricated figures is so strong that we forget the fundamental difference: we even go so far as to identify with the [character](#), to cry, to laugh, and to search for or with it – or even against it, when the character is a villain.” 106

Character Qualification

“Because the features are attributed to the [character](#) by a [focalizer](#), I use the concept qualification rather than ‘quality,’ which suggests they really possess those features.” 115

Within a given [narrative text](#), a character may be said to have qualities which are either directly attributed to them by the [author](#) (i.e., external [narrator](#)) or indirectly implied through the [narrative](#) itself. However, there may also arise the case where a character is *qualified* by a [character-bound narrator](#)—in the above quote, this is the focalizer that is referenced—which is to say they are attributed qualities *from that character’s perspective*. These attributions are not necessarily meant to be taken as “real” within the context of the [fabula](#) but rather as subjective perspectives specific to the focalizer presented through the narrative.

Character Trait

A manifest behavioral tendency of a [character](#) which comes to define its individuality.

Chronology

The [sequence](#) of events as they appear in the [fabula](#). This is distinct from the order in which they are eventually interpreted as the timeline of the [story](#).

“Differences between the arrangement in the story and the chronology of the fabula are called chronological deviations or [anachronies](#).” 70

As an example, someone may

- A) walk to a door
- B) go to unlock it and
- C) realize they
- D) forgot their keys.

The chronology of the fabula follows $A > B > C > D$. However the timeline of the story was that someone:

- 1) Forgot their keys
- 2) Walked to a door
- 3) Went to unlock it and
- 4) Realized they

Applying the fabula to the timeline we see $A2 > B3 > C4 > D1$. The anachrony—specifically a [retroversion](#)—occurs at position D1.

Chronological Homonymy

“...it may [be] impossible to determine which period in the [fabula](#) is being referred to.” 76

A particular form of [achrony](#) in which the [chronological](#) position of an [event](#) on the fabula is [ambiguous](#). One result of this ambiguity is that the [reader](#) may find it hard or impossible to determine that event’s placement in the timeline of the [story](#) itself.

As Bal notes, this is a deliberate literary device: “...just as it is possible to use puns to achieve certain effects (confusion, humour, a sense of the absurd), so too chronological homonymy may be purposefully employed for the same effect.” 76

Chronophobia

“...the fear that [time](#) is the enemy’s gain...” 67

Anxiety over the scarcity of time itself, manifesting as the belief that one is on the losing side of a zero-sum contest with some other entity over the sovereign [agency](#) to use time as a resource.

Classification

Classification is to [analysis](#) what tactic is to strategy. In the process of textual analysis, there is a need to describe the objective components of the [text](#) so as to be portable, extensible, and can lead to insights worth arguing over. This description can be done on a basis of determining qualities common to some components and distinct from others. However, “[*Narratology*] cautions against the illusion of objectivity, both in storytelling as witnessing and in analysis as the scientific discovery of the truth. Narratology also cautions against a confusion of understanding and axiology, against a sense of value inherent in narrative:

either as intrinsically true, hence, good, or as intrinsically false, fictional, manipulative, hence, bad. The point is, instead, to ask meaningful questions.” xxi

A general who focuses purely on tactics, neglecting strategy, may win battles but lose wars. Similarly, *classification* for its own sake—confused for analysis itself—is a fallacious practice as Bal notes: “Classifying texts as a method of analysis is a circular way of reasoning.” xx

Coherence

“It is crucial to distance oneself from this [anthropomorphism](#).” 106

The presumed alignment between the [author’s](#) intent for how she rendered the [text](#), the arrangement of the [symbols](#) within the [fabula](#) itself, and the [reader’s](#) clear understanding of the [story](#). Bal critiques a strong insistence on this presumption as a specific kind of [analytical](#) failure called anthropomorphism.

Colonialism (Colonial)

“The genre of the [fantastic](#), I am beginning to sense, serves the purpose of a colonial perspective.” 78

As a [narratological](#) concept, Bal seems to view *colonialism* as an [anthropomorphism](#). It manifests as the pastiche of a beneficial, paternalistic relationship between a dominant foreign [actant](#) and a subservient indigenous one.

Commentary

Any part of the [text](#) which contributes nothing to the [fabula](#). *Commentary* is considered in *Narratology* to be non-narrative. It serves as an extra-textual link between the [author](#) and the [reader](#) and provides insight into the text’s overt [ideology](#). *Commentary* is contrasted with [narration](#) in that the latter does contribute to the fabula and, while it also relates the ideology of the text, it conveys “its more hidden or naturalized ideology, as embodied in the narrative representations.” 25

Although it represents a distinct form of writing, *commentary* is not listed in the three textual forms identified by *Narratology*. This is perhaps due to its subordinate nature to—and tendency to overlap with—two of them; respectively [argumentation](#) and [description](#). From this, it can be inferred that there are two antinomies of textual form present in *Narratology*: Argumentative *commentary* vs narrative argumentation and descriptive *commentary* (Bal’s use: non-narrative description) vs narrative description.

Regarding argumentative commentary vs narrative argumentation.

Though both are extra-textual, argumentative *commentary* is contrasted with narrative argumentation by virtue of the former addressing the text itself while the latter addresses the audience. Furthermore, while commentary never contributes anything to the fabula, argumentation does sometimes interact with the events of the story.

Regarding descriptive commentary (non-narrative description) vs narrative description.

Though both may make detailed observations while not advancing the plot, descriptive *commentary* differs from narrative description in that the former is a subjective reflection about the fabula while the latter is intended to convey objective information about its contents.

Communication

The relationship between subjects that facilitates informational transference. Information is not limited to that contained in language. As Bal notes in *Narratology*, will or intention can be *communicated*: “The intention of the subject is in itself not sufficient to reach the object. There are always powers that either allow it to reach its aim or prevent it from doing so. This relation might be seen as a form of communication, and we can, consequently, distinguish a class of actors – consisting of those who support the subject in the realization of its intention, supply the object, or allow it to be supplied or given – whom we shall call the power.” 168

Comparison

The act of viewing two or more objects as in relation to one another; noting specific difference and/or similarity. *Comparison*, like [metaphor](#), [rhetorically](#) facilitates [description](#): “Between the [theme](#) or sub-theme compared and the predicates that replace them in metaphor, or specify them in comparison, the relation is termed metaphorical. On the basis of these two possible [rhetorical](#) relations, we can roughly differentiate six types of description.” 30

To distinguish *comparison* from metaphor, we look at whether the objects are specified (comparison) by their predicates or replaced (metaphor) by them. When “a door stands shut like a hinged sentinel,” we see a comparative analogy. When, “the hinged sentinel blocks the path forward,” we see a metaphor.

Competence

“If the process of the [fabula](#) can be seen as the execution of a program, then each execution presupposes the possibility of the subject to proceed. This possibility of the subject to act, the competence, may be of different kinds, which leads to further specification.” 173

The [element](#) of the fabula which distinguishes the subjective [agency](#) of its [actors](#) from the fabula’s respective telos—overall purpose or destination. The analysis of *competences* can bring specific insights about the [ideology](#) of the [narrative](#), as it highlights the limitations and capacities of the actors in achieving their goals; assisting the interpretation of the authorial intent with her presentation of the fabula’s multiple teloi.

Conative

The adjective describing words, phrases or actions issued with the intent to influence behavior or bring a result. This overlaps with [rhetorical](#) in the sense that both concepts involve purposeful influence. However, where rhetoric may be analyzed in terms of strategy or method, the conative is analyzed based on motive or intent.

Conflict

A relationship between [subjects](#) which predicates a resolution and implies [chronology](#). Wherever there is telos—purpose—in a [narrative](#), conflict manifests as an impediment to its achievement. On that basis, conflict and resolution can be said to be the quintessential drivers of a [story’s logic](#). *Conflict* is not limited to any specific [aspect](#) of a story or [element](#) of the [fabula](#). It can be presented simply and singularly or occur in abstract, plural forms. How the reader regards conflicts and their resolutions therefore ultimately determines their reception of the story.

Connotation*

Culturally informed discursive nuances which lend a specific inflection—additional meaning not explicitly rendered in [text](#)—to a given [communication](#). This is especially relevant to the [interpretation](#) of a [story](#). The [reader](#)'s own [frame of reference](#) must align with that of the [author](#)'s for the *connotation(s)* of a section of text to resonate as intended. Connotation seems, therefore, a function of shared cultural references between the author and the reader. This implies an unresolvable hindrance to complete theoretical analysis of any text on a purely objective basis. Objectivity cannot account for what cultural knowledge is implicit in a text that an author or a reader might be privy to.

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*In the two uses of this term in the text, Bal never employs them in a narratological sense as such. Bal only uses *connotation* in [commentary](#) about some other narratological concept. We nevertheless find it a useful parallax vista—a place to find a different perspective—on a deeply important thread woven throughout *Narratology* which is to say Bal's own position on(against) [author-function](#), analytical [anthropomorphism](#), and intentionalist-centered critique.

Constructivism

"[Repetition](#), [accumulation](#), relations to other [characters](#), and [transformations](#) are four different principles that work together to construct the image of a character. Their effect can only be described, however, when the outline of the character has been roughly filled in."

114

In *Narratology*, *constructivism* is dealt with directly in terms of the development of a character. The essential point is that an entity, such as a character, does not appear out of whole-cloth, but is built—constructed—over time in the mind of the reader.

A *constructivist* approach to narratology itself—as opposed to character development—follows from the same principle, as Bal notes: "This is a constant element in narratological analysis: a dialectic back-and-forth between speculation and verification through open-minded analysis." 114

Content

As a generic concept, *content* can be that which a container—material or ideal—contains.

"A [narrative text](#) is a [text](#) in which an [agent](#) or subject conveys to an [addressee](#) ("tells" the reader, viewer, or listener) a [story](#) in a medium..." "A story is the content of that text..." 5

Like nesting matryoshka dolls, content can also be a container, with its contents being yet more containers. Consider the quote above in relation to the one which follows:

"The [fabula](#), understood as material or content that is worked into a story, has been defined as a series of [events](#)." 7

We see that the content of a narrative text is a story, among whose own content is a fabula, itself containing [elements](#).

Context

The situational framing or guidelines of a particular discourse. *Context* informs the sensemaking of a given presentation of [content](#): “direct or indirect knowledge of the *context* of certain characters contributes significantly to their meaning.” 107

As Bal notes, some *contexts* may be less helpful to sensemaking than others: “In some *contexts* it is impossible to ascertain whether the word bank refers to a financial institution or the side of a river; the word and its homonym look and sound identical.” 76

This implies that contexts may be [manipulated](#) by the [author](#) to impact the [reader’s](#) own sense of clarity.

See [Extra-Textual Situation](#), [Frame of Reference](#)

Contiguity (Contiguous)

A relationship wherein “one thing follows, or is adjacent to, another.” 30

Convention (Conventional)

Of or relating to [contexts](#) so thoroughly entrenched in a discourse that they are taken to be fundamentally understood by any reasonable discursive participant in the same way; regardless of their personal situation.

“Conventional restrictions could be seen as the [interpretation](#), by historically and culturally determined groups, of logical rules in concrete situations. Also included among the conventional restrictions are the traditional rules to which [texts](#) of specific genres must conform; for example, a classical tragedy takes place in the mythical upper-class circles of kings and gods. Conventional restrictions are based in [ideological](#) and [political](#) assumptions. This is more obvious for older texts, or texts from other cultures, than for what is close by, because what is normal for one reader need not be so for others.” 159

Copy

The act or result of a process whereby an original entity is duplicated. This could be to any level of detail for a given use of the term, except for the level of its situation in [time](#). In *Narratology*, the examination of the concept of a copy has implications on the nature of history.

For instance, the attribute of a copy *as a copy* is a consequence of the flow of time. This not only makes perfect mimicry entirely impossible—E.g., a *copy* cannot take the original’s place in time—but also informs the way we might consider history.

In her discussion (on pages 55-57) of Borges’ *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*, Bal illustrates that a text ‘perfectly’ reproduced three centuries after its original becomes a new original in its own right, imbued with a different set of cultural and temporal associations.

In this view, history is not a static record of events but a dynamic process, constantly reinterpreted and reshaped by the presence of the *copy*. Every reproduction becomes a unique entity, influenced by the subjective perspective and temporal context in which it is created or encountered.

Bal notes: “Writing – and by extension, painting or making a film – is an act of reading, and reading is a manner of rewriting or repainting. And such acts don’t occur in empty time but

in a time filled by the present. In the present, social agents – subjects with more or less easy access to the codes that direct the cultural integration of images – confront images and see mirrors held up to them.” 56

Corpus

Though literally translated from Latin as *body*, as used in *Narratology* specifically and in academic discourse generally, a *corpus* is a related group of [texts](#).

(My emphasis to show connection) “In many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century novels a clear connection can be discerned between the male sex and a military ideology. There is, however, no systematic connection in **the same corpus** between the female sex and a pacifist attitude...” 116

Here, *corpus* designates a specific collection of novels that are [analyzed](#) for recurring [ideologies](#) or thematic links.

Creation

Bal’s interpretation of *creation* includes notes of divinity and enunciation, expanding beyond a lay understanding of the word which might read: “the [act](#) of bringing something into existence.”

She notes: “As the meta-narrative phrase quoted earlier (‘the two did the best they could to create what really happened,’ 78) has already suggested, [narration](#) is an act of creation. In this sense the [narrative](#) aligns the power of narration with the divine creation as recounted in the biblical book of Genesis, which is also primarily a speech act.” 54

As to the question begged by the lay definition: “bringing from what/where,” Bal’s further exploration of *creation* as demarcation–dividing line–gives some clue:

“Separating dark from light, water from earth, animals from humans – all of this is what creation is. By this logic, taking a morsel of earth and kneading a human figure out of it is one such separation.” 118

By this understanding, we could answer “bringing from what/where?”, with, “from nothing,” and the aspect of separation becomes clear. *Creation*, therefore, must require either some supernatural being which can perform acts that defy our understanding of physics, or failing that, an [author](#) who can *build* or *bring forth from nothing* worlds of imagination and [characters](#) to fill them through the sheer act of distinction:

“But such subtle transitions are not the sole preserve of the [postmodern](#) novel. The classical [realist](#) novel of the second half of the nineteenth century also excelled in the creation of such complex structures.” 146

Crisis (vs development)

Narratology discusses *crisis/development* as forms through which the [duration](#) of [events](#) in the [fabula](#) might take:

“A first, general distinction might be the one between crisis and development: the first term indicates a short span of time into which events have been compressed, the second a longer period of time that shows a development. Neither of these two forms in itself has clear advantages over the other.” 178

Bal is skeptical that one or the other form has a greater claim to (small-r) realism:

“It has sometimes been said that development is more realistic, more in accord with the experience of real life. This seems doubtful, to say the least.” 178

Instead, she argues that there may be ideological dimensions to either [interpretation](#):

“It does seem likely, however, that a preference for one of these forms entails a certain vision of the fabula and, often, of reality.” 178

At any rate, these forms are not mutually exclusive:

“The distinction between crisis and development is relative: one form blends into the other. A fabula tends to a greater or lesser degree towards either one of the two forms. So it is often possible to distinguish both forms within one type of text.” 179

To summarize, *crisis* and *development* are forms that shape the [temporal](#) structure of events in a [narrative](#). While crisis compresses events into brief, decisive moments, development unfolds over longer periods. Neither form is inherently more realistic, as both can reflect different visions of reality. Moreover, the distinction is fluid, and narratives invariably combine aspects of both.

Cultural Analysis

“What I propose we are best off with in the age of cultural analysis is a conception of [narratology](#) that implicates [text](#) and [reading](#), [subject](#) and object, production and [analysis](#), in the act of understanding. In other words, I advocate and offer a narrative theory that enables the differentiation of the place of narrative in any cultural expression without privileging any medium, mode, or use; that differentiates its relative importance and the effect of the narrative (segments) on the remainder of the object as well as on the [reader](#), listener, viewer.” xx

Having remarked earlier on the “omnipresence of narrative in culture” xix, Bal establishes a position on *Narratology* qua *cultural analysis* as always-already included in culture. This stance precludes the kind of scholarly distancing that the kind of academic who says ‘epoché’ would privilege; which is to say, it dispels the fantasy of pure objectivity in anything like *cultural analysis*:

“Taking an instrumentalist position counters this view of culture. It feeds the illusion, typical of Enlightenment thought, that the subject can stand outside of what it criticizes, analyses, understands.” xx

In a similar vein, Bal indicates a “watching the watchers” quality in *Narratology* as it pertains to *cultural analysis*, noting: “Cultural analysis should not be taken literally – or analytically – as meaning the taking apart of culture. Rather, cultural analysts interpret the ways in which cultures take things, people, and themselves apart. Narratology is of great relevance for such a reorientation of, simultaneously, close reading and cultural studies within cultural analysis.” xxi

Cultural Artefact [Artifact]

A distinct unit of socially informed product, either material or conceptual.

Cultural Memory

“Narrative is more important than ever, not only in literary studies but also in history, where the awareness of narrative construction has grown tremendously; in cultural studies, where cultural memory, documented in mostly narrative form, is a popular subject of study; in film studies, which has itself bloomed over the past 10 years, with its inevitably narrative subject matter.” xii

From the above, we might consider this term to mean a narrative reflection on the collective attitude of a cultural group at a given point in time. In this way, we may consider *cultural memory* itself to be subject to analyses enabled by *Narratology*.

Death

Tempting as it is to regard this term as self-evident, as with most use-cases of such words in *Narratology*, the lay [definition](#) will not suffice. For instance, in the non-narrative sense, *death* is the cessation of the physical processes that enable movement, self-sustenance, and in the final analysis, [agency](#). Notice that even in this real-world framing, the attribute of agency brings [ambiguity](#).

Similarly, Bal’s approach to [narrative death](#) often involves the cessation of an entity’s capacity for action:

“Let us take as an example a complete life-story of the kind frequently written in the nineteenth century. The [fabula](#) contains the birth of the hero, his childhood, adolescence, military service, first love, the period of social ambition, decline, and death.” 89-90

There in that straightforward take, *death* marks the end of a specific entity’s (i.e., [character](#)) ability to shape the fabula.

Above, we wrote *entity*, rather than *character*, because there is an application of this concept that extends outside of the [text](#). If it is true that a character can “cause or experience an [event](#),” this must be so because the [author](#) has “determined that to be the case.” And we see both from how she frames the role of the author/authority in *Narratology*, as well as in Bal’s remarks (60) at the end of the first chapter, that she presumes the author dies in essentially the same sense as a character on completion of the text. Having published, they have no more meaningful [interpretation](#) of the [story](#) than anyone else who has read it.

Going further, we note that *Narratology* considers the reader responsible for some, if not all, interpretive power. This implies that to some degree, the [reader’s](#) own subjectivity—their agency—has a [determinative](#) effect on the “life” and “death” of a narrative entity. This follows both from the question raised by Barthes’ *Death of the Author* (i.e., it may be a reader’s decision whether or not the author has ceased to cause events in a narrative once having published it) as well as what is implied by the problem raised by [anthropomorphism](#). If a character truly “lives” in a text in antithesis to being taken for a physical being by a reader, the inverse of that condition signifies the character’s “death” as its own entity. The reader having usurped the agency of the character, the character having ceased to have subjectivity by becoming a mere vessel for the reader’s objective interpretation, there is nothing left to be called “living” in that character. Bal illustrates this, indicting the reader who engages in anthropomorphic reification: “Rather than blaming him – or the [narcissism](#) named after the mythical figure – for moral shortcomings or formative failure, I propose that

we take Ovid's Narcissus as an allegory of the reader who conflates character and person." 113

In this sense, *death* in *Narratology* is not just about the end of a character's story but about the cessation of a narrative entity's distinct agency, whether through the completion of the text, the author's withdrawal, or the reader's interpretive fiat.

