

PART TWO

3 *The Two Principles of Narrative*

Since we are about to take up the question of narrative, let me begin by telling a story.

Ricciardo Minutolo is in love with Filippello's wife Catella. Despite his best efforts, however, Ricciardo's love is not returned. When he discovers that Catella is extremely jealous of her husband, Ricciardo decides to take advantage of this weakness. After making a public display of his lack of interest in Catella, he finds an occasion to convey the same impression to her directly; at the same time, he informs her of approaches Filippello has purportedly made to his own wife. Catella is furious and wants all the details. Nothing could be easier, Ricciardo replies. Filippello has made a date to meet Ricciardo's wife the next day, at a nearby bath house; Catella has only to show up there instead, and she will be convinced of her husband's treachery. So Catella goes to the bath house – where she finds Ricciardo in her husband's place. She fails to recognize him, however, as the meeting place is completely dark. Catella cooperates with the desires of the man she takes to be her husband, but then immediately begins to reproach him, explaining that she is not Ricciardo's wife, but Catella. Ricciardo reveals in turn that he himself is not Filippello. Catella is distraught, but Ricciardo convinces her that scandal would be in no one's interests, and "how much more savoury a lover's kisses are than those of a husband."¹

So all ends well, and Boccaccio adds that this tale was praised by all who first heard it.

The foregoing text consists of a sequence of propositions that is easily recognized as a narrative. But what *makes* it a narrative? Let us go back to the beginning of the story. First Boccaccio describes Naples, the setting for the action; next he presents the three protagonists; after that, he speaks of Ricciardo's love for Catella. Is that a narrative? Here I think we can readily agree that the answer is "no." This judgment does not depend on the dimensions of the text; the passage in question takes only two paragraphs in Boccaccio, but we sense that it could be five times as long without making any difference.

¹ *The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio*, trans. Richard Aldington (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1982) 207, "Third Day, Sixth Tale."

On the other hand, when Boccaccio says: "Such was his state of mind when . . ." (and in the French translation there is a change of tense here from the imperfect to the *passé simple*), the narrative takes off. The explanation seems straightforward. The beginning of the text presents the description of a state of affairs. That does not suffice for narrative, however, as narrative requires the unfolding of an action, change, difference.

Every change constitutes in fact a new narrative link. Ricciardo learns of Catella's extreme jealousy – which allows him to conceive of his plan – after which he can carry it out – Catella reacts as Ricciardo had hoped – the meeting takes place – Catella reveals her true identity – Ricciardo reveals his – they discover their happiness together. Each action thus isolated follows the previous one and most of the time the two are in a causal relation. Catella's jealousy is a *condition* of the plan that is concocted; the plan has the meeting as a *consequence*; public condemnation is *implied* by adultery; and so on.

Description and narrative both presuppose temporality, but the temporality differs in kind. The initial description was situated in time, to be sure, but in an ongoing, continuous time frame, whereas the changes that characterize narrative slice time up into discontinuous units: duration-time as opposed to event-time. Description alone is not enough to constitute a narrative; narrative for its part does not exclude description, however. If we needed a generic term to include both narrative texts and descriptive texts (that is, texts containing only descriptions), we might choose the term *fiction* (the French cognate term is used relatively rarely). This would have two advantages: first, because fiction includes narration *and* description; second, because it evokes the transitive and referential use made of words in each case (and the texts of someone like Raymond Roussel, who bases narrative on the distance that exists between two senses of a given word, do not constitute counterexamples), as opposed to the intransitive, literal use that is made of language in poetry.

This way of looking at narrative as the chronological and sometimes causal linkage of discontinuous units is of course not new. Vladimir Propp's work on the Russian fairy tale, which leads to a similar conclusion, is widely known today. Propp uses the term *function* for each action isolated when actions are seen from the perspective of their usefulness to the story; and he postulates that for all the Russian fairy tales there are only thirty-one types of function. "If we read through all of the functions one after another, we quickly observe that one function develops out of another with logical and artistic necessity. We see that not a single function excludes another. They all revolve on a single pivot, and not . . . on a variety of pivotal stocks."² Functions come in sequence and are not alike.

