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## 1. Toward (a Queerer and) More (Feminist) Narratology

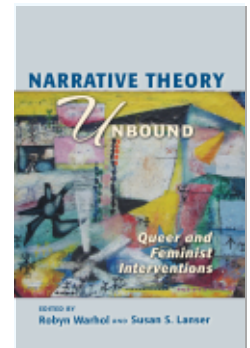
Published by

Warhol, Robyn and Susan S. Lanser.

Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions.

The Ohio State University Press, 2015.

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SUSAN S. LANSER

## Toward (a Queerer and) More (Feminist) Narratology

“*T*he story had held us, round the fire”: With this classic lure, Henry James inaugurates both *The Turn of the Screw* and the large conundrum that his small novel poses for the project of narrative. For James’s homage to the power of story is complicated almost immediately when the text disclaims its ostensible purpose: we’re about to get a story, but “the story *won’t* tell,” or at least “not in any literal, vulgar way” (8). In a more than trivial sense, this gesture reminds us that, as my graduate professor David Hayman was fond of saying, narrative is the art of not telling a story. And if “the story won’t tell,” then that art of narrative is also decidedly queer.

I begin with this passage to suggest that it is precisely to the extent that “the story *won’t* tell . . . in any literal, vulgar way” that narrative needs narratology. To the extent that narrative succeeds by covering the tracks of its own strategies, narratology provides a critical pathway to understanding how stories work and thus also to how they “hold” us. To the extent that those narrative strategies function as narrative content, stories cannot even be apprehended unless we can read them as form. And to the extent that the gender arrangements on which narrative depends—and the narratives on which gender arrangements depend—are complex, subtle, and sometimes elusive, feminist and queer studies might be among narratology’s particular beneficiaries. In advancing these opening claims, I am reversing the emphasis

of my earlier work: if in the 1980s and 1990s I was urging narrative studies to be queerer and more feminist, I'm now urging feminist and queer studies—and even narrative studies—to be more narratological. While feminism and narratology have made a fruitful marriage that produced contextual narratology as its sturdiest offspring, the benefits of narratology remain untapped. Tapping those benefits, however, may require some reform in narratological theories and practices, not least a shift to inductive and intersectional approaches and a hard interrogation of terms and priorities.

In the quarter century since the publication of Robyn Warhol's *Gendered Interventions* and my own "Toward a Feminist Narratology," feminism and narratology have certainly formed a visible intersection on the literary map, with an impressive dossier of achievements. The extensive bibliography to Ruth Page's *Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology* provides a case in point, as does any web search on the two terms. And as "the earliest and most established strand of contextual narratology," feminism has rightly been credited for helping to move narratology from structuralist to postclassical paradigms (Sommer 61). But can narratology take credit for influencing feminist or queer studies with parallel force? To what extent does narratology matter to scholars who do not practice it as its own end? Has the widely touted "narrative turn" across the human sciences been a narratological turn as well? Where does narratology reside today beyond the small world of specialist journals and conferences? Why, conversely, has narratology refused to die—rather like the ghosts that James's governess sees or imagines—when its death has been proclaimed so frequently? Why, in short, was David Lodge ultimately wrong when he wrote, three decades ago in his novel *Small World*, "Hasn't [the narratologist's] moment passed? I mean, ten years ago everybody was into that stuff, actants and functions and mythemes and all that jazz. But now . . ." (134).

In this essay, I would like to make several interventions as a way of staking the terms for a narratological future that also furthers feminist and queer intellectual aims. I will argue that feminist and queer narratologies have worked with canons that are too narrow, and I will suggest the importance of extending their historical and geographic maps. I will propose that an intersectional narratology may assist that cartographic project while also moving beyond the confines of literary scholarship to reveal the narrative formations in feminist and queer studies broadly conceived. I will argue that questions of representation, and especially of queer representation, are as much questions of form as of content and that narratological concerns thus lie at the heart of debates about the queer capacities and limits of narrative. In the end, I will hope to persuade you that "the story *won't* tell" unless we study narrative form

as narrative content, a strategy that might also help to mend the continuing—and in my view false—division between cultural and formal approaches evident, for example, in the tacit breach between theory of the novel and theory of narrative. And I will speculate that feminist and queer literary scholarship, along with other ideologically charged or identity-focused inquiries, might benefit in particular from narratology insofar as the mimeticist tendencies of those critical practices overlook the transgressions, subversions, and contingencies embedded in form. Finally, I will argue that narratology is well worth retaining as both word and practice, but that narratology may be too important to leave to narratologists: we might need new approaches to address the terminological and topical terrors—and, I dare say, missteps—that the field inspires. And because all of this is too much to cover in one essay, I will also have to take the risk that this essay *won't* tell, or—worse—will tell only in literal and vulgar ways.