Declarative Verb

"Declarative verbs indicating that someone is about to speak are, in a narrative text, signs of a change in level in the narrative text." 36

In *Narratology*, all narrative [acts](#) happen on discrete, hierarchically arranged levels. This arrangement begins with the primary (superordinate) or first level; that of the [narrator's](#). From there, the narrator will signal a shift to an [embedded](#), subordinate level. When that shift occurs due to a speech act, [convention](#) holds that it will be signaled by some arrangement of a *declarative verb*, the name of the speaking character, and dialogue bracketed by quotation marks.

While the above quote refers to the circumstance that the declarative verb (i.e., *said* in "Jack said, 'It's hot.'") precedes the [speech act](#); it may also follow it (i.e., "'It's hot,' said Jack."). It should be noted that this holds for [conventional](#)—popular and/or common—writing, but as is the case in all writing, there is no universal rule requiring this.

Consider the following from *Reaper Man* by Terry Pratchett, in which the protagonist, Death, meets a representative of the antagonist [actant](#), the Auditors:

"Death turned slowly, and addressed the figure that wavered indistinctly in the gloom.

WHY?

It told him.

BUT THAT IS... NOT RIGHT.

It told him that, No, it was right." (Pratchett 5)

We see that, by simply using all capitals, Death's speech avoids the convention entirely. We also see that the Auditor—the wavering figure—speaks through either [paralipsis](#) or [indirect speech](#) but nevertheless preceded by a declarative verb.

Definition

"...definitions are like a language: they provide something of a dictionary, so that one person understands what another means. But the definitions proposed here are provisional, serving before all else the purpose of being explicit and transparent enough that we can know what is relevant and what is not for the discussion at hand." 5

It is essential to understanding *Narratology* that what's written above remains at the front of the mind. A *definition* is, in this [text](#) and perhaps everywhere, merely a snapshot, or slice in time, of some potential meaning(s) of a given word. It describes how the [author](#) of that *definition* intends her [reader](#) to understand it for the limited purposes of the conversation at hand. *Definitions* are therefore, ephemeral as opposed to everlasting, context-dependent as opposed to fixed, and existential as opposed to imminent.

There is a common misconception that dictionaries—and by extension, *definitions*—are prescriptive; that they hold [authority](#) over the meanings of words. A thorough explanation of why that misconception is false or exists in the first place is not within the scope of this text. Anyone who has lived long enough to witness the inception of new terms and expressions already has ample evidence against the idea that a dictionary has any true authority over the language it describes.

Nevertheless, it seems the case that the word *definition* has taken on a colloquial connotation of authority and wherever it is used. That connotation seems to tag right along. But again, if you read *Narratology* with that framing, you will not have actually read *Narratology* any more than if you had opted to read it in pitch black darkness with your eyes closed.

Deixis (Deictic)

“This is the nature of words called deixis: words that only have meaning in the context in which they are uttered, such as “I” and “you,” “yesterday,” “here” or “there.” According to French linguist Émile Benveniste, who gave currency to the importance of deixis, the essence of language lies in deixis, not reference, because what matters in language is not the world “about” which subjects [communicate](#), but the constitution of the [subjectivity](#) required to communicate in the first place.” 22

All words may be regarded as more or less [ambiguous](#). Even the most mundane will leave some room for nuance: a tree might be a literal biological entity or an analytical visualization, for instance. In either of those cases, what’s meant by ‘tree’ follows some kind of throughline which has a continuity regardless of its use.

The meanings of *deictic* words, however, are entirely situationally dependent. For them, it isn’t a matter of nuance but of the whole makeup of that word’s meaning that shifts from use to use. As Bal mentions in the quote which begins this entry, the existence of such words have led some—we presume her to be among them—to extend their implications to language itself.

See [Definition](#)

Delimitation

In its narratological sense*, *delimitation* is—of the three features of [description](#)—the one responsible for marking distinctions between objects of focalization and enables the reader to sense their relationships within the fabula. The role of descriptive *delimitation* is to provide a structure on which a reader may concretize their interpretive abstractions within a text. This allows them to ground their interpretations in a way that makes conversation with other people—each with their own subjective standards—possible.

The risk to the analyst, however, is to hyper-prioritize the function of *delimitation*, as Bal notes: “Delimitation, classification, typology, are all very nice as remedies for chaos-anxiety, but what insights do these yield? ... Classifying texts as a method of analysis is a circular way of reasoning. There is no direct logical connection between classifying and understanding texts.” xx

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**Delimitation* is used much more frequently in *Narratology* in its generic sense (i.e., boundary, clear point of separation between multiple related but distinct entities or concepts.)

Density

Being rich in information relative to size. In *Narratology*, an example might be the use of [ellipsis](#), where a literal absence of information nevertheless implies a wealth of what might have been there.

Description (Descriptive)

“a textual fragment in which features are attributed to objects.” 27

One of the three textual forms identified by *Narratology*. What distinguishes this form is that while the other two (i.e. [argumentative](#) and [narrative](#)) enunciate on primarily (though not strictly) [subjective](#) levels, the descriptive is a primarily objective voicing. *Descriptive* text plays a crucial role in setting common, subjectively neutral distinctions between objects to establish a coherent [fabula](#) legible to the vast variety of readers that will encounter it. By doing so, it enables the subjective or ideological aspects of argumentative and narrative texts to engage in meaningful dialogue; both within the reader’s own interpretation and among those of others’.

While the emphasis on objective voice might imply that description is ideologically neutral, this is—humor intended—objectively false. As Bal notes: “It would be naive to suppose that only argumentative parts of the text communicate ideology. This happens equally in descriptive and narrative parts of the text; but the manner in which it happens is different.” 25

For one thing, a strong preference for the presentation of descriptive facts is itself ideologically driven. For another, the overlap of [commentary](#) with both description and argumentation indicates a dialectical relationship among those two textual forms that makes such a thing as “pure objectivity” seem laughably impossible. Bal, herself, nods to this dialectic in writing: “Description, thus, is both narrative’s “other” and an integral part of it.” 34

In pages 29-31, Bal identifies the three features which compose descriptive text: [delimitation](#), [motivation](#), and [rhetoric](#).

See [Narrative Text](#)

Detective Fiction (Novel)

A genre of fiction characterized by an emphasis on mystery, investigation, and resolution. Some of its [conventions](#) are:

- A plot centered on at least one mystery which will be solved by the end.
- Incomplete anachrony: “...the retroversions concerning the murder are incomplete, as they are in any detective novel.” 79
- Anticipations which function as hints about the solution of (one of) the mystery(ies).
- A cast of uncomplicated, archetypal characters.
- A protagonist whose primary motive is to solve the mystery(ies) (i.e., the detective).

- A tacit contract between the author and the reader that any given mystery could be solved by the reader prior to them reading that solution in the text with only the hints provided to them.

Determination

“On the basis of bits of information, the [character](#) becomes more or less predictable. These data determine him or her, mostly so inconspicuously that the [reader](#) processes the information without giving it a thought. I call this fixating process determination.” 108

Determination happens gradually through accumulated [narrative](#) details (e.g., [descriptions](#), [acts](#)); in dialogue with a reader’s and author’s shared [frames of reference](#). To whatever degree a character evolves over the course of the [narrative](#) relative to its initial determination is a rich site for argument and therefore a useful [aspect](#) of the [story](#) for discussion. To say, for example, that a character grows through the story would indicate that there was an established determination from which they will have diverged in the end.

Development (vs Crisis)

See [Crisis \(vs development\)](#)

Deviation

A break from expectation. In *Narratology*, not just the presence of deviations but the specific genres (e.g., [chronological](#) deviations, breaks in [determined characters](#), departures from [conventional](#) formatting etc.) and characteristics (e.g., whether they lead to more or less confusion, whether they are more or less noticeable etc.) can be an impactful direction of narratological study.

Dialogue (Dialogic)

“Dialogue is a form [of [embedded](#) text] in which the actors themselves, and not the primary narrator, utter language.” 59

Direct Discourse (Direct Speech)

“Direct discourse or direct speech, an [embedded](#) sentence, is the object of a [language act](#). Thus it is, in principle, an [event](#) like so many other events.” 37

Of the modes of speech, *direct speech*—also called *direct discourse*—is the most clearly distinguished from the rest. In many cases, “there is a [declarative verb](#) to indicate that what precedes is direct discourse.” 37

Though, as often as not, the declarative phrase may precede the speech itself. In either case, if the text follows the general [conventions](#) of modern literature, the [content](#) of the [character’s](#) speech will be bookended by quotation marks which is why this mode of speech is so conspicuous.

To distinguish the modes of speech from one another, Bal leaves a helpful set of examples on pages 47-48.

Drama (Dramatic Text)

“Insofar as genre distinctions are taken into account, the novel is in these studies contrasted sometimes with drama, sometimes with poetry, and sometimes with the novella or short story.” 150

In *Narratology*, the primary use of this term is in reference to the genre of texts written to be performed (i.e., screenplays, scripts etc.) as opposed to literature meant to be experienced through reading directly.

However, Bal does sometimes use the term more figuratively as to indicate sections of prose which feature elevated emotion or heightened activity:

“An entire drama of vision inserts itself between fabula and story.” 98

Durative

See [Anachrony](#)

Duration

The length of a span of [time](#), often considered in terms of long and short intervals. In *Narratology*, *duration* serves as an analytical reference point for understanding the relationship between [fabula](#)-time (the chronological sequence of events) and [text](#) time (the amount of space those events occupy in the [narrative](#)).

For instance, a single [scene](#) might represent just a few seconds within the fabula, but may span several pages in the text, indicating a prolonged or emphasized treatment of that moment. On the other hand, an entire year of the fabula could be summarized in a single sentence, creating a sense of rapid passage.

These *durational* variations indicate how the [author](#) manipulates the [reader's](#) perception of time, making *duration* a powerful lens for analyzing the [temporal](#) structure of a story and its effects on pacing, emphasis, rhythm, and meaning.

Effect

The result of the relationship between the various components of a narrative and the audience's reception of it. As for the site or object of that result, it should be noted that throughout *Narratology*, we sense an implied [ellipsis](#) follows in nearly every use of *effect*.

Note in these three quotes from the text, how fitting the words “upon the reader/reading” follow *effect*:

- The foreshadowing effect is preserved at the expense of suspense. 57
- For the moment, let us assume that a character is the effect that occurs when a figure is presented with distinctive, mostly human characteristics. 104
- But the effect of this predictability also depends on the reader's attitude with respect to literature and the book he or she is reading. 112

See [Character-Effect](#)

Ekphrasis

“Moreover, it recalls the dual status of the non-narrative description of an imaginary visual image called ekphrasis as interruptive yet constitutive of narrativity.” 34

Expansive [descriptive commentary](#) (non-narrative description), almost always focused on an image or scene, which acts to punctuate the narrative. Bal seems to imply that *ekphrasis* can cause ambiguity for the audience as to precisely whose subjectivity—theirs or the author’s—is most responsible for the overall interpretation, writing: “Does the ekphrasis produce the woman, or the woman the ekphrasis?” 34

Element

A distinct [narrative](#) unit which, in plurality, composes the [fabula](#). These *elements* may include [actors](#), [events](#), [times](#), [locations](#), [dialogues](#), and various other expository details.

Elementary Series

A discrete/irreducible grouping of the three phases—“the possibility (or virtuality), the [event](#) (or realization), and the result (or conclusion)” 160—that make up the process of events which compose the [fabula](#). While a very simple [story](#) might be composed of a lone *elementary series*, most narratives are composed of a plurality of these interconnected sequences.

Ellipsis

In the [aspect nomenclature](#) of [tempo](#), *ellipses* are pure informational voids in periods of fabula-time. As opposed to a [pause](#), an *ellipsis* is “an omission in the story of a section of the fabula.” 90 A common example happens when one chapter ends at a given [chronological](#) point in the story and the next one begins at a later point with no exposition of what might have occurred in between.

Bal also conceptualizes the pseudo-ellipsis which is essentially an *ellipsis* with only the barest hint of description. She begins by offering the example (b):

“b Two years passed.

In fact, this is no longer an ellipsis, but could be called a minimal summary, or rather, a summary with maximum speed: two years in one sentence.” 92

She takes this to be more or less synonymous with *mini-summary* and notes that, “the borderline between these two tempi [summary and ellipsis] is flexible.” 92

Embedding (Embedded)

A hierarchical relationship between a superordinate and a subordinate wherein the latter is among the [content](#) of the former.

See [Declarative Verb](#)

Emotion (Emotional)

Of or relating to an [event](#) marked by a particular change to the perceived psychological state of the affected [character](#).

Emotional Capitalism

“...the mixture of emotional and commercial interests.” 147

Epic

A [narrative](#) literary genre characterized by travel as a primary [metaphor](#) for plot and/or [character](#) development. Bal notes a gendered valence: “It tends to be gender-specific as well: in traditional genres, men travel, whereas women stay at home. As a result, the development of epic literature is bound up with men, that of lyric literature with women.” 128

Epistemology (Epistemological)

Of or relating to knowledge. In *Narratology*, as in elsewhere, *epistemology* tends to carry a veridical subtext; erring towards the true, whole, or authentic and away from the fantastic, incomplete, or fraudulent. This can be seen in its first use in *Narratology* wherein a wholeness or truth is inferred by contradiction: “As I have argued at length in my reply to Genette, the pervasive taxonomical bend of narratology is epistemologically flawed; it entails skipping a step or two (1991).” xx

Eroticism (Erotic Effect)

This term is used when addressing two different texts in *Narratology*; William James’ *What Maisie Knew*, and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (specifically the tale of Narcissus). In each use, the temptation to simply parse the term as “essentially sexual” seems to be contradicted by the strong connotations of dissonant [ambiguity](#). This puts a particularly Lacanian spin on the concept of *eroticism*. Well beyond the physical sex act, *eroticism* can be a function of forestalled desires, many of which may be deeply conflicted, indicating a site of pure and unresolvable contingency. How this impacts the [reader](#) depends on how they [interpret](#) this kind of dialectical tension. *Eroticism* exists in the space between intent and action, desire and satisfaction. Its [effect](#), therefore, is one of suspense.

Ethics (Ethical)

Of or relating to culturally derived, situational determinations—[conventions](#)—of what should (or shouldn’t) be done. We include the cultural dimension to this description because *Narratology* seems written with the explicit purpose to help plumb artifacts of cultural attitude; [narratives](#). Many would find *ethics* to be in a domain outside of [subjectivity](#) and yet, that finding itself has the subtle intellectual aroma of narrative. What someone believes they should or should not do will in any [analysis](#) include one’s [historical situation](#). Bal notes in an example of Proust’s writing of how the [character](#) Marcel seems to reduce people to their appearances:

“One motivation for the negative judgments that accompany the [descriptions](#) – in terms of both social class and ethical judgments – is the continuous adjustment that problematizes appearance. Another, I propose, is to isolate for consideration the ethics of representing the other as such, which ultimately leads to an ontological assessment. Ideological reduction appears, in effect, to result from character description.” 121

Bal asserts the need to evaluate not just the way in which Marcel is acting but what this act allows the [reader](#) to consider. For instance, the reader could ask herself, “Do I actually disagree that we can make a determination about someone’s fundamental being on the basis of appearances, or do I simply find Marcel’s way of doing so repellant?” Very much in keeping with her multifaceted approach to analysis, Bal seems to indicate that her approach to *ethics* is much more amenable to subjective coloring than the average Kantian.

Event

The building block of the [narrative](#) that anchors both the [temporal](#) and [spatial aspects](#) of the [story](#). The *event* is the [element](#) responsible for both [delimitation](#) and bridging, and therefore movement, in a story. “An event is the transition from one state to another state.” 5

Events happen to and are caused by [actors](#):

“Actors are agents that perform actions. They are not necessarily human. To act is defined here as to cause or to experience an event.” 5

They represent discrete chronological parts of the fabula:

“An event, no matter how insignificant, always takes up [time](#).” 7

As is the case with anything which involves time, events must also involve space:

“Furthermore, events always occur somewhere, be it a place that actually exists (Amsterdam) or an imaginary place (C.S. Lewis’s Narnia). Events, actors, time, and location together constitute the material of a fabula. I will refer to these as elements.” 7

External Focalizer (EF)

“When [focalization](#) lies with one [character](#) that participates in the [fabula](#) as an [actor](#), we can refer to internal focalization. We can then indicate by means of the term external focalization that an anonymous [agent](#), situated outside the fabula, is functioning as [focalizer](#). Such an external, non-character-bound focalizer is abbreviated EF.” 136

From the above quote, we can derive that the *EF* is an agent and can therefore color the fabula. Though they are indistinct and lack [character traits](#), they are nevertheless subjective actors. They are external to the fabula. An important role of the *EF* is to play the one other agent besides the [character-bound focalizer](#) who can observe a non-perceptible [focalized object](#) (e.g., a case where a character has a hallucination which might be focalized by the *EF* and the character themselves in turn.) That means they have a unique perspective which allows them to see, and therefore relate to the [reader](#), the biases of the characters. Being without character traits does not necessarily mean the *EF* is free from bias, however. The [subjectivity](#) which is inherent to focalization lets the reader distinguish between what the *EF* elects to convey and what it might have seen but otherwise left unsaid.

External Narrator

See [Narrator](#)

External Retroversion

See [Retroversion](#)

Extra-Textual Situation

All of the [context](#) relevant to the ultimate interpretation of a narrative that is situated outside of the text itself and is specific to the [reader](#).

“The influence of data from reality is all the more difficult to determine since the personal situation, knowledge, background, historical moment, and so on of the reader are involved here.” 107

The analyst who prefers clear [binary oppositions](#) and sensible [delimitation](#) will sense some tension in the overlap between *extra-textual situation* and its related concept, [frame of reference](#). This is for good reason. We [explore that tension](#) within the entry for the latter term.

See [Referential Characters](#)

Fabula

“A fabula is a series of logically and [chronologically](#) related [events](#) that are caused or experienced by [actors](#).” 5

We can think of the fabula as the ideal space where the facts, “[e]vents, actors, [time](#), and [location](#)...I will refer to these as [elements](#).” 7, reside prior to the [reader’s interpretation](#) resolves as a [story](#).

Only the [text](#) is directly observable by the reader. “The fabula is a memory trace that remains after the reading is completed.” 9

Story and fabula are latent; inferred by the reader through interaction with the text. The fabula is the reader’s interpretation of the text. The story is the reader’s reinterpretation of the fabula.