Propp analyzes one tale, "The Swan-Geese," in its entirety; we shall summarize his analysis here. This is the story of a young girl who neglects to look after her little brother. The swan-geese kidnap him, the girl goes off to find him, and succeeds, thanks to the wise counsel of a hedgehog. She takes her

² Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, ed. Svatava Pirkova-Jakobson, trans. Laurence Scott (Bloomington: Indiana University Research Center, 1958) 58.

brother away; the swan-geese set out in pursuit, but, with the help of the river, the apple tree, and the woodstove, she manages to get him home safe and sound. In this narrative Propp singles out twenty-seven elements, of which eighteen are functions (the others are descriptions, transitions, and so forth) belonging to the canonical list of thirty-one. Each function is situated on the same level as, while being totally different from, all the others; one function is related to another only through chronological succession.

The validity of this analysis can be questioned, particularly as regards the possibility that Propp may have confused generic (and empirical) necessity with theoretical necessity. All the functions may be equally necessary to the Russian fairy tale; but are they all necessary for the same reasons? Let us try an experiment. When I told the Russian tale, I omitted some of the initial functions: for example, the girl's parents had forbidden her to stray from the house; the girl had chosen to go off to play; and so on. The tale is nevertheless a narrative, fundamentally unchanged. On the other hand, if I had not said that a girl and a boy were playing at home, or that the geese had kidnapped the boy, or that the girl had gone looking for him, there would have been no narrative, or a different one. We may conclude that not all functions are necessary to the narrative in the same way; a hierarchical order has to be introduced.

If we analyze "The Swan-Geese" this way, we shall discover that the tale includes five obligatory elements: (1) the opening situation of equilibrium; (2) the degradation of the situation through the kidnapping of the boy; (3) the state of disequilibrium observed by the little girl; (4) the search for and recovery of the boy; (5) the reestablishment of the initial equilibrium – the return home. If any one of these five actions had been omitted, the tale would have lost its identity. Of course one can imagine a tale that omits the first two elements and begins with a situation that is already deficient; or a tale might omit the last two elements and end on an unhappy note. But we sense that these would be two halves of the cycle, whereas here we have the cycle in full. Theoretical research has shown – and empirical studies have confirmed – that this cycle belongs to the very definition of narrative: one cannot imagine a narrative that fails to contain at least a part of it.

The actions Propp identified do not all have the same status. Some are optional, supplementary to the basic schema. For example, the little girl's absence at the time of the kidnapping may be motivated or not. Other actions are alternatives, of which at least one has to occur in the tale: these are concrete realizations of the action prescribed by the schema. For example, the little girl finds her brother thanks to the intervention of a helper; however, she might just as well have found him owing to her speedy legs, or her divinatory powers, and so forth. In his well-known book *La Logique du récit*, Claude Bremond has taken up the challenge of cataloging the possible alternatives available to any narrative whatsoever.³

But if the elementary actions are arranged hierarchically, it is apparent that

³ Claude Bremond, *La Logique du récit* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973).

new relations prevail among them: sequence and consequence no longer suffice. The fifth element obviously echoes the first (the state of equilibrium), while the third is an inversion of the first. Moreover, the second and the fourth elements are symmetrically opposed: the little boy is taken away from home and is brought back home. Thus it is incorrect to maintain that the elements are related only by *succession*; we can say that they are also related by *transformation*. Here finally we have the two principles of narrative.