We might start with a report card. If we take feminist and queer narratologies as a test case for addressing the questions I've outlined, there is cause for both celebration and concern. On one hand, the work of queer and feminist scholars, including those represented in this volume, has advanced narrative theory in ways as rich and varied as their many books, essays, and conference papers indicate. Indeed, so much has been accomplished that we can now chart achievements on multiple axes to see precisely where feminist and queer narratologies have made major inroads and which terrains are barely traversed. On the other hand, the rough data I found in, say, the *MLA Bibliography* charts a narrower path not only of feminist and (especially) queer narrative theory but of narrative theory *tout court*. My subject searches on women and feminism yielded a whopping 69,000 entries. Gender added a sizeable 14,000, sexuality another 8,000, and the combined indices “lesbian,” “gay,” “queer,” “bisexual,” and “transgender” about 2,000 more—for 93,000 subject entries in all. Searches combining any of these subjects with “narrative”—itself over 52,000 entries strong—were much more modest: respectively, 2,077 entries for women, 445 for gender, 219 for sexuality, and just 50 for lesbian, queer, gay, bisexual, and (the nonexistent) transgender combined. Equally surprising, “narrative theory” and “narratology” together yielded only about 2,000 subject entries, with narratology comprising but 15 percent of these, and subject searches combining narrative theory or narratology with *all* of the terms denoting women, feminism, gender, or sexuality were minuscule at 125.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, MLA searches can be faulty and MLA classifications

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1. I undertook these particular searches in mid-2013; needless to say, the *MLA Bibliography* is an ever-shifting entity. But data from 2011 and 2013 were not appreciably different.

complex, and narrative theorists might want to inquire about current parameters.<sup>2</sup> But we also know that search terms perpetuate critical practices.

It's also sobering, therefore, to acknowledge the narrow literary canon that these MLA entries draw upon, for they support the probability that feminist and queer narrative studies has been forging a field on a very small portion of the world's texts, indeed primarily from a small body of novels by white, nineteenth- and twentieth-century English and American women and queer men, with a few films offering modest generic diversity. In my tally of MLA citations, fully three-quarters of the essays engaging feminist and queer narrative theory were drawn from these sources. Postcolonial and pre-1800 texts were striking for their paucity, and a bare handful of entries considered works by male novelists not known as queer. A search of the twenty-odd entries on "women writers" and "narrative voice" suggests a potentially wider canon of narratological *practice*, which may indicate not only the *MLA Bibliography's* limited ability to discern what counts as narrative theory but a deeper need to integrate that broader canon into the theoretical formulations that guide the field. Like many feminist projects of the 1980s, feminist narratology was effectively born essentialist despite finer intentions, its universalizing gender oppositions ironically replicating the either/or tendencies of structuralist narratology itself. As Ruth Page rightly noted of my own work, feminist narratology at the outset was "embedded in . . . a binary model of gender that emphasized difference" between men and women and tended "to construct the category 'women' as if it were a universal group" (46–47). While theorists such as Margaret Homans and Susan Friedman challenged this initial model early on, it's telling that the only edited collection that uses "feminist" and "narratology" in its title, Kathy Mezei's wonderful *Ambiguous Discourse*, is explicitly focused on British women writers from Jane Austen to Jeanette Winterson. My own *Fictions of Authority* is barely broader in its attention to the United States and Europe, while queer narrative theory reveals a disproportionate penchant for British modernists. It's not implausible that the narrow contours of this dominant corpus unwittingly imply an equally narrow role for narratology itself.

As the work of several contributors to this volume should demonstrate, feminist and queer narrative theorists might thus find a useful concept in the intersectional approach now pervasive in feminist scholarship yet still under-tapped for the study of narrative.<sup>3</sup> Named by the legal scholar Kimberlé Cren-

2. For example, Robyn Warhol's *Gendered Interventions* turned up only under "narrative discourse" and "sex roles" and my *Fictions of Authority* only under "women writers" and "narrative voice." Susan Friedman's *Mappings* was nowhere in the MLA database at all.

3. The summer 2013 special issue of *Signs* provides some of the most recent thinking—and

shaw, intersectionality argues that multiple aspects of identity—gender, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, global position, age, sexuality, ability, religion, language, historical moment—converge and interact to create actual or perceived social positions, meanings, experiences, and representations in a world patterned by structural inequalities. Identity categories are thus never simply additive; each vector produces and is produced within a set of social locations where “traffic” differentially affects the movements of individuals and groups and indeed where what even counts as traffic and movement is socially contingent. As Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin observe, “no individual lives every aspect of his or her existence within a single identity category. Every person is a crowd, characterized by multiple identities, identifications, and allegiances” (923). Thus, as Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall remind us, intersectionality challenges “single-axis thinking” to examine more complex “dynamics of difference and sameness” across multiple academic and more-than-academic inquiries (787).