Fairy Tale

A genre of [story](#) characterized by “narrations of impossible or unknowable situations” 14, generally featuring simple, uncomplicated characters (see discussion on 106-107 regarding Bal’s rejection of E.M. Forster’s character distinctions), forms of competency often distributed or distinguished within the “opposition between good and evil powers” 174, and frequently concluded with “the future of the protagonist(s) [being] briefly alluded to.” 180

One can see that although in common use, fairy tales tend to be seen as “for children,” there is nothing in the set of distinctions written above which preclude them from being “for adults.” A popular example of the latter case would be George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*.

Fantastic (Genre)

“...even if the fabula is blatantly implausible, fantastic, absurd, metaphysical.” 13-14

Of the three specific references in *Narratology’s Index of Concepts*, the above is the only which gives direct information about Bal’s conception of this term. Therefore, erring towards clarity at the risk of tedium, we might consider the genre of the fantastic to be composed of narratives whose fabulae are “blatantly implausible,” “absurd,” and “metaphysical.”

Fantasy

A condition or an object which exists purely in the context of thoughts not entirely constrained by what one would take to be the rules of physical reality. One may or may not be consciously aware of a *fantastic* thought; and if aware, one may or may not feel consciously responsible for its creation.

A mark of distinction between *fantasy* and [fiction](#) could be that in the latter case, the subject originating the *fantasy* is aware of and, to some degree, purposefully constructing it: “In this respect, it doesn’t matter whether the object actually exists or is part of a fictitious [fabula](#), or whether it is a fantasy created by the [character](#) and so a doubly fictitious object.” 140

Fiction (Fictionality, Fictional)

“The [fabula](#) is fictitious, invented, an instance of the child’s play of make-believe.” 14

“Given the fundamental arbitrariness of the elements of the fictional world...” 28

From the above, and other uses within *Narratology*, that *fictionality* contains notes of artifice, [fantasy](#), and purpose. It exists in relation to reality in ways that are not clearly [demarcated](#); making that relationship a suitable site for critique: “I have made remarks here and there, and especially in this chapter, concerning the relationship between fiction and reality.” ... “Instead of seeing in every [narrative](#) a representation of reality – a [reading](#) posture than leads to flat, realistic judgments – I have insisted that this relationship is important as a tool for critique.” 151

Flashback

“... the event presented in the anachrony lies either in the **past** or in the future. For the first category I use the term **retroversion**; for the second, anticipation. I avoid the more common terms “**flashback**” and “flashforward” because of their vagueness and psychological connotations.” 71 (emphasis ours)

This is a case where it’s necessary to distinguish between popular lay expressions and more precisising analytical ones to guard against unintended analytical inferences. Considering the above, *flashback* might be understood as an insufficiently developed and contextually loaded pseudo-synonym for [retroversion](#).

Focalization

“I will refer to the relations between the elements presented and the vision through which they are presented as focalization. Focalization is, then, the relation between the vision and what is seen, perceived.” 133

“Focalization is the relationship between the vision, the agent that sees, and that which is seen.” 135

Being “the key aspect of the [story](#)” 132, *focalization* is a phenomenon which manifests as the parallax effect between the [reader’s point of view](#), and her perception of the [focalizer](#)—from whose point of view the [elements](#) are described by a [narrator](#). This phenomenon is responsible for coloring the [fabula](#) with [subjectivity](#) influencing the reader’s construction of the story. This subjectivity, emerging from a dialectical relationship among the [author](#), the [text](#), and the reader, is what marks the essential distinction between a list of [events](#) and a story.

See [Character-Bound Focalizer](#), [External Focalizer](#)

Focalized Object (Non-Perceptible vs Perceptible)

The locus of a [focalizer’s](#) attention at a given moment. If this object is available to other [characters](#) in the [story](#) to interact with, it is a *perceptible focalized object*. A strong example might be the One Ring from Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Tolkien). The One Ring was the pivotal object of desire in the story and therefore responsible for the central conflict. Though each character had a unique opinion of it and what should be done with it, they all were able to form such opinions because of the object’s perceptibility.

The counterpoint to this would be a *non-perceptible* focalized object. “Unspoken words – thoughts, internal monologues– no matter how extensive, are not perceptible to other characters.” 141 In this case, though the object is only perceptible to one character, the (non-character) nature of the [external focalizer](#) allows it to perceive the object as well.

See [Character-Bound Focalizer](#), [External Focalizer](#)

Focalizer

“...focalizers, in the [story](#), are the [agents](#) of perception and interpretation.” 10 In any given [narrative](#) moment, the key [aspect](#) responsible for a particular point of view within the story is the *focalizer*. Generally, character-bound focalization will shift throughout a story from character to character and even to a non-character agent, called an [external focalizer \(EF\)](#). “[Focalization](#) is, then, the relation between the vision and what is seen, perceived.” 133 The focalizer is, therefore, that which is doing the seeing or perceiving.

See [Character-Bound Focalizer](#), [External Focalizer](#)

Frame (Framing)

“...those constraints that make the process of [interpretation](#) of more general interest.” 10

A fulfilling conversation—especially where literary critique is the goal—needs a way for the participants to hold a common set of terms, concepts and themes. There needs to be some established areas of objectivity towards which each participant’s own [subjective](#) opinion can point in such a way that they are legible and coherent to the other participants. The *framing* of a discourse establishes these areas by [delimiting](#) what is relevant or irrelevant in the conversation at hand.

Frame Narrative

“Frame narratives are the clearest examples of the structure of [embedding](#).” 52 These are the kinds of [stories](#) where there is a primary plot which relies on the telling of embedded sub-plots for its own progress. These embedded stories may vary widely in genre, [characters](#), [location](#) and [time](#), yet all contribute to the telling of the main plot in their own way. Classic examples (besides those listed in *Narratology*) would be Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, and we could make the case for Plato’s *Republic* (The majority of Plato’s corpus could be considered one expansive *frame narrative* about the life and death of his character, Socrates.)

Frame of Reference

“...there is information that is always already involved, that relates to the [extra-textual situation](#)*, insofar as the [reader](#) is acquainted with it. Indeed, the moments that one realizes that some information is not “in” the [text](#) are precisely those moments when one fails to make a connection because of lack of information. I will treat that section of reality or the outside world to which the information about the person refers as a frame of reference.” 108

As a reader interacts with a text, her own lived history informs her [interpretation](#). This unique set of perspectives, or *frame of reference*, influences how the text is understood, colored by what the reader knows or doesn’t know. This would be the case even if that reader were the [author’s](#) own child because there is always some aspect of someone’s experience that is unavailable to the other’s consideration. Bal uses *frame of reference* to

describe the lens through which a reader interprets the [narrative](#), shaped by extra-textual factors that the author can never fully anticipate.

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*Distinguishing *frame of reference* from extra-textual situation is not entirely possible because these concepts seem inextricable from one another. We don't know that there's a clear dividing line between "data from reality" and "personal situation, knowledge, background, historical moment, and so on of the reader..." 107

We mention—with due hesitation—the concept of extimacy from Lacanian psychoanalysis to describe the tension here. This is a portmanteau of external and intimate; meant to give the sense of all the knowledge of the external world's logic that has been so adopted by the individual that it feels intimate.

Instead of insisting on a hard demarcation, we consider the two concepts in a dialectical continuum where *frame of reference* is inflected with interiority and extra-textual situation with exteriority.

Free Indirect Discourse (Speech)

See [Indirect Discourse](#)

Frequency

"A third [aspect](#) often distorts the two aspects of time treated above (i.e., [order](#) and [rhythm](#)). Gérard Genette labels this aspect *frequency*. By this he means the numerical relationship between the [events](#) in the [fabula](#) and those in the [story](#)." Page 100

See [heterochrony](#), [isochrony](#)

Function

The role of a concept—its specific purpose or effect. Bal uses the concept of *function* to distinguish roles from characteristics in [narratological](#) terms, focusing on what an [aspect](#) does for the [story](#) or what an [element](#) does for a [fabula](#) and so on. For example, she explains the [narrator](#) as a *function*, rather than a person, to emphasize its role in constructing the [narrative](#): "When, in this chapter, I discuss the narrative agent, or narrator, I mean the (linguistic, visual, cinematic) subject, a **function** and not a person, which expresses itself in the language or images that constitute the text." 11 (added emphasis for clarity)

Gaze

The compound effect of sight, perception, and subjectivity specific to a particular [point of view](#). As it is intertwined with the concept of [focalization](#), how an entity will focalize an object is a result of its *gaze*. In a sense, the *gaze* is the spatial and temporal link between subject and object, as Bal notes: "That gaze binds [character](#) to space." 124

In *Narratology*, though *gaze* is only mentioned in terms of a narrative entity (i.e., characters and focalizers), there isn't anything in that [text](#) to preclude the [author](#) and the [reader](#) from having their own *gaze* with corresponding [narrative](#) consequences as well.

Gender

A cultural signifier of restrictions and privileges. As such, it is a [determinative](#) detail of a [character](#). "Reference to a character by means of a personal pronoun alone limits its gender.

And, in general, this then sets off a whole series of limitations. A *he* cannot find himself unintentionally pregnant. A *she* cannot, as long as that contested rule of priestly celibacy lasts, become a Catholic priest. Insofar as they are traditionally determined, these limitations are subject to change.” 110 (emphasis Bal’s)

Grammar (Grammatical)

Of or relating to the syntactic structure of a [text](#). Where “a text is a finite, structured whole composed of signs,” 5, the *grammar* refers to the rules governing that structure and guiding its interpretation. *Grammar* can be as concrete as the spelling of a given word and as [abstract](#) as the point of view (i.e., first, second, third person etc.) or temporal tense (i.e., past, present, future).

Gynophobia

“...gynophobia, the fear that women have a life and desires of their own and hence, a [subjectivity](#).” 67

Habit

The repetition of a preferred behavior. In both of the cases where *Narratology* uses this term, it is in reference to the actions of narrative scholars, which might preclude us from considering it as strictly [narratological](#). On the contrary, given that repetitive behaviors lend to narrative [determination](#)—where [characters](#) are shaped by their actions over time—it may be a fair question as to whether it constitutes a subtle form of [anthropomorphism](#) on Bal’s part.

Heterochrony

[Temporality](#) perceived as multiple different, concurrent experiences.

A surface reading might indicate *Narratology* deals with *heterochrony* as an aside to the discourse on [frequency](#). However, it is the phenomenon which fundamentally drives that [aspect](#) of the [story’s](#) relevance. Something—such as a childhood memory—could happen in a fraction of a second in story-time yet span multiple pages of fabula-time. Novel in hand, a reader will accept this without hardly noticing it. Doesn’t this imply a contradiction with what we real-life humans must all accept as a collectively held fact (i.e., [time](#) is linear, unidirectional, and consistent across all frames of reference)?

That *heterochrony* conceptually exists outside of [narrative](#) can be clearly shown by having the [reader](#) consider how easy it is to understand these two common expressions: “time flies when you’re having fun,” and, “it’s like watching grass grow.”

Though in our day to day existence, most would claim to view time as an objective unchangeable fact that’s dictated to us by technology; it is nevertheless an uncanny convergence of an artificial, [arbitrary](#) concept that is taken to be fully concrete and “natural.” For time to be so devoid of [subjectivity](#), it would have to be not only perceived but physically consistent from all frames of reference. However, even a lay understanding of Einstein’s Theory of Special Relativity shatters that illusion.

Our reading of this section in *Narratology* found a moment of possibly unintended humor. As Bal puts it, *heterochrony* is pathological: “Heterochrony is something one can be afflicted by, suffer from. You can “have” heterochrony as you can have the flu. When

multi-temporality becomes a problem, an inhibition, and paralysing contradiction, you “have” heterochrony.” 104

This statement invites reflection on where the true affliction lies—perhaps not in the phenomenon of *heterochrony* itself, but in our stubborn adherence to the arbitrary concept of objective time.

See [Tempo](#)

Hierarchy (Hierarchical)

A relationship structured by multiple discrete levels organized by rank. In such a system, each level is subordinate to the one above it and superordinate to the one below, creating an ordered chain of relationships or positions. Bal describes *hierarchization* (i.e., the act of imposing a *hierarchy*) as the third of three steps in composing a basic analytical [binary opposition](#).

Hinge

“a fragment [of a [story](#)] with a double or at any rate [ambiguous focalization](#) in between two levels.” 44

A *hinge*, as Bal describes it, exists where multiple levels of focalization collide within a single section of a story, leaving the [reader](#) unable to clearly distinguish [focalizer](#) from [focalized object](#).

Mark Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*, is a [frame narrative](#) where the primary frame is [ambiguous](#). It could be the ersatz non-fiction manuscript written by the [character](#) Zampanó (who enters the [fabula](#) having already died). It could just as easily be the increasingly deranged footnotes added by the character who finds, annotates and publishes the manuscript, Johnny Truant.

Within the manuscript, Zampanó transcribed a conversation between his subjects:

““Hey, the water heater’s on the fritz,” she manages to say. ‘When did that happen?’”

Towards the end of a pages-long footnote about having to take a cold shower, Truant annotates:

“Now I’m sure you’re wondering something. Is it just coincidence that this cold water predicament of mine also appears in this chapter?

Not at all. Zampanó only wrote ‘heater.’ The word ‘water’ back there—I added that.”(Danielewski 12-16)

The reader is then forced to consider an ambiguity of focalization. The character who mentioned the heater may have *meant* to say “water heater;” Zampanó could have missed the contextual clues that would have clarified that point. At the same time, Truant may have simply altered Zampanó’s transcription to retroactively justify his own rambling footnote. He could also be lying.

At any rate, in this case we have three characters in this story all situated at different levels of focalization. We have a focalized object (the “heater” or “water heater”) which is only

clearly focalized by one of them. Finally, the reader is structurally frustrated by the text when trying to disambiguate how, and by whom, the object itself was focalized.

Hint

In the context of [chronological](#) suspense, the [author](#) can presage [events](#) to come in two ways: “Implicit hints and overt announcements...” 84. We see that the primary attribute of a *hint*, then, is that it is implicit. Bal notes that the presence (or lack) of hints may indicate thematic qualities: “These hints make the novel less realist and move it in the direction of (post)modernism.” 84. *Hints* can function to delay narrative payoff, “[a] hint is simply a germ, of which the germinating force can only be seen later.” 85, or even mislead the reader entirely, “This curiosity can then be [manipulated](#) by means of false hints: details that create the suggestion of being clues but turn out to have been only details after all.” 85

Holocaust

The genocide of millions of Jews, Roma, LGBTQ+, and other groups perpetrated by Germany and its collaborators during the first half of the twentieth century.

Homology

The condition of structural equivalences; a deeper connection between subjects beyond mere surface similarity. As Bal notes, “On the [resemblance](#) or homology between [fabulas](#) and reality, the literature is vast. Suffice it here to refer to the classical study by Erich Auerbach (1953) that inaugurated a flurry of interest in this subject.” 186.

While resemblance suggests superficial likenesses between fabulas and reality, *homology* indicates a deeper, systemic connection, often implying shared origins or structures that reflect similar functions or outcomes. Both terms point to a relationship between [narrative](#) and reality, but homology focuses on the deeper, more [structural](#) level of that connection.

Auerbach’s *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, which Bal references, can be read as exploring the homological relationship between narrative and reality. Auerbach shows how literary representations evolve in response to historical realities and, in turn, shape perceptions of those realities. This creates a dynamic interplay—a dialectic—where neither literature nor reality can be said to purely imitate the other; rather, they co-create meaning in the human experience. (Auerbach)

Human Interest

Of or relating to subjects which compel directed attention due to some emotional connection to the audience.

Humour [Humor]

A condition which results from a divergence of what’s expected in a way that brings joyful surprise to someone. This should not be construed to mean that *humor* is experienced joyfully for all parties. When the *humor* is the result of someone’s suffering, for example, it may be joyful for some but certainly not all. In *Narratology*, the fact that the same circumstances could be humorous to one and awful for another indicates that it is a matter of [focalization](#). As Bal notes on *humour* in [stories](#): “This suggests a distinction between “inclusive” and “exclusive” humour. The former includes the [reader](#); the latter excludes her. More precisely, the inclusion or exclusion also concerns the [focalizer](#).” 139

Icon (Iconic Sign)

“‘Ut signum’: he becomes like a sign – an iconic sign of a sign – as an enactment of radical constructivism: a [character](#) is a construction, not a person.” 113

The preceding is the only mention of this term in *Narratology*. From this use, we take *iconic* to mean the highest or most fitting form of [resemblance](#). In this context, an *iconic sign* refers to a character that becomes a representation of itself, reinforcing the caution against [anthropomorphism](#). Though it does come up in choice places—here being one—Bal seems to keep semiotic discourse to a minimum in *Narratology* and therefore we will refrain from engaging with that aspect of this term here.

Identification

The root concept—i.e., the identity property in mathematics—refers to pure equivalence, where two things are considered identical. This mathematical principle might seem to leave little room for [ambiguity](#), but *identification* in [narrative theory](#) operates on more complex relational grounds. While mathematical identity emphasizes fixed equivalence, narratological *identification* allows for subjective alignment between [focalizers](#), [characters](#), and [readers](#), where perspectives overlap but are not strictly equivalent.

Perhaps the closest use of *identification* in *Narratology* with the above referenced root concept is where one [aspect](#) of the [story](#), a focalizer, aligns with some character which is another aspect of that story. For instance, this case where Bal discusses the many levels on which [focalization](#) might be embedded:

“In these examples we have seen four different narrative situations. In d and f the narrator stood outside the fabula and in e and g it did not. In d the focalizer was a character. In f we considered a case of embedded focalization, since here we saw an infiltration of external agents into the story. In e the identification of the agents was closest: the narrator and the focalizer were both the character Ottilie. In g, finally, narrator and focalizer coincided – however, unlike e, not in the identity of one of the active actors, but in the identity of a witness.” 21

Between a focalizer and a [focalized object](#) within a narrative, *identification* could entail the focalizer sharing a perspective with their object. “The narrator’s status as a witness will enable him to present a devastating critique of his environment – the here-now – as well as shift his position constantly and creatively from identification with the main character Emma to an almost cynical outsider’s position.” 40

Between a reader and some [element](#) in the [fabula](#), *identification* can have this self-reflective property as well. This seems to beg the question as to whether the reader is a focalizer herself: “This is most conspicuous when the meaning of the narrative resides in the reader’s identification with the psychology of a character.” 27

Ideology (Ideological)

Ideology can be thought of as held belief(s), often but not always unknown to the holder, which influence their behaviors. Sitting at the nexus of the conscious and unconscious, ideologies can function as a bridge between latent desires and agencies. Conceptually, its precise ontology—the nature of its existence—and function can and must remain ambiguous; it is essentially a singularity of [subjectivity](#). Just as the physics of a black hole renders it functionally invisible, yet the characteristics of the space it occupies can be inferred;

Narratology tends to emphasize the more pragmatic or [functional](#) aspects of *ideological* content as a matter of their effect. We should therefore consider its usage in that light. Consider the following:

“It would be naive to suppose that only argumentative parts of the text communicate ideology. This happens equally in descriptive and narrative parts of the text; but the manner in which it happens is different. In addition, the example shows that the discursive form – here, the catechistic style – itself has ideological implications.” 25

At the end of the above quote, Bal notes how the catechistic–question and answer–form of the example can be analyzed on the basis of ideological communication. This is to highlight how one’s desire can be influenced both overtly and indirectly. In this case, the author doesn’t simply reinforce a normative ideology (Bal’s example here is a [character’s](#) apparent presupposition that marriage between two people who love each other is taken as a self-evident good) by stating it outright, their very writing style causes the reader to internally agree, seemingly only in the context of the reading, and nevertheless the ideological content reaches its address by both seen and unseen routes.