Can a narrative dispense with the second principle, transformation? In discussing the problems of definition and denomination, we need to be aware of a certain arbitrariness that invariably accompanies these gestures. We find ourselves confronting a continuum of facts and relationships; we then establish a limit somewhere, and call everything on one side of the limit "narrative," and everything on the other side "nonnarrative." But the words of the language we use have different nuances depending on who is speaking. A moment ago I contrasted narration and description by way of the two types of temporality they exhibit; however, others would call a book like Robbe-Grillet's *Dans le labyrinthe* a narrative, even though it suspends narrative time and posits variations in the characters' behavior as simultaneous. The same can be said regarding the presence or absence of relations of transformation between individual actions. A narrative lacking in such relations can be constructed artificially; real examples of the pure logic of succession may even be found in certain chronicles. But we shall have no trouble agreeing, I think, that neither these chronicles nor Robbe-Grillet's novels are typical representatives of narrative. We may take this argument even further: by bringing to light the difference between narration and description, or between the principle of succession and the principle of transformation, we have made it possible to understand why we perceive such narratives as marginal, in one sense of the term. Ordinarily, even the simplest, least elaborate narrative puts the two principles into action simultaneously. As (anecdotal) evidence, let us look at the French title of a recent spaghetti Western: *Je vais, je tire, je reviens* ("I go off, I shoot, I come back"): the apparently straightforward succession obscures a relation of transformation between "going off" and "coming back."

What is the nature of such transformations? The one we have noted so far consists in changing some term into its opposite or its contrary; for simplicity's sake, we shall call it *negation*. Lévi-Strauss and Greimas have placed particular emphasis on this transformation. They have scrutinized its various manifestations to such an extent that one might conclude it is the only transformation possible. It is true that the transformation of negation enjoys a special status, no doubt owing to the privileged position occupied by negation in our system of thought. The passage from *A* to non-*A* is in a way the paradigm of all change. Still, this exceptional status must not be allowed to obscure the existence of other transformations – which are numerous, as we shall see. In the tale Propp analyzed, for instance, we can find a transformation of mode: the interdiction – in other words, a negative obligation – imposed upon the little girl by her parents (she was not to leave her brother's side for an instant). And

there is a transformation of intention: the little girl decides to leave in search of her brother, then she actually leaves; the first action relates to the second as an intention to its realization.

Returning to our tale from the *Decameron*, we can see the same relationships there. Ricciardo is unhappy at the beginning, happy at the end: a transformation of negation. He wants to possess Catella, then he possesses her: a transformation of mode. But other relations seem to play an even more important role. A single action is presented three times: first of all, there is Ricciardo's plan for getting Catella into the bath house, then there is Catella's erroneous perception of that scene, when she thinks she is meeting her husband there; finally the true situation is revealed. The relation between the first and third propositions is that of a project to its realization; in the relation between the second and the third, an erroneous perception of an event is opposed to an accurate perception of that same event. This deception is obviously the key to Boccaccio's narrative. A qualitative difference separates the first type of transformations from the second. The first case involved a modification carried out on a basic predicate; the predicate was taken in its positive or negative form, modalized or unmodalized. Here the initial predicate turns out to be accompanied by a secondary predicate, such as "to plan" or "to learn." Paradoxically, this secondary predicate designates an autonomous action but at the same time can never appear all by itself: one always projects *toward* another action. The lineaments of an opposition between two types of narrative organization are beginning to take shape. On the one hand we have narratives in which the logic of succession and transformations of the first type are combined; these will be the simpler narratives, as it were, and I should like to use the term *mythological* for this type of organization. On the other hand, we have the type of narrative in which the logic of succession is supported by the second sort of transformation, narratives in which the event itself is less important than our perception of it, and degree of knowledge we have of it: hence I propose the term *gnoseological* for this second type of narrative organization (it might also be called *epistemical*).

It goes without saying that an opposition of this sort is not intended to result in the distribution of all the world's narratives into two piles, with mythological stories on one side andgnoseological stories on the other. As in any typological study, I am seeking rather to bring to light the abstract categories that make it possible to account for real differences between one narrative and another. This does not mean, moreover, that a narrative must exhibit one type of transformation to the exclusion of the other. If we go back to "The Swan-Geese," we can find traces ofgnoseological organization in it as well. For example, the brother's kidnapping took place in the little girl's absence; in principle, the girl does not know who is responsible, and there would be a place here for a quest for information. But the tale simply says: "The girl guessed that they had taken her brother away," without lingering over this process. On the other hand, Boccaccio's tale rests entirely upon ignorance followed by knowledge. If we want to attach a given narrative to

a particular type of narrative organization, we have to look for the qualitative or quantitative predominance of certain transformations, not for their exclusive presence.