We might consider *ideology* as a subject of discursive hygiene. The communication of *ideology* can be all the more effective where it is unnoticed and therefore remains unavailable to critique. Here Bal notes a particularly insidious effect caused by a commonly used analytical convention:

“I entirely refrain from using another concept from classical narrative theory, the “omniscient narrator.” I find it both fantasmatic and ideologically manipulative to even suppose such a possibility.” 62

As a concept, the “omniscient narrator” not only reifies–makes an abstract concept seem like a real or literal thing–the existence of a thing which “knows-all”, but also this reification places itself outside of the critique that would otherwise unmask it, ushering in any other undetected *ideological* content right along with it.

Image (visual)

“For example, those who consider comic strips to be [narrative texts](#) interpret the concept [text](#) broadly. In their view, a text does not have to be a linguistic text. In comic strips, another, non-linguistic, sign system is employed – namely, the visual image.” 5

A composition of physical media which collectively evoke a representation of some material or ideal object. An important distinction should be noted here. Both on this entry in her *Index of Concepts* and in the above quote, Bal adds the qualifier *visual*. This qualifier may share a homology with *literal*, distinguishing it from the unqualified term *image*, which refers to a broader or more abstract form. For example, she writes: “And here she is, the image of an odalisque in a Matisse painting: “half flung off the support of the cushions...” 33

We are presented with a curious [ambiguity](#) in this usage. Given that this section is a [commentary](#) on a selection from a narrative text, there was never a physical media–aside from the words on the page of course–to evoke the noted representation. All of this imagery exists as a theoretical ideation within Bal’s [focalization](#). She uses the language of visual physicality–i.e., “the image of an odalisque”–and yet nevertheless this *image* is composed entirely of [imagination](#).

This ambiguity is compounded not much later in this section where Bal adds another qualifier—imaginary—when she writes:

“Moreover, it recalls the dual status of the non-narrative [description](#) of an imaginary visual image called ekphrasis as interruptive yet constitutive of narrativity.” 34

We see by this use that *image-sans-visual* must have been synonymous with *imaginary visual image* all along. The key takeaway is that *image* can function both as a visual sign grounded in tangible media and as an imaginary construct that exists entirely within the narrative [interpretation](#) or mental perception of the reader. Bal’s different qualifiers (*visual*; *imaginary visual*) reflect these layers of interpretation.

Imagination

The site in the consciousness which hosts the medium of contingency. Within the [frame of reference](#) that every individual thinks of as their intellectual interior, there could be said to be distinct (but metaphorical) locations with specific (but transient) functions. For instance, we might refer to the memory as the site in the consciousness which hosts the medium of necessity. To *remember* is to reflect on a thing which “must have been.” In contrast, to *imagine* is to reflect on a thing which “might be.”

It is crucial to reiterate the metaphoric and transient caveats to this description. There is no means of determining with perfect clarity whether a given idea is a product of the memory, the imagination, or both. Therefore, we should remain suspicious of memories and respectful of imaginations or we might find ourselves on the wrong side of the is vs ought fallacy.

Implied Author

“That term was coined by Wayne C. Booth (1961) as a means for discussing and [analysing](#) the [ideological](#) and moral stances of a [narrative text](#) without having to refer directly to a biographical author. As such it preceded the generalized use of the term [‘narrator’](#).” 61

Bal rejects the *implied author* on 3 counts:

- 1) The term works on the pretense of an immediate—a priori—concept which actually conceals its synthetic, mediated nature. Bal intuits that this obfuscation makes the *implied author* seem self-evident and natural when it is in fact constructed and artificial.
- 2) The obfuscation of a mediated concept conceals the mediator. This would allow some literary critic to put on airs as if they speak with appropriate scholarly objectivity when, in fact, they are merely voicing their own pet theory. Entire fields of study (e.g., ‘oriental studies’) have been developed on the basis of this pseudo-objectivity.
- 3) On the final count, Bal seems to contradict her stance in favor of Barthes’—as interpreted by Michel Foucault—*death of the author* in her explication of the third objection. When we read, “The commodified author is as fictitious as any character in a narrative and must be subjected to analytical criticism...” 61, we might take her to mean that there is a place in narrative critique for considering the authorial intent; placing her in tension with Barthes and Foucault. Digging deeper, however, we could reflect on the always-already fictitious nature of the commodified author as a reason

to disregard their extra-textual commentary altogether. This would free us from the inevitable distraction which is, after all, completely irrelevant to the narrative itself. Therefore, instead of contradicting the *death of the author*, Bal provides even more reason to separate the text from the circumstances of its production.

Indirect Discourse

A dialogue situation where “...the [narrator](#) represents the words of the [actor](#) as it is supposed to have uttered them.” 46

A key feature of this mode of speech is when, “[t]he narrator’s [text](#) explicitly indicates that the words of an actor are narrated by means of a declarative verb and a conjunction, or a substitute for it.” 46 Bal considers circumstances where there is indirect discourse that does not feature the declarative verb/conjunction combo to be **free indirect discourse**; noting “the [narrating party](#) approximates as closely as possible the [character’s](#) own words without letting it speak directly.” 144

In Narratology, modes of speech—specifically, the levels at which a characters’ dialogues are conveyed—make for rich areas of analysis but can be troublesome to distinguish without some clear examples of each and some practice to aid familiarization. Though familiarity can only come from experience, Bal leaves a helpful set of examples on pages 47-48.

In Medias Res

“Because nothing about Cruso has been mentioned before, we begin to suspect that a structure of *in medias res* (beginning somewhere in the middle) – a rather normal narrative device when it concerns the fabula – is here deployed on the level of text.” 42 (Emphasis Bal’s)

Perhaps the [narrative convention](#) counterpoint to “once upon a time,” *in medias res* is generally used in novels regardless of genre. It situates the reader in the middle of an ongoing story. The resultant effect is a quick immersion into the temporality of the narrative.

Internal (vs External) Anticipation

See [Anticipation](#)

Internal Retroversion

See [Retroversion](#)

Interior Monologue

“...interior monologue, that equally artificial mode of narration ‘in the first person’ – with a [character-bound narrator](#) – that seeks to eliminate reference to the first-person voice in favour of a silent, ‘pure’ first person [focalizer](#).” 22

Along with second-person narration, Bal communicates skepticism about the existence of *interior monologue*. A brief semantic investigation hints at why. If the goal of *Narratology* is to provide a suite of analytical concepts to aid developing arguments, it seems obvious that it avoids euphemisms. [Ambiguity](#) abounds in language but euphemisms are subjective to the point of relativism and therefore corrosive to a coherent argument.

A monologue in [narrative](#) is a speech delivered by one character—mono—to at least one other. For this act to occur within the mind would mark that portion of the phrase euphemistic.

A seemingly fair rebuttal might be that in novels, it is entirely possible to situate multiple [characters](#) “inside” the mind of a single character; so then we might conceive of a monologue occurring in that level of [focalization](#) from the primary character to their embedded others. But this would render the other part of the phrase—interior—euphemistic. The action isn’t actually happening within that character if there are still more characters on that level. We’re left with either, “this isn’t actually interior” or “this isn’t actually a monologue.”

This term may be useful for casual conversations in book clubs to roughly address some event within a text, but it is insufficiently defined for a developed, coherent [analysis](#).

Interpretation

The retroactive reduction of any number of contingent observations to a unified synthesis that could be [communicated](#) in a declarative statement of necessity.

Let’s parse that intense mouthful of a sentence. *Interpretation* must always follow perception—something needs to *have been perceived* to be *interpreted*—which is why it is retroactive. A key component of *interpretation* is the selection of what, from the infinite things we might observe, is useful to interpret. This selection reduces that infinity into the set of things we’d observe. The infinity of observations exists in a state of possibility that, until they are composed into a [framework](#) with causal [logic](#), remain unresolved. Therefore, up to that point, they were contingent. They move from contingency to necessity when the observer determines their relationships—synthesizes their meanings into a unity of sense—and communicates or delivers that sense in a way others could also understand.

Intersubjectivity

“This democratic nature of the joint activities of analysis, description, and interpretation I call *intersubjectivity*.” 4 (emphasis Bal’s)

We read “democratic” in the apolitical sense of being among a group of people who want to amplify their effort by exchanging ideas. With any group of individuals, each brings their unique, subjective approach to this exchange. This may highlight tensions between individuals’ interpretations and the “joint activities” listed above, done with sincerity and good tools, can uncover hidden insights.

That doesn’t mean it will lead to agreement. In the companion text to *Narratology*, *Narratology in Practice*, Bal writes : “That is what intersubjectivity means: not that we all agree but that we can disagree, meaningfully and rationally.” (Bal xii)

Besides the intellectual works generated through narratological *intersubjectivity*, a grounding of ideals among humans, a whole social reality is maintained that otherwise wouldn’t exist:

“In this way, the procedure and the theory from which it is derived serve to enable an interpretive community to emerge.” Ibid.

Irony (Ironic)

As an affect, *irony* can evoke faux sincerity in the explicit content of a given [communication](#). This creates or exposes tensions between its layered explicit and implicit contents. That exposition invites the [reader](#) to remain critical of their explicit versus implicit readings. Therefore, *irony* can be employed by an [author](#) to signpost the ambiguity of a situation and remind the reader to keep her ideological distance and remain skeptical:

“The [argumentative](#) parts of the [text](#) often give explicit information about the [ideology](#) of a text. It is, however, quite possible that such explicit statements are treated ironically in other parts of the text, or are contradicted by [descriptive](#) or [narrative](#) parts of the text to such an extent that the reader must distance herself from them.” 26

This highlighted [ambiguity](#) informs the lay meaning of this term—i.e., contrary to expectation—where the expectation is that the explicit content was the truest or most sincerely intended when, it turns out, the implicit content was perhaps intended to be taken foremost all along. An example of this is where Bal writes: “Does the conflation between ‘my bedroom’ and ‘my cunt’ retrospectively turn this event into an iterative one, ironically turning the ‘explanation’ of the hotel head into an indictment of gender relations?” 102

Isochrony

“...isochrony, a complete coincidence of TF and TS...” 90

The abbreviations—TF and TS—refer respectively to [time](#) of the [fabula](#) (which we think of as *fabula-time*) and story-time. That these two kinds of time exist theoretically implies that [narrative temporality](#), or the way in which time is experienced as a narrative plays out, has at least two relative perspectives. Bearing in mind that the fabula is where the facts of the [story](#) are arranged, and the story is the [reader’s interpretation](#) of those facts, then the relative amounts of time in either space as compared to the other has a significant impact on what Bal refers to as the narrative’s [rhythm](#).

Let’s consider two forms of narrative conversation. There is one in which each [character](#) is explicitly named, their speech is directly attributed to them and bookended by quotes; standard [direct discourse](#) per Bal. There may even be some [descriptive commentary](#) telling how the characters might look or move about the scene as they converse.

Then there is another, in which a character might speak to themselves internally. The [narrator](#) may take over the function of the [language act](#), leaving out the declarative verbs and punctuation entirely; just a series of statements apparently in dialogue format but no description of the scene or the character(s) within it whatsoever. In short, a sequence composed of pure [free indirect discourse](#) per Bal.

In the first scene, there is a lot to read besides the dialogue. There are all of the characters’ names and declarative verbs, the descriptions, and other content that occupy no time whatsoever in terms of plot movement and therefore do not count for story-time. They do, however, occupy actual fabula-time as the reader must traverse that content to interpret the story itself. We can see from this example how story-time seems shorter relative to fabula time and therefore a counter-example of isochrony.

In the second scene, there is nothing added to the fabula that isn’t also being directly added to the story. The time it takes to read this dialogue is the same time it occupies in the plot. The TF is equal to the TS so here—theoretically—we have *isochrony*.

...

We believe that here we must address the very apparent ellipses that surround the leading quote in this description. We recognize that what was left out would appear to contradict the example of *isochrony* which precedes this confession; the redacted words following those we used for the definition say: “cannot occur in language.” 90

And yet, we just gave an example (arguably using language). What gives?

The best we can offer here is a short digression on the ontology, or existential nature, of language. Very short. We promise.

We challenge you to notice how we managed to extend the time between the promise of this digression and its own content, by issuing the promise itself. Here we are, digressing, and you are experiencing it real-time—fabula-time—so to speak, but we’ve nevertheless managed to inflate the TF while using words that were strictly meta or extraneous to the TS (e.g., “Very short. We promise.”).

Even if we removed those extraneous phrases, you would still be internally attributing the rest of the words to us. Within your own experience of this text, you are extending the TF without also extending the TS. That additional content you either consciously or unconsciously add to our words, the ones which help you keep track of who is thinking what; these are all an inflation of only the fabula-time and never the story-time. This is why Bal can claim this phenomenon to not really exist. It is an entirely interpretive effect that can only be observed by looking askance, what Slavoj Žižek might call a sublime object; a gap in reality that defies direct observation.

Iteration (Itarativity)

“I refer to a [repetition](#) when an [event](#) occurs only once but is presented a number of times... The reverse of a repetition is an iterative presentation: a whole series of identical events is presented at once.” 101

Where a single event in fabula-time is written in such a way as to give the [reader](#) the sense of it having happened and/or continuing to happen many times before and/or after in story-time. Narratological *iteration* has the [temporal](#) effect of [embedded time](#).

Iteration and repetition function differently as narratological aspects of a [frequency](#) than from their lay meanings. Where the common use of repetition and iteration mean literally repeating the same event exactly (repetition), or with slight progressive adjustments towards a goal (iteration), respectively, their use in *Narratology* are markedly different. For instance, [narrative](#) repetition may seem to better fit the lay version of *iteration*, as the presentation to the [fabula](#) in repetition will contain variations for effect.

Bal briefly mentions the possibility of *pseudo-iteration*. She seems to be referring to a scene which has all of the features of other such scenes in the text that were true iterations, but lacking some aspect to clearly define it as such. Bal does not describe precisely what aspect(s) such a scene might lack. We assume that a reasonable interpretation of the scene might conclude that, while this scene is evocative of the other characteristically iterative scenes, there is either too much or too little information to positively conclude the author intended it to be anything other than a singular event.

See [Tempo](#)

Iterative Anticipation

Where an [iterative event](#)—one that compresses a series of habitual or recurring actions into a single instance—presages another event that will come later to the [fabula](#). It is essential that the reader understands iteration in the sense it is used in *Narratology* as opposed to its common form.

See [Anticipation](#)

Landscape

The composition of physical, cultural, and [symbolic](#) features specific to a [location](#). The [logic of events](#) can often depend on some aspect of the actors' interactions with these features. To whatever degree a location impacts the interpretation of the story, it is that which composes the *landscape* that accounts for this. Though *landscape* can be used in common vernacular to reference background, placing it in a subordinate position of relevance, there are whole genres (e.g., Western, Adventure/Survival, Magical Realism) of fiction where the *landscapes* are equivalent in prominence to—sometimes even featuring as—characters.

Language Act

An [event](#) of verbal communication. An important consideration here is that silence can function as verbal communication. In the case where a word might be said, its absence drives the plot just as strongly as its presence would have. Therefore, reticence is an event predicated on verbal communication all the same.

We can distinguish *language act* from [speech act](#) on the basis of intent. A simple way to understand their primary difference is to say that a language act is performed to say something where a speech act is performed to do something.

Layer

A single dimension of a multidimensional entity. For example, this arrangement could be simple as in the physical layers that can be separated and distinguished from one another and yet all contribute to a contiguous single entity called an onion. It could also be complicated such as the theoretical dimensions of [story](#) and [fabula](#) relative to the material dimension of [text](#), which collectively compose the contiguous single entity called a [narrative text](#).

Bal warns not to take that example to mean that any single dimension is in any sense complete without the others, writing: “These definitions suggest that a three-layer distinction – text, story, fabula – is a good basis for the study of narrative texts. Such a distinction entails that it is possible to analyse the three layers separately. That does not mean that these layers exist independently of one another. They do not.” 6

Location

The [element](#) of the [fabula](#) that [functions](#) as the contiguous physical environment and setting for the given [scene](#), including those specifically described as immaterial. This means that a location could just as soon be a coral reef for a clownfish, as in the movie *Finding Nemo* (Stanton 2003), or the [metaphorical](#) interiority of a child's mind for personified emotions such as in the movie *Inside Out* (Docter 2015).

Locus Amoenus

Literally translated from Latin as, “pleasant place,” *locus amoenus* references a [landscape](#) with [symbolic](#) importance congruent with notions like safety, comfort and calm.

Logic

Of or relating to a rule-governed operation or system. To the degree that a thing might conform to an expected rule or ruleset, it may be called *logical*.

Logic of Events

“The [fabula](#), understood as material or content that is worked into a [story](#), has been defined as a series of [events](#). This series is constructed according to certain rules. We call this the *logic of events*. ” (emphasis Bal’s) 7

The rules which constrain, and therefore define the structure of, the processes of change from one state to another across the span of a story.

Lyric

This term is used only twice in any form in *Narratology* and never directly defined. We have to presume Bal either didn’t intend it to be of much consequence or else that the common understanding of it suffices. We can therefore only speculate on its relevance to the text on the basis that it is only used as a counterpoint to some other term or concept. We take the significance of *lyric* to stem from its association with poetry; a form which often eschews literary narrative conventions such as being subject to a [logic of events](#) thereby unfolding a discernable plot.

Manipulation

“Manipulation originally meant simply ‘handling,’ ‘treatment,’ and even though its modern sense has shifted to include more negative connotations, the original meaning is still synonymous with ‘operation.’” 65

It seems clear from the above quote that within *Narratology*, and specifically when speaking about narratological analysis, Bal intends to convey what she describes above as the simple, original version; free of negative connotations. In most cases*, therefore, we take the term to mean what she describes in the above quote.

In the two cases in *Narratology* where it is used in its more modern, pernicious sense:

- “I entirely refrain from using another concept from classical narrative theory, the “omniscient narrator.” I find it both fantasmatic and ideologically manipulative to even suppose such a possibility.” 62
- “The difference between the standard interpretation and this one only goes to show that structural analysis must come with its own critique if it is to avoid the ideological manipulations it is meant to counter.” 119

We can presume by leading adverb and adjective (i.e., ideologically, ideological), that Bal clearly distinguishes between the value neutral and this negatively connoted version. It feels notable that in both cases, the modifier is some form of the word *ideology*. It is important, however, that in both of these cases the subject of Bal’s discourse is interpretation, and not narrative, which helps us to understand the distinction between forms of this term.

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*It should be understood that this applies only to *Narratology*, and not its companion, *Narratology in Practice* (Bal 2021), where most uses of that term are in the modern sense.