A glance at some other examples of gnoseological organization will be helpful. In a work like *La Quête du Graal*,⁴ passages recounting actual events are often preceded by passages in which those same events are evoked in the form of a prediction. In this text, such transformations of supposition have a peculiar feature: they all come true, and are even perceived as moral imperatives by the characters. The outcome of the plot is related by Perceval's aunt at the very beginning of the section entitled "Aventures de Perceval": "For it is well known, in this country as elsewhere, that in the end three knights above all others will reap the glory of the Quest: two will be virgins and the third chaste. Of the two virgins, one will be the knight you are looking for, and you will be the other; the third will be Bohort de Gaunes. These three will succeed in the Quest" (118). And there is Perceval's sister, who predicts where her brother and Galahad will die: "For my honor, have me buried in the Spiritual Palace. Do you know why I request this? Because Perceval will be lying there, and you by his side" (272). In a general way, in the whole second part of the text the forthcoming events are first announced by Perceval's sister in the form of imperative predictions.

These suppositions prior to the event are matched by others recalled only after the event has taken place. The chance incidents of his journey lead Galahad to a monastery; the adventure of the shield begins; just as it ends, a heavenly knight appears and declares that everything has been foreseen in advance. "'So here is what you will do,' said Joseph. 'Put the shield where Nasciens is to be buried. To this place Galahad will come, five days after he receives the order of knighthood.' Everything happened as he had said, since on the fifth day you arrived at the abbey where Nasciens's body lies" (82). Gawain has the same experience; immediately after receiving a harsh blow from Galahad's sword, he remembers: "Now it has come true, what I heard the day of Pentecost about the sword I was reaching out for. It was announced to me that before long I would receive a terrible blow, and that is the very sword with which this knight has just struck me. It happened just as it was foretold to me" (230).

But even more characteristic of *La Quête du Graal* than the "announcement" is a transformation, not of supposition, but of knowledge; it consists in a reinterpretation of events that have already taken place. In general, *prud-hommes* and hermits give every earthly action an interpretation in the celestial order, often adding purely terrestrial revelations. Thus when we read the beginning of the story, we think everything is clear: we encounter the noble knights who decide to leave in search of the Holy Grail, and so forth. But little by little the narrative acquaints us with another meaning of these same scenes. Lancelot,

⁴ *La Quête du Graal*, ed. Albert Béguin and Yves Bonnefoy (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1965) 118.

whom we thought strong and perfect, is an incorrigible sinner, living in adultery with Queen Guinevere. Sir Gawain, who was the first to vow to undertake the quest, will never achieve it, for his heart is hard and he does not think enough about God. The knights we first admire are inveterate sinners who will be punished; they have not been to confession for years. When the opening events are alluded to later on, we are in possession of the truth and not deceived by appearances.

The reader's interest is not driven by the question What happens next?, which refers us to the logic of succession or to the mythological narrative. We know perfectly well from the start what will happen, who will reach the Grail, who will be punished and why. Our interest arises from a wholly different question which refers instead to the gnoseological organization: What is the Grail? The Grail narrative relates a quest; what is being sought, however, is not an object but a meaning, the meaning of the word Grail. And since the question has to do with being and not with doing, the exploration of the future is less important than that of the past. Throughout the narrative the reader has to wonder about the meaning of the Grail. The principal narrative is a narrative of knowledge; ideally, it would never end.

The search for knowledge also dominates another type of narrative that we might hesitate to compare to the quest for the Holy Grail: the mystery, or detective story. We know such narratives are constituted by the problematic relation of two stories: the story of the crime, which is missing, and the story of the investigation, which is present, and whose only justification is to acquaint us with the other story. Some element of that first story is indeed made available from the beginning: a crime is committed almost before our eyes; but we have been unable to determine its real agents or motives. The investigation consists in returning over and over to the events, verifying and correcting the smallest details, until the truth about the initial story finally comes out; this is a story of learning. But unlike the Grail story, what characterizes knowledge in detective fiction is that it has only two possible values, true or false. In a detective story, either we know who committed the murder or we do not, whereas the quest for meaning in the Grail story has an infinite number of intermediate degrees, and even in the end the quest's outcome is not certain.