Mapping

The *Narratology*-specific use of this term seems to evoke [conative](#), if value-neutral, [ideological manipulation](#), as Bal writes: “Memory is also the joint between time and space. In stories set in former colonies, memory evokes a past in which people were dislodged from their space by colonizers who occupied it, but also a past in which they did not yield. Going back – in [retroversion](#) – to the time in which the place was a different kind of space is a way of countering the effects of colonizing acts of [focalization](#) – a process that can be called mapping.” 145

At this part of the quote, we might take *mapping* to be a kind of combative epistemological tactic employed by a resistance movement countering the effects of colonization. But in the very next sentence, Bal describes how the same tactic might be employed by the colonizers as well:

“Mastering, looking from above, dividing up and controlling is an approach to space that ignores time as well as the density of its lived-in quality. In opposition to such ways of seeing space, providing a landscape with a history is a way of spatializing memory that undoes the killing of space as lived.” Ibid.

Therefore, we are left to presume that in either case of the term *mapping*, knowledge is being operationalized as a kind of strategic weapon which might benefit any wielder regardless of their ideological motivation.

Master Code

Based on the context surrounding its only mention in *Narratology*, we presume that this term refers to an unassailable, absolute [logic](#)—a comprehensive system or set of rules assumed to apply universally. Such a logic, while theoretically comprehensive, is also irrelevant within Bal’s framework, as her approach to narratology values flexibility and contextual sensitivity over rigid, all-encompassing systems.

Meaning (Meaningful)

This is a term that is so expansively ambiguous that it verges on [deixis](#); relying on context for its specific interpretation. A common, if narrow, way to understand *meaning* is “of or relating to *reference*” such as how Bal writes: “Both inner and outer space function, in this instance, as a frame. Their opposition gives both spaces their meaning.” 125

Another way of considering it would be in terms of telos—purpose—as in how Bal contrasts it with truthfulness: “If truth, or even probability, is no longer a sufficient criterion to make [narrative](#) meaningful, only motivation can suggest probability, thus making the contents believable, plausible.” 27-28

Yet another might be in terms of utility with regard to sense-making as in how she remarks: “[Classification](#), however, is not a self-serving aim for the literary scholar. Its use is instrumental: only when classification helps achieve greater insight into the phenomena constituting the classes is it meaningful [i.e., useful] in describing the [text](#).” 186

It may be synonymous with *interpretation* as in: “A perfect fit as well as any deviations from the model can influence the meaning [i.e., interpretation] of the text.” 159

And it could be interchangeable with *consequence*, such as in: “This idea of a historically meaningful [i.e., consequential], heavily political investment of space can help us interpret stories in which a narratological analysis reveals the intricate relationship between characters, time, and space.” 146

Memory (Memories)

“Memory is an act of ‘vision’ of the past, but as an act, it is situated in the present of the memory.” 145 When a [character](#) recounts a *memory*, that constitutes an [act](#) in the sense that its addition to the [fabula](#) also drives the plot forward. [Chronologically](#) speaking, two [aspects](#) of the narrative are actually in motion. On the one hand, there is the character remembering and thus moving the story in their present. On the other hand, there is that character in the past, within the timeframe of that *memory* also moving the plot forward. The *memory* could be said to serve as a bridge between two [temporal](#) realities, dynamically evolving both.

Meta-Narrative

Of or referring to the [logic](#) of the text which, while not directly contributing to the [fabula](#), nevertheless affects the narrative’s interpretation. For instance, whether a [character’s](#) dialogue is [direct speech](#) or [indirect speech](#) is a matter of the *meta-narrative* situation—whether the narrator (a *meta-narrative* figure in its own right) indicates one way or the other is what guides the [reader’s](#) interpretation.

Metaphor (Metaphorical)

The act of describing one object as another, creating an implicit equivalence between them. Like comparison, *metaphor* rhetorically facilitates [description](#). As Bal writes, “Between the [theme](#) or [sub-theme](#) compared and the predicates that replace them in metaphor, or specify them in comparison, the relation is termed metaphorical”. 30

To distinguish *metaphor* from comparison, we examine whether the object is replaced (metaphor) by its predicates or specified (comparison) by them. For example, “Its unblinking, glassy eyes watched over the yard” is a *metaphor* for windows. In contrast, “Its windows, like unblinking eyes, watched over the yard” is a comparison that likens the windows to eyes without replacing them.

Method

A fixed, theoretically informed process with articulable goals. A method is [conative](#) in nature—it is designed not only to structure [analysis](#) but to direct it toward a specific outcome. It facilitates consistency in results by systematically employing [logic](#) to achieve its objectives. The success of a *method* may be measured not only by its internal coherence but also by the extent to which it fulfills its intended function.

Metonymy

A [rhetorical](#) condition where a descriptive word or phrase stands-in for the name of its object. A simple example might be, “The White House said today...” indicating some communication from the current American president.

Mirror

“[Resemblance](#), however, can never be identity...” 55

As a verb, to *mirror* is to physically/materially or symbolically/ideally display a strong resemblance of an original. This could occur in a material sense such as how a reflective surface will display the image of its surroundings relative to its angle and positioning. Another such example could be when two or more dancers or actors literally copy each other's movements in a performance. This could happen in an ideal sense as well. An example of this might be the case of Leibniz's and Newton's independent developments of calculus.

We prefaced this description of *mirror* with a quote that is less about what *mirroring* does and more about what it does not do. It felt important to preclude the notion that to *mirror* is to evoke identity for the simple fact that many people, scholars and lay alike, seem to make that mistake regularly. Bal makes a strong statement about this with an analysis of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, specifically the story of Narcissus which is commonly summarized as “the story of a man who fell in love with himself and drowned because of it.” She points out that this vulgar, albeit popular, interpretation runs contrary to Ovid's own words, writing:

“Ovid presents the denial of carnal knowledge as Narcissus's fatal failure: 'he falls in love with an image without body' ('spem sine corpore amat' 417). Imputing bodily existence to what is only a visual image – or, in this case, water – he condemns himself ('corpus putat esse quod unda est,' 417). This story of 'death and the image' is about the denial of the true, natural body.” 113

Clearly, to fall in love with an image is not to fall in love with the self; since these concepts are not actually synonymous.

Mirror Text

“An [embedded text](#) that presents a [story](#) that, according to this criterion, resembles the primary [fabula](#) may be taken as a sign of the primary fabula. This phenomenon is comparable to infinite regress. I use the term '*mirror text*' for this.” 55

A trope often employed in so-called children's or family movies is where (what's taken to be) the primary fabula is revealed to have been an allegory of the 'true' primary fabula by way of [repetition](#). This reveal is generally the closing act of the story and tends to convey the sense that the film had been, after all, a kind of fable with an explicit moral. *The Lego Movie* (2014, Warner Bros. Pictures), for example, sees the revelation that the entire fantastical story rendered in stop-motion Lego bricks was after all a mirror-text of the story of the protagonist's relationship with his father. The directors chose to go so far as to include a series of edits that cut rapidly back and forth between the Lego fabula's antagonist and the father; issuing a stark example of *mirror-text*.

Mixed Retroversion

See [Retroversion](#)

Modality (Modal)

The degree to which an entity or circumstance is imbued with contingency. Bal uses *strong* and *weak* respectively to indicate whether a given word—often a verb or an adverb—more or

less certain. For instance, “She may go,” and “She will go” both contain *modal* verbs; the former being contingent and the latter being certain.

Model

In *Narratology*, Bal uses this term in two distinct ways. The most prevalent form throughout this text is as a theoretical framework, as in: “A semantic model for describing these categories is a reflection of cultural cognitive habits.” 114

The second, less prevalent form is best described as an example of a formal ideal: “The encyclopaedia is a model of this type of description.” 30

There appears to be overlap between the two forms, such as where Bal writes: “In particular, the ‘classic’ novel, after the model of the nineteenth-century realistic novel, makes much use of this possibility.” 70

Modernism (Modernist)

A literary movement which emerged at the end of the 19th century. *Modernism* was characterized by descriptions infused with subjective ambiguity, unreliable narrators, and a tendency to focus on the internal, personal experiences of its characters. *Modernism* could be seen as reflecting the preceding movement, *realism*, but in a distorted, fractured way. Both would heavily emphasize detail but while a *realist’s* descriptions were meant to show clarity, the *modernist’s* would be intended to convey contingency.

Above is a brief reductive summary written to be a portable reference for a complicated subject. What follows is a slight digression on our interpretation of the *realist* and *modernist* movements in terms of their historical provenance and interpretive relationships as we see them.

Narratology often uses *modernism* as a counterpoint to *realism*; both being coherent, chronologically situated and stylistically distinct movements in western narratives. This seems fitting for at least two reasons. For one thing, *realism*—which dominated 19th century novels—saw its popularity transfer to *modernism* at around the turn of the 20th. This may seem an arbitrary distinction, being attributed to nothing more nuanced than a simple calendar date, but it nevertheless coincides with the second reason: The social and material conditions in each of those eras were themselves significantly different from one another and this was reflected in how artists chose to portray them.

In the 19th century, societies had to reckon with the impact of enlightenment thinking which normalized a sense of pragmatic rationality to what was formerly a much less knowable world. In many fields of study, what had been the intellectual territory of gods might be claimed by human beings seemingly through objective methodology alone. It is therefore understandable why a primary characteristic of *realist* novels was meticulous description presented with objective clarity meant to accurately and sincerely [mirror](#) reality.

At the dawn of the 20th century, however, post-enlightenment promises had been overshadowed by what they had delivered. Along with technological marvels, mass industrialization brought pollution, deeply unequal wealth distribution, and wars of unprecedented scale and monstrosity. Understandably, the artists of that new era began to question the merits of uncritical objectivity. They would echo the richly detailed styles of their predecessors but flip the perspective inwards, increasing subjectivity and [modality](#) and thereby reflecting the new social uncertainty the previous era had wrought.

Monologue

“When the embedded text is spoken – or thought – by one actor, it is a soliloquy or monologue. The content of a monologue can, again, be practically anything. There is no intrinsic difference between an embedded monologue and other language use. Embedded passages contain confidences, descriptions, reflections, self-reflections. This is the reason I will not discuss the monologue further here.” 59

Bal seems to find the concept of the *monologue* to be redundant to the degree of superfluity. While it might make sense as a referential term (e.g., “the monologue in scene 6 of the 2nd act”), it doesn’t offer much by way of analytical precision. This is because the *monologue* isn’t distinguished in any meaningful way from any other [embedded language act](#) besides the fact that there is only one participant in the conversation.

Motivation

Of the three features of [description](#)—the one responsible for giving a [story](#) its tangibility and enables the [reader](#) to sense the [agency](#) of a given [character](#). *Motivation* is the reader-inferred condition of the [focalizer](#) which justifies—or makes plausible—the [act](#) which delivers their focalization to the [fabula](#).

“On the basis of the theory of [narrative](#) presented in this book, we can distinguish three types of motivation. Speaking, looking, or acting – the three forms of narrative agency – bring about motivation.” 28

To have the sense that a character has said, seen, or done something, the reader must interpret the character’s *motivation*. As Bal explicates: “Given the fundamental arbitrariness of the [elements](#) of the fictional world, there is, equally fundamentally, no end to the need for motivation.” 28

This is perhaps the core component of narrative which allows the text of the fabula to manifest as a story when read; rather than a mere collection of facts. To feel plausible; real.

Myth (Mythical)

A classic [narrative convention](#) often, but not necessarily, associated with the supernatural, and also as often considered to be adjacent to history. A [story](#) which has been told often enough, long enough, by enough different people may be considered a *myth*. A key feature of *myth* is the incorporation of strongly [determined characters](#) and settings: “...mythical and allegorical characters fit a pattern of expectation, established in the basis of our [frame of reference](#).” 109 Considering the features mentioned above, it feels fair to say that *myth* exists as part of a given culture’s [extra-textual situation](#), and therefore *mythical* references have strong [rhetorical](#) potential.

Narcissism

For this term, *Narratology* disambiguates common usage from Bal’s particular narratological argument. For the common usage she writes that it is “...a psychoanalytic concept that has taken on ordinary meaning and that, more often than not, is applied in a moralizing way.” 112

As for its use in *Narratology*, Ball alludes to *narcissism* being an allegorical synonym for this text’s particular use of [anthropomorphism](#), writing: “Rather than blaming him – or the narcissism named after the [mythical](#) figure – for moral shortcomings or formative failure, I

propose that we take Ovid's Narcissus as an allegory of the reader who conflates character and person." 113

Narrative (Narrativity)

Of or relating to an ideal—as opposed to instrumental or material—unit of cultural attitude as conveyed through media which collectively resolves as a whole or partial [story](#). Though commonly thought to be only pertinent to verbal media such as books or television, Bal notes: "In addition to the obvious predominance of narrative genres in literature, a random handful of places where narrative occurs includes lawsuits, visual images, philosophical discourse, television, argumentation, teaching, and history writing." xix

Narrative Situation

"[Narrator](#) and [focalization](#) together determine the narrative situation." 12

The combination of both the viewpoint as well as the distance between it and the entity responsible for its perception and expression. For example, it is one thing if, "I watched with my jaw on the floor as Uncle Mike did magic," another if, "Timmy watched, mouth agape, as Uncle Mike made the quarter vanish into thin air," and another entirely if, "Uncle Mike palmed the quarter just to see if a bug would fly into the little idiot's mouth." In each case, the *narrative situation* frames not only the perspective but also the underlying [motivation](#), altering the [reader's](#) understanding of the [event](#) and the resulting [interpretation](#) of the [story](#).

Narrative System

The underlying framework which informs the construction of a [narrative text](#). This is articulated in *Narratology* as a coherent, methodological employment by the [author](#) of various [elements](#) in such a way as to highlight their relationships with each other.

Narrative Text

"...a [text](#) in which an [agent](#) or subject conveys to an [addressee](#) ('tells' the [reader](#), viewer, or listener) a [story](#) in a medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof." 5 It feels necessary to point out that the inclusion of "buildings" in the above reference tells us that a *narrative text* can be non-verbal.

Narratology

A formalized "ensemble of theories of [narratives](#), [narrative texts](#), [images](#), [spectacles](#), [events](#), [cultural artifacts](#) that tell a [story](#)." 3

Bal's ideal use of *narratology* is to formulate an [interpretive](#) description of a narrative in a way accessible to others (increase [intersubjectivity](#)) and suitable for replication with consistent outcomes across [texts](#) and possibly extension into other media with the ultimate goal of having a meaningful argument.

Narrator

The [agent](#) responsible for presenting the signs which constitute the [text](#). There may be one or many narrators in a given text, and in *Narratology*, they are defined as one of two forms. These forms are External Narrator (EN) and Character-bound Narrator (CN) and distinguished as follows:

- **External Narrator (EN):** “When in a text the narrator never refers explicitly to itself as a [character](#), we speak of an external narrator. This term indicates that the narrating agent does not figure in the [fabula](#) as an [actor](#).” 13
- **Character-bound Narrator (CN):** “...if the “I” is to be identified with a character, hence, also an actor in the fabula, we speak of a character-bound narrator.” 13

Naturalism (Naturalist)

A literary genre—sometimes considered a sub-genre of [modernism](#)—which emphasized the psychological impact of environments on people. As modernist [texts](#) were famously saturated with details, the distinction for *naturalism* was the focus on [landscapes](#) and spaces as allegorical extensions of the [characters’](#) inner psyches.

“The most obvious place to expect examples of the relations between space and character in modern literature would seem to be the naturalistic novel, since it claims to depict the influence of the environment on people. A person’s living space is connected to his character, his way of life, and his possibilities.” 130

Aesthetically, this would result in long passages filled with descriptions of the land which rendered a famously slow pace in the reading.

“During the era of Naturalism, the [pause](#) was less of a problem; the explicit goal of these novels was to sketch a picture of reality. To do that, a good many object [descriptions](#) were necessary, while the flow of the fabula-time was of secondary importance. Lengthy descriptive sections and, to a lesser extent, generalized argumentative expositions are certainly not exceptions in the novels of this period. The pause was an accepted [tempo](#). And when such descriptions led to excessively long interruptions of the [fabula](#), their presence was justified by tying them to the vision of an onlooker.” 95

Naturalization

The [rhetorical](#) purpose of the [author’s](#) inclusion of literary [motivation](#). When a [reader](#) encounters a [description](#)—often a non-narrative [element](#)—there is a possibility that their suspension of disbelief may end and immersion in the [story](#) could break. Wherever they descriptions occur in a [text](#), then, it is crucial that the author [embed](#) them within some character’s motivation via their actions therefore: “...making those interruptions known as descriptions seem self-evident or necessary, so that the inflections of the presentation, the attribution of qualities, and the ideological machinations remain invisible.” 27

Nomenclature (In Description)

The series of discrete components, individually called *sub-themes* in *Narratology*, which collectively make up/flesh out/give body to the [theme](#) of a given [description](#). The relationship(s) between—and amongst—a description’s theme and the sub-themes which comprise the *nomenclature* can be examined for their particular [rhetorical](#) effect based on how they are presented in a given [narrative text](#).

Nouveau Roman

An experimental genre of novels prominent in the mid-20th century. Translated from French as *new novel*, *nouveau roman* played with conventions like [narrative structure](#), character identity, and hyper-objectivity to test the limits of storytelling.

Object (vs Process)

Bal appears to disambiguate *object vs process* from [object](#) vs subject so as to highlight the impact of what the degree of the [narrator's](#) involvement can have on the overall [narrative situation](#). *Narratology* never explicitly uses the phrases “object-oriented” or “process oriented” as descriptors for narrative situations yet, but for greater clarity, we will.

Essentially, should the narrator hint or overtly state their interaction with the given object, they have indicated their relationship to the situation is familiar, subjective, and therefore the narrative situation is process-oriented. On the contrary, if their involvement in the text keeps its distance, its objectivity, we can think of the narrative situation as object-oriented. These distinctions help identify to what degree the narrator might be considered part of the [text](#) as a mere faithful delivery agent of the [fabula](#) or as a less reliable [character](#) in their own right.

Object (vs Subject)

Though it is an expansive, highly [ambiguous](#) relationship outside of this text, it feels necessary to reflect on Bal's precise use of *object/subject* within it. *Narratology* has a focused discourse on *object/subject* relationships to such a degree that it merits only one entry in the text's Index of Concepts.

In this case, it appears that Bal considers this in the particular sense of an [actor](#) (subject) performing an action, and an object (may or may not be an actor) that is impacted/changed by that action. It might be helpful for the reader to think of this alternatively as object vs agent.

Objective Anachrony

An [anachrony](#) delivered to the [fabula](#) by an [external narrator](#), thus the product of [external focalization](#). For a deeper discussion of this concept (by view of its opposite), see [Subjective Anachrony](#).

Objectivity (Objective)

While all words contain some degree of [ambiguity](#), *objectivity* is in a class of terms that holds great [rhetorical](#) weight and its varied senses are widely distributed. Rather than fill the next couple of pages with philosophical explications, we think it best to chronicle how *objectivity* is used in its various senses across this text on the basis of its recording in the Index of Concepts.

As a synonym for the noun, *map*:

“I have changed the tone wherever I could, trying to emphasize more the role of [narratology](#) as a heuristic tool, not an objective grid providing certainty.” xi

As a synonym for the adjective/adjectival noun (phrase), *clinical detachment*:

“If, as Zola argued, the novel should be objective, this notion of objectivity necessitates naturalization – that is, making those interruptions known as [descriptions](#) seem self-evident or necessary, so that the inflections of the presentation, the attribution of qualities, and the ideological machinations remain invisible. This so-called objectivity is, in fact, a form of subjectivity in disguise.” 27

As a synonym for the noun, *goal*:

“The objective is to convey knowledge...The objective is both to convey knowledge and to persuade.” 30

As an antonym for the adjective, *hermeneutic*:

“A subjective anachrony is an anachrony that can be only be regarded as such if the contents of consciousness lie in the past or in the future – not the past of being conscious, but the moment of thinking itself.” 75

The above passage describes subjective anachrony (the inverse of *objective anachrony*) as a hermeneutic phenomenon—one that deals with the experience of things. *Objective* anachrony regards the facts of the experience, not the experience itself.