If we take as our third example one of Henry James's tales, we shall see that the gnoseological search can take other forms (Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* presents yet another variant, as we shall see). As in the detective story, James's search focuses on the truth about an actual event, not an abstract entity; but, as in *La Quête du Graal*, at the end of the story we are not sure we possess the truth; we have moved, rather, from primary ignorance to a lesser ignorance. *In the Cage*, for example, recounts the experience of a young woman telegraph operator. Her full attention is focused on two people she hardly knows, Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen. She reads the telegrams they send, hears fragments of sentences, but despite her skill at imagining the absent elements, she does not succeed in reconstituting a faithful portrait of the two strangers. Moreover, when she meets the Captain in person it does not help; she can see his physical

build, observe his gestures, listen to his voice, but his "essence" remains just as intangible, if not more so, than when the glass cage separated them. The senses retain only appearances; truth is inaccessible.

Comprehension is made particularly difficult by the fact that the telegraph operator pretends to know much more than she really does, when under certain circumstances she has the chance to question intermediary third parties. Thus when she meets a friend, Mrs. Jordan, the friend asks: "'Why, don't you know the scandal? . . . ' Our heroine thought, recollected; . . . 'Oh, there was nothing public . . .'"⁵

James always refuses to name "truth" or "essences" directly; these exist only in the form of multiple appearances. This position has a profound effect on the organization of his works and draws his attention to the techniques of "point of view," which he himself comes to call "that magnificent and masterly indirectness." *In the Cage* gives us the telegraph operator's perception as it bears upon Mrs. Jordan, who herself relates what she has gotten out of her fiancé, Mr. Drake, who in turn has only a remote acquaintance with Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen!

Once again, the process of acquiring information is *dominant* in James's tale, but its presence does not exclude all others. *In the Cage* is also subject to a principle of mythological organization. The original equilibrium of the telegraph operator is disturbed by her encounter with the Captain; at the end of the narrative, however, she returns to her initial project, which was to marry Mr. Mudge. On the other hand, alongside transformations of knowledge as such, there are others that possess the same formal properties without having to do with the same process (the term *gnoseological* no longer applies); this is particularly true of what one might call *subjectivation*, a personal reaction or response to an event. Proust's *A la Recherche du temps perdu* develops this latter transformation to the point of hypertrophy: the most trivial incident of the narrator's life, like the grain of sand around which a pearl grows, serves as a pretext for long descriptions on the way the event is experienced by one character or another.

Here we need to distinguish two ways of judging transformation: according to their *formative* power or to their *evocative* power. By formative power I mean the transformation's aptitude for forming a narrative sequence all by itself. It is difficult (although not impossible) to imagine a narrative that would include only transformations of subjectivization, a narrative that would be reduced, in other words, to the description of an event and various characters' reactions to it. Even Proust's novel includes elements of mythological narrative: the narrator's inability to write will be overcome; Swann's way and Guermantes' way, at first completely separate, will converge with Gilberte's marriage to Saint-Loup. Negation is clearly a transformation with great formative power; but the coupling of ignorance (or error) and knowledge also serves quite often to frame narratives. The other devices of the mythological

⁵ Henry James, *In the Cage* (New York: Fox Duffield Company, 1906).

narrative seem less apt (at least in our culture) to form sequences on their own. A narrative that included only modal sequences would resemble a didactic and moralizing text, with sequences like the following: "X must behave like a good Christian – X behaves like a good Christian." A narrative formed exclusively of transformations of intention would resemble certain passages in *Robinson Crusoe*: Robinson decides to build himself a house – he builds himself a house: Robinson decides to put a fence around his garden – he puts a fence around his garden; and so on.

But this formative (or syntactic) power of certain transformations must not be confused with what we particularly appreciate in a narrative, either what is richest in meaning or what makes it possible to distinguish one narrative from another. I recall that one of the most exciting scenes of a spy movie, *The Ipcress File*, consisted in showing us the main character in the process of fixing himself an omelet. Naturally, the narrative importance of that episode was nonexistent (he could just as well have eaten a ham sandwich); but this crucial scene became something like the emblem of the film as a whole. This is what I call the evocative power of an action; it seems to me that transformations of manner in particular serve to characterize a given fictional universe as opposed to some other, yet on their own they would have great difficulty producing an autonomous narrative sequence.

Now that we are beginning to become familiar with this opposition between the principle of succession and the principle of transformation (and with the variants of the transformation principle), we may wonder whether it is not identical to Jakobson's opposition between metonymy and metaphor. The association is possible, but I do not think it necessary. It is difficult to assimilate all transformations to relations of similarity, just as it is difficult to assimilate all similarity to metaphor. Nor does the principle of succession have anything to gain by being called metonymy, or contiguity, especially since the former is essentially temporal and the latter spatial. The association would be all the more problematic in that, according to Jakobson, "the principle of similarity underlies poetry," and that "prose, on the contrary, is forwarded essentially by contiguity,"⁶ whereas from our viewpoint succession and transformation are equally necessary to narrative. If we had to contrast narrative and poetry (or epic and lyric), we might focus, in the first place, on the transitive or intransitive character of the sign (in this we are in agreement with Jakobson); in the second place, on the nature of the temporality represented: discontinuous in one instance, a perpetual presence in the other (which does not mean atemporality); in the third place, on the nature of the names that occupy the place of the semantic subject, or theme, in the one case and the other: narrative recognizes only individual names in the position of subject, whereas poetry allows both individual names and common nouns. Philosophical discourse,

⁶ Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbance," in *Selected Writings II: Word and Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971) 258-9.

for its part, is characterized both by the exclusion of individual names and by atemporality; in this view poetry is an intermediate form between narrative discourse and philosophical discourse.

But let us return to narrative and ask rather whether all relations between one action and others can be distributed between the mythological and the gnoseological types. The tale Propp analyzed included an episode that I skimmed over earlier. Having set out to find her brother, the little girl encountered some potential donors. First she met a stove whom she asked for information and who promised it to her if she would eat one of its rye-cakes; she insolently refused. Then she met an apple tree and a river: "similar proposals and similar arrogant replies."⁷

Precisely how are these three episodes related? We have seen that, in relations of transformation, two propositions turn out to be associated; the transformation involves a modification of the predicate. But at present, in the three actions Propp describes, the predicate specifically remains unchanged: in each instance, one character offers, the other insolently refuses. What changes are the agents (the subjects) of each proposition, or the circumstances. Rather than being transformations of each other, these propositions appear as *variants* of a single situation, or as parallel applications of the same rule.

One might then conceive of a third type of narrative organization, no longer mythological or gnoseological but, let us say, *ideological*, inasmuch as an abstract rule, an idea, produces the various peripetias. The relation of the propositions among themselves is no longer direct; one no longer moves from a negative to a positive version, or from ignorance to knowledge. Instead, actions are linked through the intermediary of an abstract formula: in the case of "The Swan-Geese," that of the proffered assistance and the insolent refusal. Often, in order to find the relation between two actions that are completely independent of each other in material terms, we must look for a highly developed abstraction. I have attempted to describe the logical rules, the ideological imperatives that govern the events of the narrative universe of a number of different texts (this could also be done for each of the narratives we have referred to above). Thus, in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, all the characters' actions can be presented as the product of some very simple and abstract rules; these rules in turn refer to the organizing ideology of the work as a whole.