As a synonym for the adjective, *immediate* (i.e., *unmediated*):

“Objectivity is an attempt to present only what is perceived: all comment is shunned, and implicit interpretation is avoided.” 132 (Bal shows anti-Kantian sentiments: “Perception depends on so many factors that aiming for objectivity is pointless.” 132)

Another use of synonym for *immediate* (*adjectival noun* ‘*immediacy*’):

“In such cases the focalizer’s bias is not absent, since there is no such thing as objectivity in storytelling, but it remains implicit.” 137

Oedipus Complex

A condition coined by 19th century psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud wherein the gendered male subject holds a simultaneous fascination with his mother and resentment of his father. Freud argued that these socially unacceptable feelings are repressed, causing psychological stress and manifestations. Due to Freudian psychoanalysis having fallen out of social esteem and processes of natural language drift, this phrase has since morphed into something better described as a sexual aberration.

Narratology invokes this (relatively) contemporary term to contrast it with the circumstances surrounding its namesake protagonist in the ancient play, *Oedipus Rex* (Sophocles c.400-500 BCE). The point we took from this passage is that as language develops, earlier words and ideas can become linked with concepts in later eras which will (mis)inform their reading in ways that may not have been intended by the author.

As stated earlier, the lay sense of the term *oedipus complex* is more commonly understood as a shallow cliché synonymous with socially unacceptable compulsions. Very few layfolk are literate in Freudian (or Lacanian) psychoanalysis to the degree that they understand the nuances, breadth and implications of Freud’s application of the term; this isn’t said to denigrate folk understandings but to inform what Bal seems to intend by its invocation.

Considering the play *Oedipus Rex* in light of the modern cliché form of *oedipus complex* is to apply an anachronistic [character determination](#). This can cause the [reader](#) to make inferences of the protagonist’s motivations which were entirely absent from the original play.

Opposition (Binary)

An ideal (i.e., immaterial) construct whereby two interdependent concepts ([semantic axes](#)) are stripped of information to the point that they appear to be in a state of pure contradiction. It is essential to understand that *binary oppositions* are always artificial and

therefore [ideologically](#) derived. According to Bal, *binary oppositions* are created in three steps:

First,

“reduction, of an infinitely rich but also chaotic field, to two centres;” 116

A complex overarching concept (e.g., music) is simplified by bracketing or removing information that would otherwise give nuance that defies the next two operations.

Second,

“the articulation of those centres into polar opposites;” 116

With the removal of that information, what is left behind are two subordinate concepts (e.g., harmony and discord) that are related to the superordinate and yet appear—again, artificially due to the bracketing—to be mutually exclusive. (e.g., “this section can either be in harmony or discord but not both.”)

Third,

“and the [hierarchization](#) of these two into a positive term and a negative one.” 116

Depending on the preferences and degree to which a person has been culturally conditioned to see a ranked, linear relationship wherever two distinct entities exist, these concepts will be arranged as positive and negative respectively.

—

Following the musical motif we began with: different musical traditions will consider the same arrangement of notes to be in either harmony or discord. However, most cultures will have some synonymous relationship between harmony and peace, discord with strife, and so on. The conjunction of these conditions along with the [analytical](#) application of *binary opposition* leads to an inevitable ideological conflict between any disparate cultural groups’ analyses.

The above could give the impression that *binary oppositions* should be avoided entirely by the serious analyst, yet this is hardly the case. A model which addresses them mindfully can be “... a critical tool that lays bare the text’s ideological tenets.” 116

In the hands of a skilled analyst with the wherewithal to sidestep the dangers: “The very binary opposition that is such an ideological trap also helps us notice ideological positions.” 117

But this can only be useful if we have the courage to recognize our own subjectivity and resulting critical limitations. “The point is not to notice, confirm, or denounce oppositions but to confront the oppositions we notice with those we hold ourselves, and to use the differences between them as a tool to break their tyranny.” 185

Paper Person

A [character](#) written with a deliberate lack of apparent [psychological](#) depth, resisting [anthropomorphism](#) in the sense that *Narratology* uses the term. The *paper person* isn't necessarily less complex than—but offers a perspectival shift when contrasted with—a realistic character. “Indeed, Proust’s Albertine is explicitly presented as flat – a flatness that precisely constitutes the complexity of this figure, if not her ‘density.’” 120

This allows the [author](#) to highlight a [Character Narrator](#) (CN)’s own psychological states, impressions, biases etc. via reflection on/of the paper person: “And for hundreds of pages, the [narrator](#) continues to struggle with the impossibility of knowing his elected other.” 123

Ultimately, the *paper person* highlights the distinction between a narrative’s fantastic and realist themes, providing a critical distance for the reader to explore aesthetic and epistemic concepts without being mired in holding suspension of disbelief. “Obviously, Albertine’s ‘flatness’ can in no way be considered a lack of ‘density.’ On the contrary, it is of essential importance for this ‘dense’ novel that she be flat.” 123

Paralipsis

Often employed [rhetorically](#), *paralipsis* is the act of drawing attention under the pretense of omission e.g., “I won’t even mention your infidelity.”

Paratext

Extra-narrative elements situated within a given work meant to be read at the meta-level that shapes the reading of the text. Examples would be page numbers, chapter headings, stage directions etc.

Patriarchy

An [ideological](#) formation featuring concepts like gender normativity, biological essentialism, and power distributions that tend to privilege male bodies. It is featured in *Narratology* to situate it in juxtaposition to another ideological formation, feminism, to explore the narrative utility of oppositions.

Pause

In the aspect nomenclature of [tempo](#), *pauses* are [descriptive](#) sections of the [text](#) which do not move the plot forward whatsoever. As opposed to an [ellipsis](#), a “pause [is] when an element that takes no fabula-time (hence, an object, not a process) is presented in detail.” 90 A common example occurs when a [narrator](#) describes the appearance of a given [character](#) or [landscape](#).

Periodization

An approach to history that situates cultural themes within specific temporal boundaries, assigning them to defined periods between two dates. Being a taxonomical method—one that prioritizes neatly defined categories—it offers a sense of objectivity and clarity at the expense of accuracy and nuance. Examples include [modernist](#), [realist](#), and [postmodernist](#).

Personal Language

One end of a spectrum (i.e., *personal* to impersonal) of [descriptive](#) language characterized by the distance a [narrator](#) has from the object of its speech. The closer or more familiar the

narrator is to the object, the more personal its language becomes. This can be a useful axis for determining the existential level of the narrator—e.g., whether it is an external narrator or a character. However, a strict analysis on that basis alone can be frustrated by cases such as [text interference](#), where personal language might be employed by a character “...without previously stepping down from their narrative level.” 45

In fact, the existence of phenomena like text interference could be why Bal seems to avoid calling *personal/impersonal language* a binary opposition and informs why we chose to instead consider that relationship a spectrum.

Persuasion

An [ideological](#) appeal where an interlocutor seeks to influence a target’s actions by way of conditioning their patterns of thought. In [narrative](#), this is done by an [author](#) employing language to shape the [reader’s interpretation](#) in a way that aligns the reader’s extant ideological stance with the author’s own.

Pleasure

This term is employed only three times in Bal’s own writing—once more in a quote. In no case is it used where context would give a clear sense of its intended meaning beyond “good feeling.” We will let that description suffice.

Place

see Location

Poetics (Poetic)

The first distinction of this term in *Narratology* is where Bal contrasts *poetic* with [narrative](#), when she writes: “A poem such as this may be termed a narrative poem, and its narrative characteristics may be narratologically described. That this does not often occur can be attributed to the fact that the poem displays other, more salient characteristics, such as poetic ones.” 9

From this we see that certain characteristics may be *narrative*, others *poetic*, therefore we have an apparent dichotomy. Later, Bal explores *poetics* as an exposition of the subjectivity inherent to [modernist](#) writing—in contrast with the objectivity of [realist](#) literature: “Far from the realism attributed to Flaubert, Proust’s novel stands for a modernist poetics because of this emphasis on [subjectivity](#).” 41

So far, we have *poetics (poetic)* as writing inflected with subjectivity and adjacent, if not opposed, to narrative. Elsewhere it can be signaled by the use of [metaphor](#), replete through (presumably unconventional) narrative structure itself, and suggested through the creative embodiment of metatextual ideas by elements in the text.

To clarify this concept any further feels inappropriate because it seems—if you’ll forgive our *poetics*—to exist by dint of its resistance to disambiguation.

Point of View

“The view from which the [elements](#) of the [fabula](#) are being presented.” page 66

The *point of view* is the apex of a triangulation which extends to the boundaries of what is in focus for a given [narrative](#) moment, contextualizing the other elements in the fabula and thereby influencing the reader's interpretation of [events](#) within the [story](#).

Politics (Political)

Neatly described in the early 20th century by the influential political theorist Harold Laswell as “the study of who gets what, when and how.” (Laswell) A philosophical interpretation might favor something like “a socially informed ethics of resource and power distribution.” Indeed, throughout *Narratology*, the *political* is invoked whenever there's an analysis of expressed social ideology via narrative.

For instance: “Often, the rape of women is allegorically related to invasion and destruction of space. The more allegorical this fable, the more political becomes its moral.” 126

The above quote is an appraisal of a literary convention whereby women are analogous with property. The resulting [interpretation](#) of the physical domination of either woman or property may be intended by the [author](#) to be taken as synonymous to the [reader](#). In this light, the convergence of concepts such as ethics, power, and (albeit abhorrently in this application) resources should be clear.

Portrait

The concept of a *portrait* is surprisingly flexible considering the root of its etymology which might be written reductively as: a visual rendering—traditionally, but not necessarily, a painting or photograph—of a specific subject. Everything in the composition ought to highlight some aspect of the subject with a continuity that resolves as a faithful depiction of the figure. Often, symbols are employed to represent the personal characteristics of the subject—e.g., a hunter might be posed with a rifle, a chef with a knife and so on.

To complicate what might seem to be a simple concept, we might consider that a *portrait* ultimately requires three distinct entities to have any [interpretive](#) meaning: the subject of course, the artist, and the audience. These entities could be embodied by a single individual in different roles (e.g., imagine a self-portrait which hangs in the personal bathroom of the artist for them alone to view). They could be embodied by many individuals at once, such as in the case of the collaboratively arranged installation, *The Dinner Party* (Chicago) featuring key figures and accomplishments in women's history.

So now, having addressed the foundational concept of portrait, to expand on its narratological sense is to understand how all of the aspects listed might map to a literary work. The three entities responsible for interpretation are respectively the [author](#), the subject, and the [reader](#). Symbolism can be employed in a much more abstract sense and yet remain lucid in a [text](#) because of the emergent properties of linguistic [metaphors](#). Anything from [anachrony](#) to scenery could theoretically be [manipulated](#) by the author to give a symbolic effect so long as they manifest as some part of a coherent whole about the subject. What's crucial, then, is that a *portrait* is existentially dependent on whether it has explicitly [focalized](#) a specific subject; regardless of the medium.

Postcolonialism (Postcolonial)

A narrative situation in which a place and/or a people are taken to have surpassed some temporal demarcation point, prior to which they were subject to foreign domination.

Dealing in time as it does, this has myriad [interpretive](#) possibilities as well as multiple, often conflicted [ideological](#) valances.

In one instance, a *postcolonial text* might be written by an [author](#) from a currently colonized group envisioning a future point where their society is free of the domination they are currently living under. In another, an [author](#) might write a *postcolonial* text to reaffirm their cultural group's claim on a previously stolen space. In still another case, a dominant foreign agent may utilize the genre as a propagandistic technique to hide the fact that colonization persists; all the better to prolong it. Being enmeshed with the public view of history as it is, *postcolonialism* is a fraught concept which begs deep analytical circumspection.

Postmemory

"Postmemory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right." *The Generation of Postmemory* (Hirsch 2008)

We will let the above suffice for the description of this term being that it was directly cited by Bal along with a cautionary note (that we don't wish to defy): "The term 'postmemory' has been introduced by Marianne Hirsch and is widely used, although it easily lends itself to misunderstandings." 153

Postmodern (Postmodernist)

A literary movement which emerged in the mid-20th century and arguably persists to this point in 2025. As [modernism](#) followed [realism](#), *postmodernism* maintained the trajectory of its predecessors in moving from concrete towards more abstract ways of rendering the human experience. Both of the preceding movements explored the grand narratives—the overarching cultural touchstones which shaped social thought—in their own ways and yet nevertheless dealt with them sincerely. [Writers](#) in each movement saw these narratives (e.g., universal justice, the concept of the nation/state etc.) as legitimate, uncontested backdrops against which societies would operate.

With the emergence of *postmodernism*, that legitimacy would become subject to skepticism. Any form of [convention](#) had become fair game for interrogation. Within the extremely nuanced dialogue of a given modernist novel, for example, all manner of subjective cloudiness might be indicated in the words a given character might say; but the reader will have little trouble determining which character said them. In a *postmodernist* text, however, the very concept of [embedded](#) dialogue might be the subject of exploration and thus toyed with, reworked in ways that lead to intentionally confused interpretations. Bal notes: "This wavering, the unanswerability of the fundamental question "Who is speaking?" that guides the narratology of the [text](#) level, characterizes postmodernist literature." 44

In a realist novel, an author might provoke a [reader's](#) skepticism of a [character](#) by contrasting its words with [descriptions](#) of their actions. In a modernist novel, an author may intend that skepticism instead to be directed towards the reliability of the narrator by modulating the levels of familiarity they might show towards objects of description. Yet in a *postmodern* text, the reader's own sensemaking ability could be challenged by a deliberately confusing presentation. Franz Kafka's *The Trial* gives very little help to the struggling reader who hopes to find a clear plotline to follow. Nevertheless, she will empathize with Josef K's

struggle in the face of an inscrutable, unavoidable system that she herself has likely dealt with in her own life. This is all to point out that a *postmodern* approach isn't to bring confusion for its own sake, but for the sake of showing that confusion exists where society operates under the pretense of clarity. While there are better and worse examples of *postmodern* literature—a circumstance it shares with all literary movements—it is necessary to take their approach seriously and issue them the same critical response as would fit any other movement's works.

Predicate

Reductively: what a subject does or what is asserted about a subject. The role of the *predicate* in a sentence is to act as the site of the extimate—(Lacanian jargon) simultaneously external and intimate—relationship to contingency. Where a subject would otherwise be static and unchanging, the predicate ensures inevitable evolution in some way. This evolution could be straightforward such as in the case where the predicate is a simple description of a subject's action; i.e., "The dog *walked*." It could just as soon be a more complicated scenario where the change occurs upon interpretation; i.e.; "The dog will walk."

Predictability (Predictable)

The capacity of an [event](#) to be declared prior to its (supposed) occurrence. In [narrative](#), *predictability* often—but not always, as we'll discuss at the end of this description—impacts the [anticipatory aspect](#) of the [reader's interpretation](#) of the [story](#). Bal remarks on how, even when employed subtly, *predictability* can flatten anticipation and dampen the reader's sense of [suspense](#): "Flaubert, as mentioned before, was a master of [rhythmic](#) storytelling. By the sheer use of verb forms he managed to predict the entire outcome of an episode, and thus undercut suspense." 103

By contrast, the state of *unpredictability* vexes anticipation in a way which extends both its [temporality](#) and stress; as Bal details: "Soon after, Samuel's experience of [time](#) changes. It comes to be ruled by anticipation, but owing to the unpredictability of what he is expecting, the span of the anticipation is so undetermined that it takes on a torturous quality." 82

Being so associated with anticipation, *predictability* has a narrative function intertwined with the perception of the passage of time. Its presence or lack can signal to the reader whether certain aspects of the story beg deeper investigation: "Every analysis is continuously preoccupied with demonstrating its own relevance; there is no point in initiating a detailed calculation of temporal relationships unless some relevance can be predicted." 89

Finally, precisely where a *prediction* occurs in the [fabula](#)—earlier or later—greatly impacts whether or not it relates to anticipation at all. Obviously, a *prediction* early in fabula-time will have forward-facing implications (regardless of its relation to story-time). The [extra-textual situation](#) is almost* always such that a reader can physically observe that there are a certain number of pages yet to read and would reasonably interpret a *prediction* as a cause for anticipation.

The opposite also being true, that a *prediction* which occurs late in fabula-time has the interpretive effect of confirmation or re-contextualization, gives the sense that wherever it is found in a story, it's always a form of [mirror-text](#). Bal might take issue with that last assertion, noting that in the latter case, "The course of the fabula is then largely familiar, and the function of the mirror-text is no longer predictive, but retrospective." 57 However, a rebuttal could be that a retrospective effect might nevertheless be the result of the later

repetition of an earlier prediction (thus satisfying the mirror-text requirement). In short, and not to be too pedantic, a *prediction* need not necessarily be *predictive*.

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*[Postmodern](#) texts being a confounding variable here, given that genre's tendencies to play with formatting.

Projection

Projection is—at its simplest—the act of throwing forward or extending something from one place to another. Of the seven references in the Index of Concepts, none are using this term in the transitive verb sense either of throwing light onto a surface or of extending an object across a span. Nevertheless, these two physical examples of projection act, in their respective ways, as useful analogous substrates on which we might better grow our understanding of the ideal—i.e., immaterial—sense of *projection*.

Where in the physical senses above we're dealing with light or roads, in the ideal sense, what is being projected are [ideologies](#)—beliefs that influence behaviors. *Narratology* being a toolkit for the [analysis](#) of [narrative](#), narrative [interpretation](#) is the behavior at issue when *projection* is involved.

For instance we might do well to recognize that we are *projecting* our own ideological tendencies onto the subjects of our investigation. Having done so, we might “turn off the projector,” so to speak, and see our subject in a new light. Bal notes that: “Looking more closely at this [character](#) makes us aware of the extent to which Proust's [modernist](#) masterpiece has strong features of what would later be called [postmodernism](#). Such a close look helps us to understand his novel beyond [realist](#) projections and to relativize the periodization that forms the backbone of literary history.” 120

Gone unnoticed, the ideological projection referenced above would have hindered a full analysis. Having become salient, that projection itself can be a useful reference point from which to analyze the nature of that text's subversion of both genre and [conventional](#) analysis.