The same is true for Constant's *Adolphe*. The rules that govern the characters' behavior can be reduced to two. The first stems from the logic of desire as asserted by this text, which might be formulated as follows: one desires what one does not have, one flees what one has. Consequently, obstacles reinforce desire, and any help weakens it. A first blow strikes Adolphe's love when Ellénore leaves Count P. . . to come live with Adolphe. A second blow is struck when she devotes herself to caring for Adolphe after he is wounded. Each of Ellénore's sacrifices exasperates Adolphe: they leave him fewer and fewer things to desire. On the other hand, when Adolphe's father decides to

⁷ Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 88.

bring about the separation of the couple, the opposite effect is achieved, and Adolphe states this explicitly: "Thinking you are separating me from her, you may well attach me to her for ever."⁸ The tragic aspect of the situation stems from the fact that desire, in order to follow this particular logic, still does not stop being desire, that is, does not stop causing unhappiness in the one who is unable to satisfy it.

The second law of this universe, also a moral law, is formulated by Constant as follows: "The great question in life is the pain one causes and the most ingenious metaphysics cannot justify a man who has broken the heart which loves him" (169). One cannot govern one's life by the search for good, for one person's happiness is always another's misfortune. But one can organize one's life on the basis of the requirement that one should do as little harm as possible: this negative value turns out to be the only one to have the status of an absolute here. The commandments of this second law take precedence over those of the first when the two are in contradiction. This is why Adolphe has so much trouble telling Ellénore the "truth." "Whilst speaking thus, I saw her face suddenly bathed in tears. I stopped, I retraced my steps, I retracted and explained" (89). In chapter 6, Ellénore hears him out; she falls into a faint, and Adolphe can only assure her of his love. In chapter 8, he has a pretext for leaving her but fails to exploit it: "Could I punish her for an imprudence which I made her commit and, with cold hypocrisy, find a pretext in these imprudences to abandon her without pity?" (139). Pity takes precedence over desire.

Thus isolated and independent actions, often accomplished by different characters, reveal the same abstract logic, the same ideological organization.

Ideological organization seems to possess a weak formative power: narratives that do not frame the actions that result from this organization with another order, adding a second organization to the first, are hard to find. For one can illustrate a logic or an ideology ad infinitum; and there is no reason for one particular illustration to precede – or follow – any other. Thus in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* the actions described are presented within a framework based on ideological organization: the exceptional state constituted by the reign of the "roués," Valmont and Merteuil, will be replaced by a return to traditional morality.

The cases of *Adolphe* and Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, another text illustrative of ideological organization, are a little different, as we shall see in detail in a later chapter. Another order – which is not the simple absence of the preceding ones – is instituted. It consists of relations that might be called "spatial": repetitions, antitheses, and gradations. Thus in *Adolphe*, the sequence of chapters follows a precise route: there is a portrait of Adolphe in chapter one; we observe the development of his sentiments in chapters two and three, their slow disintegration in chapters four through ten. Each new manifestation of Adolphe's feelings has to be superior to the previous one in the rising section,

⁸ Benjamin Constant, *Adolphe, and the Red Note-Book*, intro. Harold Nicolson, trans. Carl Wildman (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959) 104.

inferior in the descending section. The end becomes possible owing to an event that seems to have an exceptional narrative status: death. In *Notes from the Underground*, the succession of events is determined both by gradation and by the law of contrast. The scene with the officer presents in summary form the two roles available to the narrator; next he is humiliated by Zverkov, and he humiliates Lisa in turn, even more seriously. The narrative is interrupted owing to the announcement of a different ideology, embodied by Lisa, which consists in rejecting the master-slave logic and in loving others for themselves.

Once again, it is clear that individual narratives exemplify more than one type of narrative organization (in fact, any one of them could have served to illustrate all of these organizational principles); but the analysis of a specific type is more helpful for the comprehension of a particular text.

One might make an analogous observation by radically changing levels and declaring that a narrative analysis will be more helpful for the study of certain types of texts than for others. For what I am examining here is not *text*, which has its own varieties, but *narrative*, which may play an important role or none at all in the structure of a text, and which appears in literary texts as well as in other symbolic systems. It is a given that the narratives that all society seems to need in order to live depend today, not on literature, but on cinema: filmmakers tell us stories, whereas writers play with words. The typological remarks I have just presented thus have to do in principle not only with literary narratives, such as the ones I used as examples, but with all types of narrative; they stem less from *poetics* than from a discipline that seems to me to have every right to exist and that should be called *narratology*.