Returning again to our light and bridges metaphor, we may instead of merely *projecting* our ideological positions, build enduring intellectual infrastructure from them (what Michel Foucault might refer to as discursive formations). Bal critiques the dangers of unchecked projection in scholarship:

“The kind of response that judges characters as real, modern, psychologically complex people has had nefarious effects on scholarship. It has produced the myth of primitivism in the scholarship about ancient and folk literature and about geographically and culturally remote literatures. It has also produced a large body of critical literature that, seemingly reiterating the misogyny of the texts studied, projects sexism on texts whose function is not moral at all, or whose standards of representation have nothing to do with what realist literature has taught us to expect. This is a major ideological trap.” 105-6

To be caught in this kind of trap is to fail to recognize just how thoroughly steeped in subjectivity our supposedly objective analyses had always-already been. How the conventions we'd built on those foundational ideologies may have come to reproduce themselves and, as with all bridges, can come to work both directions. On the contrary, the awareness of an “ideological trap” has the astounding power not only to potentially disarm

it but to recognize when others may have fallen prey to it and subject that to analysis as well. Bal describes that possibility when addressing the dually useful and problematic aspects of applying a descriptive analytical model (i.e., [binary opposition](#)): “It depends on our use of it whether it is a mode of projecting ideology on the text or, on the contrary, whether it is a critical tool that lays bare the text’s ideological tenets.” 116

Pseudo-Ellipsis

See [Ellipsis](#)

Pseudo-Iteration

See [Iteration](#)

Pseudo-Scene

See [Scene](#)

Psychoanalysis (Psychoanalytical)

Both psychoanalysis and **psychology** are fields of nuance and technicality that fall beyond the scope of this text to properly explicate. Attempting to distill either subject into brief summaries risks perpetuating the pop-cultural misunderstandings and misapplications that often distort their meanings. We feel ethically obliged to err on the side of reticence rather than contribute to these regrettable externalities at the interface between culture and techné.

In *Narratology*, references to *psychoanalysis* and **psychology** are made primarily to highlight their discursive relevance to [narrative](#) concepts, rather than to provide definitive insights into their technical methodologies. The specific ways in which either interacts with given concepts in the text remain nebulous and varied. Both fields, in their own ways, engage with the interiority of the human mind. This, we believe, is the extent of what Bal intends us to understand in each use-case.

Psychology (Psychological)

See [Psychoanalysis](#)

Punctual Anachrony

See [Anachrony](#)

Qualification (Qualifying)

A characteristic which may or may not be actually possessed by a given [character](#), but is nevertheless [focalized](#) by another. Bal distinguishes between *qualification* and *quality* because the latter term “...suggests [focalized characters] really possess those features.” *Qualifications* can say as much about the [focalizer](#) as the focalized and—by extension—the [text](#) itself. Whether they do or do not possess the *qualification*, what the *qualification* may say about them or their focalizer, to what degree a lack of a(n expected) *qualification* might bring interpretations intended by the [author](#); all of these and more can make for rich [ideological](#) investigations of a [narrative text](#).

Reader (Reading)

An individual [interpreter](#) of a [text](#). While *Narratology* is largely about written (more specifically, prose) literature, Bal appears to be among the theorists who contend that a text isn't defined by those narrow terms. For instance, she remarks that "[r]eaders have only the book, paper and ink, or the strokes of paint on a canvas, the light in a dark (movie) theatre, the sound coming out of speakers, and they must use this material to establish the structure of the text themselves." 6

This implies that someone might be *reading* whether they are holding a book, playing a record, or munching popcorn in a cinema. Throughout this 'glossary', we sometimes oscillate between *readers* and *audience* and feel very confident that the two are—for all of Bal's intents and purposes—synonymous. In either case, the specific activity that gives meaning to their name is interpretation.

See [Extra-Textual Situation](#), [Frame of Reference](#)

Realism (Realist)

Of or relating to the 19th century literary movement characterized by richly detailed [descriptions](#) of [characters](#) and their environments meant to be taken as sincere and therefore grounded in observable reality. We have discussed this in much greater detail in contrast to its successor-movement, [modernism](#).

Reception

Of the myriad ways that [narrative](#) might be analyzed, *reception* specifically focuses on the way in which a text may be [interpreted](#) by a [reader](#). "The aim of textual analysis is not to account for the process of writing, but for the conditions of the process of *reception*." 65

Narratology employs analytical methods (i.e., structural, text-based) with an overall intent to highlight the subjective agency of the reader while organizing her interpretations in a way that can form the basis of her [intersubjective](#) discourse on the text. As Bal writes: "The textual description that results provides the basis for interpretation, from which it cannot be firmly distinguished. Interpretation is involved every step of the way. Precisely for that reason a systematic theory is helpful, not to eliminate or bracket interpretation but to make it arguable." 10

Reduction (Reductive)

Of or relating to simplifying a complex entity by selectively highlighting useful points of reference and subduing features which would otherwise distract from the [analysis](#). Bal describes *reduction* as the first of three steps in composing a basic analytical [binary opposition](#).

See [Articulation](#), [Hierarchy](#)

Referential Characters

[Characters](#) with an established set of characteristics which a diverse set of readers—familiar with the cultural relevance of that character—will consider [determinative](#). This concept highlights how the reader's [frame of reference](#) informs their [interpretation](#) so reliably that this phenomenon is a common literary device. Whether these references are historical, mythological, pop-cultural; the overall dynamic is the same, as Bal notes: "Historical

characters are often brought to life in novels. Napoleon we meet quite regularly. Legendary characters, like King Arthur and Santa Claus, also fit into a frame of reference. Historical characters are not more strongly determined than legendary ones... The ensuing determination, and the extent to which it is realized, is therefore an interesting object for study." 109-110

Relevance (Relevant)

What is worthy of discussion within a discourse. The more or less *relevant* a subject is within a given frame is determined by that framing and the subjective motivations for each agent in the discussion. Consider how Bal argues for the worthiness of [narrative](#) as a subject of [cultural analysis](#):

"Narrative is a cultural phenomenon, one of the many cultural processes by which we live. The conditions of possibility of those processes are what constitute the interest of narrative analysis; there lays its cultural relevance." 9

Relevance is subject to [temporality](#)—the perception of time. Take for example the case where a seemingly irrelevant detail at one point comes to be exceedingly relevant later. Such is a common feature in detective/mystery novels.

Irrelevance seems to be indicated by Bal as harmful to serious discussion, as she writes: "But it also leads us to ask questions that are frankly irrelevant ("How many children had Lady Macbeth?") and that reduce the narrative to flat realism." 105

Often, *relevance* is determined quantitatively such as when Bal discusses the practical construction of binary oppositions: "Selecting relevant semantic axes involves focusing, out of all the characteristics mentioned – usually an unmanageably large number – only on those axes that determine the image of the largest possible number of characters, positively or negatively." 114

On the contrary, it may be determined qualitatively as Bal goes on to write: "Of the axes that involve only a few characters or even just one, only those are analysed that are "strong" (striking or exceptional) or that are related to an important event. Such a selection involves the ideological position of the analyst and also points at ideological stances represented in the story, and can therefore be a powerful tool for critique." 114

Repetition

Of or relating to multiple instances of the same (or those taken to [resemble](#) each other) [event](#) in different places on the fabula. "When I refer to a repetition, I mean different events – or alternative presentations of events – that show similarities." 100

'Similar' and 'resembling', as opposed to 'identical', are relevant here because complete identity seems entirely impossible, as Bal notes: "Similarly, two events are never exactly the same. The first event of a series differs from the one that follows it, if only because it is the first and the other is not." 100

Repetition enables the interpretation of [themes](#) or concepts through the similarities and distinctions between events. In the following, Bal describes how two separate events are related by a repetitive theme: "There, the repetition of capture, first by the Nazis, now by the guerilleros, triggered the son Samuel's 'contamination' by his father's trauma." 87

Repetition is a function of [frequency](#), and therefore is intertwined with the reader's [interpretation](#) of the story's [temporality](#). The way in which repetition is conveyed is relevant to the overall analysis. In this discussion of a *repetitive* element called [mirror text](#), Bal notes the effectiveness of a summary as a *repetitive* element vs a whole-cloth copy:

"A simple *repetition* of the primary fabula in a mirror-text would not be as interesting. Its function is mostly to enhance or inflect significance. The paraphrase of the primary and of the embedded text that we have made in order to infer resemblance will have a more general meaning. This more general sense – a human being always loses against a bureaucracy, or, even more abstractly, 'no one escapes fate' – lifts the whole narration to another level." 57-58

Importantly, *repetition* functions entirely differently in *Narratology* from its common use in everyday conversation. This is also the case for its related concept [iteration](#), as we discussed at greater length in its entry.

Resemblance

An effect of greater or lesser (but never absolute) similarity between plural entities.

See [Mirror](#)

Retrospection (Retrospective)

A [temporal](#) aspect of [focalization](#) where the [focalizer](#) looks back on an event earlier in the [chronology](#) of the fabula. This contrasts with focalization of the present or future.

Retroversion

"Seen from that moment in the [fabula](#) that is being presented when the [anachrony](#) intervenes, the [event](#) presented in the anachrony lies either in the past or in the future. For the first category I use the term retroversion; for the second, [anticipation](#). I avoid the more common terms 'flashback' and 'flashforward' because of their vagueness and [psychological](#) connotations." 71

As with anticipation, the boundary of interiority/exteriority in retroversion is the timeline of the primary fabula. Wherever the span of the *retroversion* crosses that boundary, Bal refers to it as '**mixed retroversion**,' in her summary of this nomenclature:

"Whenever a retroversion takes place completely outside the time span of the primary fabula, we refer to an **external retroversion**. If the retroversion occurs within the time span of the primary fabula, then we refer to an **internal retroversion**. If the retroversion begins outside the primary time span and ends within it, we refer to a **mixed retroversion**." 76-77 (Emphasis ours)

See [Analepsis](#)

Retroversion-Within-Anticipation

The result of a specific configuration of a hybrid of [retroversion](#) and [anticipation](#) which gives the net effect of a foreshadowed revelation. "This occurs, for instance, when we are told beforehand how circumstances in the present will be presented to us. The meaning of an event can only be made known later, and the coming of that revelation is announced 'now'..." 86

Reversal

A [narrative](#) device that subverts or affects the opposite of an expectation, often [abstracting](#) the usual sense of causality. Bal gives a succinct example by way of contrasting a classic causal argument: “She tersely verbalizes this lack of self that comes with being a labourer in a phrase that sounds like a reversal of Descartes’s famous dictum ‘I think therefore I am’: ‘I am nobody because I work’ (37).” 99

This can have a striking [interpretive](#) effect for [readers](#) who appreciate it, but runs the risk of seeming overwrought or pretentious to those who do not. Consider how Bal describes the [fabula’s](#) structure in *Madame Bovary*: “Many [events](#) that one could expect to have been presented as dramatic climaxes, are summarized rapidly, whereas routine events – for instance, situations that recur every week – are presented extensively. This reversal of the traditional [rhythm](#) is very well suited to a fabula that reflects boredom, the emptiness of a person’s existence.” 93

Rhetoric (Rhetorical)

Of or relating to persuasive acts. *Rhetoric* is generically seen as a mode of speech, but in *Narratology*, is often discussed as an [attribute](#) of a given narrative [element](#).

Rhetoric is—of the three features of [description](#)—the one responsible for “selling” or gaining buy-in from the reader that the [text](#) presents a plausible reality. The *rhetorical* role of description is to provide the sense of immersion in a [story](#), investing the reader.

In one use, Bal notes the *rhetorical* function of description: “Working intuitively from the premise that descriptions interrupt the line of the fabula – a premise that, as we have just seen, is somewhat problematic – the ways in which descriptions are inserted characterize the rhetorical strategy of the narrator.” 27

Rhetorical strategies can be effectively employed outside of descriptive text. For instance, Bal reflects on how [temporality](#)—manipulated through suspense—is a rhetorical lever: “If we consider suspense as a narrative rhetoric, and define it as the effect of the procedures by which either the reader or the character is made to ask questions that are only answered later, it is possible to achieve some grasp of the various kinds of suspense in terms of [focalization](#).” 148

See [Conative](#)

Rhythm

Bal implies *rhythm* to be a relative [interpretive](#) effect, as she interrogates: “But what is narrative rhythm? What are we to take as a measure of the speed of presentation, the rhythm?” 89

Since an entire section of *Narratology* explores this concept, we summarize it as an [aspect](#) of the [story](#) within the nomenclature of [tempo](#) which manifests as the interpretive effect of the pace of presentation juxtaposed with the time span of [events](#) in the [fabula](#).

Riddle

Within the nomenclature of [suspense](#), a *riddle* refers to information that is known to the [reader](#) but unknown to the [character](#). Its significance, however, has not yet been [focalized](#) or fully revealed at that point in the [fabula](#). This dynamic creates [anticipation](#), as the reader

speculates on how and when the character will encounter or [interpret](#) the information, and what its implications will be within the [story](#).

Scene

In the aspect nomenclature of [tempo](#), “In a scene the [duration](#) of the [fabula](#) and that of the [story](#) are roughly the same. Roughly, because most scenes are full of [retroversions](#), [anticipations](#), non-narrative fragments such as general observations, or atemporal sections such as [descriptions](#). A truly synchronic scene, in which the duration of the fabula coincided completely with that of the presentation in the story, would be unreadable.” 94

See [Ellipsis](#)

Second Person*

A [narrative](#) voice that serves a practical function in [embedded](#) dialogue but is structurally tenuous when employed by an [external narrator](#). In dialogue, it helps the [reader](#) discern the speaker’s [focalization](#) by aligning the subject and addressee within the [language act](#). However, when used as the external narrator’s voice, *second-person* narration often resolves as a form of first-person narration upon closer interpretation. Bal critiques this as more of a gimmick than a device, noting: “The ‘you’ is simply an ‘I’ in disguise, a ‘first-person’ narrator talking to himself; the novel is a ‘first-person’ narrative with a formal twist to it that does not engage the entire narrative situation, as one would expect it should.” 22

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*There seems to be an oscillation between this term being written as hyphenated or not. We chose to reflect Bal’s use in the Index of Concepts.

Secret

Within the nomenclature of [suspense](#), a *secret* is information which is known to the [characters](#) but kept unknown—and conspicuous in its absence—to the [reader](#). This dynamic creates [anticipatory](#) tension, as the reader looks to discover what might account for the informational gap they perceive but cannot yet name, as well as how it might impact the overall [story](#).

Seeing

The essential primary action of the [narrator](#). The constituents of *seeing*—perception and [interpretation](#)—comprise “the object of narrating.” 12

See [Focalization](#)

Semantic Axis

“Semantic axes are pairs of contrary meanings. Characteristics like “large” and “small” could be a relevant semantic axis; so could rich–poor, man–woman, kind–unkind, reactionary–progressive.” 114

Semantic axes are the starting material of what eventually become [binary opposition](#) once they are subjected to the three-step process described at length [in that entry](#). It is notable—from our perspective, crucial—that these axes seem superficially always-already in opposition. However, they do require that nuance-stripping process to be in true opposition

as such. This bears heavy implications (which we will not explore here as it is well out of the scope of this work) on the nature of truth and the [ideological](#) operation that is sensemaking.

Sequential ordering

An objective [aspect](#) of [narrative](#) that involves the arrangement of events within a given timeframe; be it the [fabula](#) or the [story](#). It is objective in that, while it is the result of an [interpretation](#) of the [text](#) as opposed to a direct reflection of it (which might presuppose subjectivity), it is nonetheless the product of the application of causal [logic](#) to those textual elements. That logic is an inherently objective framework. Differences between the sequential [ordering of events](#) on the fabula vs the story are what account for the terms fabula-time and story-time respectively and are the basis for the entire narrative concept of [temporality](#) itself.

See [Tempo](#)

Sexism (Sexist)

An [ideology](#) which is constituted by biological essentialism—the idea that one’s biological morphology is stable and determinative—and gender normative realism; which is taking a social construct weighted in favor of a majority interpretation to be a concrete rather than abstract concept. *Sexism* often manifests as a form of bigotry on the basis of privilege favoring one of the resultant discourse’s prescribed categories. Forms of sexism might be misogyny (i.e., privileging gendered male over gendered female), misandry (i.e., the opposite of misogyny), and transphobia (i.e., privileging the culturally normative binary categories over those outside of that binary) among others.

The common use of the adjective *sexist* reflects actions or conditions which privilege gendered males in a society which is taken to systematically favor them; a condition commonly referred to as patriarchy.

Slow-down

In the [aspect](#) nomenclature of [tempo](#), a slow-down inflates the [fabula](#) with [acts](#) and [narrative descriptions](#) that are grossly disproportionate to their impact on the [chronological](#) movement of the [story](#). Typically, this is done through an [embedded](#) sequence such as the example Bal provides:

“Imagine the arrival of a visitor or a letter. In the short time between the ringing of the bell and the opening of the door, the actor is bombarded by all sorts of thoughts, his nerves are taut – a whole life passes through his mind, and it takes pages before he actually opens the door.” 94

Bal remarks that a *slow-down* and a [summary](#) are the relational inverse of one another.

Speaking

As one of the “three forms of narrative agency” 28, *speaking* brings about the [motivation](#) and development of the [character](#) through verbal expression. Second only to narrative [description](#), it gives the clearest sense of what the character intends others—including the reader—to assume they think. However, the equivalence between speech and thought is inherently contingent, given the common social practice of deception.

See [Focalization](#)

Speech Act

Verbal or nonverbal communication that is performed less to convey information than to cause a specific change in social reality.

The necessary disambiguation of *speech act* from [speaking](#) arises from the counterintuitive fact that, while speaking is always an [act](#), the motivation for—and indeed result of—a *speech act* often go well beyond the simple verbal communication of thought. For instance, Bal regards the Judeo-Christian creation myth, just as the narration within the tale of *Beloved*, as speech acts:

“This is particularly important in a novel like *Beloved*, where the secondary narrators’ joint efforts slowly narrate *Beloved* into life. As the meta-narrative phrase quoted earlier (“the two did the best they could to create what really happened,” 78) has already suggested, narration is an act of creation. In this sense the narrative aligns the power of narration with the divine creation as recounted in the biblical book of Genesis, which is also primarily a speech act.” 54

Other examples might include the Constitution of the United States of America, a receipt from the grocery store, and a vote in an election—acts that carry performative weight and produce tangible consequences. Some scholars like Searle and Austin have argued that speech acts are foundational to our perception of reality. While Auerbach does not make this claim explicitly, his analysis in *Mimesis* explores how language, particularly in literature, reflects and constructs cultural understandings of reality.

Speed

“...the amount of [time](#) covered by the [fabula](#) can be juxtaposed with the amount of space in the [text](#) that each event requires: the number of pages, lines, or words.” 89

Specific to *Narratology*, Bal’s use of this term is less to give a particular quantification scheme than to indicate a general sense of relational scale. Just as in physics discourse, literary *speed* is a relative—rather than constant—term; a fact which is clear from the reference to juxtaposition in the above quoted section. A succinct example is provided slightly later in the text:

“b Two years passed.

In fact, this is no longer an ellipsis, but could be called a minimal summary, or rather, a summary with maximum speed: two years in one sentence.” 92

Note that Bal doesn’t justify why she writes *sentences* over *words* or even *letters*. She doesn’t need to. The analytical point is sufficiently made without devolving into such pedantry; and the logical end of that intellectual path has the same notes of bleak ossification as the staunch privileging of authorial intentionality over a reader’s interpretation in the analysis of a text.

It seems important to remark that what does not follow from *Narratology*’s invocation of *speed* is that we should audit the exact number of minutes for a given section of fabula-time, literally count the words used to describe that section, and expect to come away with a meaningful statement about the text. Certainly one could perform such an [‘analysis’](#) and perhaps whole college literary departments might be filled with scholars

stoically plodding away generating spreadsheets and inferences about genres based on this or that formula. But it would seem to be the literary equivalent of phrenology. All manner of scientific, professionalized “critique” could certainly be industrially produced but the result would have all the verve and humanity of AI generated poetry.

See [Tempo](#)

Spectacle

In its primary use within this text, *spectacle* refers to a cultural artifact orchestrated to evoke emotional catharsis in an audience. For instance:

“i Then the President appeared on the screen, a spectacle that would weigh on our spirits every Friday from now on.

Subsequently, the spectacle in question is presented in full detail, and the reader is to view each particularity as an example of something that will occur again and again in the future.”
84

In its subordinate use, it can also refer to a spontaneous phenomenon—whether by artifice or nature—that evokes emotional catharsis regardless of authorial intent. Bal uses it in this form within the following: “Half flung: as a spectacle of arrested intimate movement, unsuitable for the public gaze, so that the man looking down on her is caught up in the inevitably voyeuristic position.” 34

For example, a *spectacle* in the primary sense could be a political direct action such as chaining oneself to a tree, or in the secondary sense, the collision of the WienerMobile into the Trump Tower.

Story

The content of a [narrative text](#) that provides a particular manifestation, inflection and “coloring” of the [fabula](#) in the [interpretation](#) of the [reader](#).

Stream Of Consciousness

A literary device that presents otherwise coherent intellectual content which is devoid of relational cues—i.e., chronology 135; focalization 74-75—sufficient to be [interpreted structurally](#). The resultant effect can range from an immersive sense of subjective interpretive liberty in ideal cases, to vertiginous confusion in less successful applications.

A classic example of this narrative style is the famous final soliloquy of James Joyce’s character, Molly Bloom:

“I was a Flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how he kissed me under the Moorish Wall and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes.” (Joyce 1137)

Structure (Structural)

Of or relating to rigid, [durative](#) relationships of elements and processes which facilitate interpretations with consistent objective outcomes. *Structure* could apply to an [analysis](#) or its subject; both or neither. The extent to—and indeed, success of—which an [author](#) *structures* their [text](#), the [reader](#) *structures* their [interpretation](#), or the critic *structures* their [analysis](#) is counterintuitively easy to misconstrue. Consider this particular warning Bal issues to the would-be structural narrative analyst who fails to reckon with their own subjective application of an objective method:

“The difference between the standard interpretation and this one only goes to show that structural analysis must come with its own critique if it is to avoid the ideological manipulations it is meant to counter. To be critically literate is to see not only what the text does but also what we do with it.” 119

This is to say that, for all their utility to sensemaking and communication, a perennial aspect of all *structures* is that at some point they must fail. The same ladder which allows us to reach beyond our genetically determined grasp has the capacity to send us tumbling. The application of [binary opposition](#), for instance, is a powerful, portable and extensible approach to analysis. And yet, as Bal notes:

“But binary opposition, as a structure of thought, is problematic. The process of establishing semantic axes of this kind subjects its object – say, a particular semantic field – to three successive logical moves, each of which aggravates the damage: reduction, of an infinitely rich but also chaotic field, to two centres; the articulation of those centres into polar opposites; and the hierarchization of these two into a positive term and a negative one. But here, logic catches up with this structure of thought. For the logic of opposition has it that negativity is by definition vague, if not void. It cannot be defined, and hence it cannot be articulated, and as a result it remains unmanageable.” 116

Style

Given that a text is a “finite ensemble of signs” 5, there are nevertheless infinite forms in which those signs might be arranged. Any conceivable form is the result of a deliberate choice by the [author](#) and so informs the [interpretation](#). This choice and its coherent, consistent application resolves as *style* in the [reader’s](#) interpretation.

Form itself can imply function and so *style* can give analytical clues to authorial intent. Bal remarks on the [rhetorical](#) value of the call-and-response style in narrative: “In addition, the example shows that the discursive form – here, the catechistic style – itself has ideological implications.” The interaction between the questioner and the respondent gives an implied sense of [hierarchical](#) authority (favoring the questioner) and weights the discourse accordingly.

To go further, information carries interpretive weight in its absence as much as in its presence. An author may leverage omission in particular ways to great *stylistic* effect. Consider how Bal remarks on the impact of what’s unsaid:

“The sentence ‘When they left Tostes, Madame Bovary was pregnant,’ which is so characteristic of Flaubert’s narrative style, indicates by the ease with which it passes over the [event](#) that the getting, and later having, of children is of very slight importance to Emma Bovary, and the moment at which the child is conceived is of none at all. Indeed, the sexual

relationship between Emma and Charles is, through the [ellipsis](#) of the event, fully represented as poor.” 180-181

For all that it might inform the interpretation, there is an inherent jeopardy in the [analysis](#) of *style*. Consider that *style* is subjectively applied by the author and subjectively interpreted by the reader. *Style* being a reflection of two-fold subjectivity, there is the danger that a hubristic critic—self-assured that they have well and truly decrypted the author’s stylistic code—might develop the mistaken impression that they have objectively determined the precise authorial intent. We mention this not to discount the analysis of style but only to caution the analyst not to forget their own subjectivity.

Subjective Anachrony

“A subjective anachrony is an [anachrony](#) that can be only be regarded as such if the contents of consciousness lie in the past or in the future – not the past of being conscious, but the moment of thinking itself.” 75

Anachrony—a break in the ordered [chronological](#) sequence of [events](#)—can be further distinguished by the [focalizer](#) of that break. In the event that a given anachrony was delivered to the [fabula](#) by an [external narrator](#), we can consider that an **objective anachrony**. On the contrary, where the anachrony derives from a [character-bound narrator](#)—thus the product of internal focalization—we can consider that to be a *subjective anachrony*.

This distinction cues the [reader](#) to analyze all the same manner of problematics as with any other subjective/objective duality might. Veracity, for instance, is presumed under the objective case in a way that wouldn’t hold for the subjective. If we take the [narrator](#) to be truly external—not a [character](#)-in-disguise, as with an unreliable narrator—then we can conclude that an objective anachrony “actually happened,” experienced by all [actors](#) on the [fabula](#). This of course carries the potential for subversion, but up to the point where that happens (if it does), the reader would be expected to infer truth in the telling from an external narrator. On the other hand, a recounting of the past from within the conscious memory of a character is always colored—contextualized—by its point of origin and as a result begs [interpretive](#) skepticism.

One result of this issue with veracity: *subjective anachrony* requires more interpretive effort of the reader than its counterpart. This burden of effort has a risk/reward function for immersion; the harder the reader must work, the greater the likelihood they may shirk the labor, but also the greater the immersive effect if successful rendering a deeper emotional connection to the narrative.

Subjective Retroversion

The rear-facing form of [subjective anachrony](#); whereby the [character-bound narrator](#), through internal focalization, recounts an [event](#) which occurred prior to their present [chronological](#) situation. As opposed to objective retroversion, which renders interpretively as having “actually happened” for all characters in the story, *subjective retroversion* delivers only the [character focalizer’s interpretation](#).

Subjectivity

“...understood as the crossing, in culture, of individual and social existence” 10

When used regarding an [agent](#), *subjectivity* is a quality or condition specific to the individual's phenomenal experience. It reflects their personal perceptions, emotions, and [interpretations](#) of reality, whether that individual is real or imagined.

As [attributed](#) to an object, *subjectivity* reflects the fact that its [description](#) is inflected with the interpreter's particular [frame of reference](#). What is—and is not—included in that description is experienced as particular for the interpreter as well as for the audience of that interpretation.

Summary

In the aspect nomenclature of [tempo](#), a *summary* fills the gaps of fabula-time through [description](#) rather than action. As opposed to a [scene](#), where story-time and fabula-time are [interpretively](#) equivalent because the [reader](#) can see the causal chain of events, a *summary* essentially moves the plot forward by sheer descriptive fiat.

Bal remarks that a summary and a [slow-down](#) are the relational inverse of one another.

See [Ellipsis](#), [Tempo](#)

Suspense

"If we consider suspense as a [narrative rhetoric](#), and define it as the effect of the procedures by which either the [reader](#) or the [character](#) is made to ask questions that are only answered later, it is possible to achieve some grasp of the various kinds of suspense in terms of [focalization](#)." 148

Suspense is an [aspect](#) of the [story](#), and therefore an [interpretive effect](#). Specifically, it is [temporality](#) colored with tension; itself derived from a lack of information and the reader's [anticipation](#) of its revelation. As Bal notes above, *suspense* operates rhetorically to "sell" the story and develop the immersion of the reader.

Symbol

An object which primarily functions as a representation of another. It seems notable that every instance of Bal's writing uses this term in its qualitative sense—*symbolic*—with the exception being where she quotes another [author](#). Specifically in that section, Bal alludes to the fact that *symbolization* could, among other uses, render an [event](#) into an object (please excuse the extended block-quote from page 99 in the text):

"As one critic wrote: "When Janey tells about the abortions in her life, she immediately makes clear that they should not be seen as [dramatic](#) moments in a life story. She tells about her abortions because they have for her symbolic value." This critic cites the following two passages:

I'm not trying to tell you about the rotgut weird parts of my life. Abortions are the symbol, the outer image, of sexual relations in this world. Describing my abortions is the only way I can tell you about pain and fear ... my unstoppable drive for sexual love made me know. (34)

I didn't know how much these abortions hurt me physically and mentally. I was desperate to fuck more and more so I could finally get love. Soon my total being was on fire, not just my sex, and I was doing everything to make the non-sexual equivalent of love happen. (35)"

From the above, it might be inferred that although *symbolism* appears prima facie to be an [abstract](#) operation, it paradoxically has the capacity to reify or concretize abstractions; rendering phenomena into tangible “things” in the [reader’s interpretation](#).

Tempo

A [structurally themed aspect](#) of narrative where the pace of presentation of the [fabula’s elements](#) impacts the [reader’s interpretation](#) of the [story’s temporality](#). The [nomenclature](#) of this theme includes [rhythm](#), [ellipsis](#), [pause](#), [scene](#), [slow-down](#), [summary](#).

For the reader’s benefit, we expand on the table Bal includes on pages 90-91 below:

(where “n” represents a relative-normal, measurable tempo and “O” represents a relative-infinite, immeasurable tempo)

Ellipsis: Fabula progresses without being narrated (TF = “n,” TS = “O”).

Summary: Fabula-time is condensed into less story-time (TF > TS).

Scene: Fabula-time matches or is slightly greater than story-time (TF ≤ TS).

Slow-down: Fabula-time moves slower relative to story-time (TF < TS).

Pause: Fabula halts entirely while the story focuses on description or reflection (TF = “O,” TS = “n”).

Temporality

The perception of [time](#). *Temporality* is a subjective [aspect](#) of the [story](#) which, though often taken for granted by the [reader](#) as coherent and linear, can be [manipulated](#) by the [author](#) with technical devices (such as [sequential ordering](#), [rhythm](#), and [frequency](#); themselves subordinate aspects of the story). These manipulations influence the reader’s experience of narrative [time](#), creating a [subjective](#) sense of how it flows in the story that may differ from the [chronological](#) order of events.

Tense

[Narrative](#) voicing through the conjugation of verbs to indicate whether the [event](#) occurs in the past, present, or future. While tense primarily shapes the [reader’s temporal interpretation](#), it also functions as a narrative tool for:

- Cluing the reader into the [personal/impersonal language](#) situation. 44
- Indicating existence and form of [anachrony](#) in a sequence. 80
- Suggesting [iteration](#) through juxtaposition with the rest of the sentence.

102–103

Text

“...a text is a finite, [structured](#) whole composed of signs. These can be linguistic units, such as words and sentences, but they can also be different signs, such as cinematic shots and sequences, or painted dots, lines, and blots. The finite ensemble of signs does not mean that the text itself is finite, for its meanings, effects, functions, and backgrounds are not. It only means that there is a first and a last word to be identified, a first and a last image of a film, a frame of a painting – even if those boundaries, as we will see, are provisional and porous.” 5

See [Narrative Text](#), [Story](#), [Fabula](#)

Text Interference

When the language situation (personal vs impersonal) in a sequence changes without a clear indication that the [narrator](#) has changed levels: “In f.ii we find a “mixture” of the two narrative levels, which is called text interference.” 44

This obscures both the role/position of the narrator as well as the relationship between the primary/[embedded](#) levels of [text](#): “When there is text interference, narrator’s text and [actor’s](#) text are so closely related that distinctions between narrative levels can no longer be made.” 51

Thematic

The positive state of a binary opposition constructed on the basis of relationship to—or existence of—a [theme](#). *Thematic* elements are those that directly contribute to, reflect, or engage with the theme, as opposed to those elements that are neutral or oppositional to it.

Theme

The unifying element among a collection of [symbols](#). A *theme* is a categorical description of a series of sub-themes—called the *theme’s* [nomenclature](#). The relationship to one another defines and thereby fleshes out the *theme*. This relationship is dialectical: the theme describes the common element that unifies the nomenclature while the nomenclature justifies the conceptualization evoked by the *theme*. In this way, a *theme* functions as the touchstone of a coherent, communicable interpretive [framework](#) that can support rich [analysis](#).

Theory

“A theory is a systematic set of generalized statements about a particular segment of reality.” 3

In *Narratology*, Bal emphasizes the instrumental purpose of *theory*, prioritizing its role in enabling meaningful dialogue and [interpretation](#) over achieving definitive objectivity or certainty. As she writes: “The theory presented here is an instrument for making descriptions, and hence interpretations, discussable. That, not objectivity or certainty, ‘being right’ or ‘proving wrong,’ is the point.” 10

Time

The attentive [reader](#) will have noticed that Bal includes *time* in the list of [elements](#); themselves components of the [fabula](#). Simple logic reduces this to “time is an element of the fabula.” We will discuss* our philosophical concerns with that statement further down. First however, to remain faithful to the [structuralist](#) approach Bal has taken, we will flesh out our above overly-reductive description strictly within her chosen discourse:

In *Narratology*, *time* is the objective structural element of the fabula which enables causal [logic](#), allows for sequential ordering, and underpins the possibility of [process](#) and therefore [narrative](#) itself. It is crucial to distinguish objective *time* from [temporality](#)—the [subjective](#) experience of *time*. Bal justifies treating *time* at much greater length in terms of temporality (in the preceding chapter) because time is “primarily interesting because of the way in which [it is] [ordered](#) and specified in the [story](#).” 185

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*Firstly, we note that Bal has already sufficiently raised and addressed the strengths and weaknesses of the structuralist [analytical](#) approach. We agree that what is gained by coherence vastly accommodates the contention we now raise.

At the start of this chapter, she asserts: “The material that constitutes the fabula can be divided into stable and changeable elements – objects, on the one hand, and processes, on the other.” 154

By this logic, for time to be an element, it must be either an object or a process. However, both classifications lead to a paradox:

1. *Time as an Object:*

If *time* is an object, it must exist as a static entity. But as objects are subject to processes, and processes are changes over time, this would render time subject to a change over itself—a self-referential incoherence.

2. *Time as a Process:*

If time is a process, then it is defined as a change over *time*. This circular definition collapses into tautology, undermining its utility as a structural category.

This paradox does not necessitate eliminating time as an element of the fabula but reveals a critical limitation of the structuralist approach which Bal describes: “Objections may be raised against this approach. The one mentioned most often is that it is reductive.” 186

Time resists [reduction](#) to object (or process) because it transcends these categories. It operates as a metaphysical phenomenon that exists independently of [subject/object](#) binaries, yet informs all their relationships. Logical operations require an objective reference, and time serves as the most fundamental one available to human understanding. Similarly to how physics recognizes light as both a wave and a particle, time must be understood as both an object and a process simultaneously.

This dual nature aligns with its role in narrative: time provides the structure at the fabula-level, while also shaping the reader’s interpretation at the story-level. The [ambiguity](#) of time’s classification may be a limitation of structuralism, but it also highlights its power as a bridge between the abstract fabula and the subjective experience of the story.

Topos

“In medieval literature, love scenes frequently take place in a special space, appropriate to the occasion, the so-called *locus amoenus*, consisting of a meadow, a tree, a running stream. Such a fixed combination is called a *topos* – the Greek word for [place](#).” 130

An established literary convention whereby a place is [symbolically](#) relevant to an [event](#). Examples would be a battlefield (where a battle occurs), a public square (where a large gathering happens), and a highway (a place of travel). Topoi—the plural form of topos—draw on shared cultural understandings to provide [interpretive](#) anchor points. These connections link the [reader’s](#) and [author’s frames of reference](#), grounding the [story](#) in a symbolic framework that resonates across contexts.

Tragedy (Classical)

Classical tragedy, from the view of *Narratology*, is a genre of fiction which [conventionally](#) features [themes](#) of misfortune, downfall, and other such negative [events](#) for the principal

[character](#)(s). Perhaps a key component is convention itself; which is to say that the essential [interpretive](#) condition of a tragedy is the strongly determined nature of its characters. Therefore, since, “conventional restrictions are based in ideological and political assumptions” 159, the analyst may make interpretations based on to what degree the tragedy conforms to conventions—or at what points it breaks from them.

Transformation

“[Repetition](#), [accumulation](#), relations to other [characters](#), and transformations are four different principles that work together to [construct](#) the image of a character.” 114 (emphasis ours)

From the quote above as well as a similar one on page 126, Bal has clearly established *transformation* as a key element of the overall interpretation of character; be that of an agent or a location. Worth noting is that while in common use, transformation tends to imply a physical change, this isn’t strictly the case in the narratological sense. The takeaway is that in the construction of a contiguous entity within narrative, the ways in which that entity changes over time is a critical interpretive consideration.

Trauma (Traumatic)

Across *Narratology*, the term *trauma* consistently refers to painful lived experience. While it may invite deeper [psychological](#) or [psychoanalytical](#) exploration, expounding beyond this risks imputing interpretations that may not align with Bal’s intended [analytical](#) framework.

Trope

Perhaps best thought of as a kind of genre-specific [theme](#) that tends to tread the line between [convention](#) and cliché. *Tropes* may hint at thematic [anticipation](#), [determined](#) characterizations, and other metatextual elements that can structure the [interpretation](#). Well utilized *tropes* can function as [symbolic](#) markers the [reader](#) may connect with their own [frame of reference](#) to better immerse themselves in a [story](#). When ill-used, however, they may seem indicative of a cynical, programmatic approach to storytelling.

Unconscious

Can refer to a theoretical intellectual construct present in human beings and absent from [characters](#): “...characters don’t have an unconscious; only people do.” 110

Yet can also refer to holding [motivations](#) or beliefs without strictly recognizing them: “in tragedy the son is guilty about the father, whom he *unconsciously* desires to replace[.]” 176

As with the other terms relating to theories of mind, we will limit our explication to avoid clashing with the Bal’s intended message.

Value (Value Judgement)

Though used in other contexts, the cited references in the index all center on an appraisal of worth. It should be noted that we combined the terms which Bal chose to separately cite in the index. We find that in both cases, the essential qualities—appraisal and worth—are inherent.

Witness (Witnessing)

Refers either to an observer or the [act](#) of observation. In [narratology](#), the crucial function of the *witness*, besides that already stated, is their [communication](#) to the [reader](#). Consequently, there doesn't seem to be a distinction between the lay term *witness* and the narratological term [focalizer](#).

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