While recognizing pervasive inequalities wrought by global structures of power, then, intersectional thinking would question not only gender binaries but all notions of fixed categories read outside their specific configurations in time and space. To take a common example: motherhood can hardly be considered simply a “universal” female experience when, just for starters, we contrast the one-child policy of China to the pronatalism of some cultures in the Middle East or consider the economics of in-vitro fertilization. In the United States, staying home full-time to care for an infant has positive valence for the well-to-do mother but negative valence for the poor one who, it is assumed, should not be having babies in the first place; more provocatively, it has been legally accepted for the state to remove to protective custody the infants of black cocaine addicts but not babies born to white well-to-do alcoholics, even though “the injury to a fetus from excessive alcohol far exceeds the harm from crack exposure” (Roberts 177).<sup>4</sup> In European countries where women rearing infants receive state support, yet another set of values and distinctions applies to the notion of “stay-at-home” parenting, and a different one still in countries like Sweden where a portion of parental leave is allocated exclusively to fathers. Thus even across a specific slice of time, motherhood as “female experience” effectively does not exist; it is always constituted within, and in turn constitutes, multifaceted social locations.

debate—about intersectionality, its meanings, and its value for both scholarship and social action.

4. In one study where “the rate of positive results for [substance abuse by] white [pregnant] women (15.4 percent) was slightly higher than that for Black women (14.1 percent),” black women were nonetheless “*ten times* more likely than whites to be reported to government authorities” (Roberts 175).

To be sure, given women's lower status in virtually every portion of the globe, particularly in relation to structures of public power, some aspects of maternity, along with other social and cultural phenomena, may well offer gendered patterns that cross time and place. But intersectional thinking demands that feminism no longer assume that such patterns exist or that we can predetermine them.

Whether we are studying historical or fictional narratives, then, intersectional theory calls on us to observe the structural and circumstantial effects of particular convergences of persons in particular locations rather than to presume commonalities that may once have passed as "common sense." Intersectional thinking would reject an approach to narrative that assumes identities to be predictable or predictive, yet would understand that narrative genealogies, along with our ways of thinking about them, are doubtless shaped by intersectional configurations. To take another quick example, the election of a black president in a country riven by race and riddled by racism is reminder enough that intersectional maps do not determine the behaviors of individuals or groups. Yet surely we cannot tell even the shortest story of this presidency without recognizing the implications of Barack Obama's biracial parentage, African paternity, Hawaiian birth, and Arabic middle name, along with his athletic masculinity, his heterosexuality, and his elite education, to name only a few significant vectors.

While intersectionality theory, like any theory, carries its own problems and challenges, it seems to me a particularly fruitful ground for a narratology that is pliable enough to address feminist and queer interests and comprehensive enough to advance historical and cross-cultural inquiry.<sup>5</sup> As an extended metaphor the intersection is strikingly close to Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope, the temporal-spatial nexus that "assimilate[s] real historical time and space" to literary expression in recognition of "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature." Both the intersection and the chronotope assume that certain kinds of social persons converge in ways that enable, complicate, or prevent certain actions. Bakhtin indeed conceives the chronotope as an "intersection of axes" that "defines genre and generic distinctions . . . [and] determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature [which] is always intrinsically chronotopic" (84–85). Hence Bakhtin's primary emphasis on the road, with all its social and temporal capaciousness, in contrast to what he implies to be the static and socially restricted drawing room.

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5. It is important to acknowledge that the wide application of intersectionality theory has been contested as appropriative and dematerializing of its origins in black feminist thought. See, for example, Nash.

But Bakhtin's is hardly a gender-neutral comparison, and these two locations—road and drawing room—might therefore suggest another example of a fruitful intersectional project. It has long been said—and has sometimes been true—that historically men and boys have taken to the road, while women and girls, to recall Virginia Woolf, sit and feel in a drawing room. It would be illuminating to map roaming plots on intersectional premises to see how gender, class, race, and ethnic values have shaped representations of mobility. In the European novel alone we might compare the sixteenth-century pícaro Justina or the eighteenth-century Moll Flanders to a confined *Princesse de Clèves* or Clarissa Harlowe and consider the price for adventure paid by a Maggie Tulliver. We might interrogate the racial and class contours of the outlaw worlds created by such contemporary novels as Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees* (wildly popular and in my view disturbingly appropriative) or Toni Morrison's grimmer and less popular *Paradise*, both of which create spaces controlled by poor black women who operate more or less outside the social order; we might want to ask why the young protagonist of Kidd's novel has to leave her proper white world, in effect, to *have* a plot, and whether similar outlaw communities could function in realist fiction if the characters were black men. And we might return to Nancy Miller's provocative claims in "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction" to ask whether the "poetics of women's fiction" Miller posits through the resistant alternative verisimilitude of *La Princesse de Clèves* and *The Mill on the Floss* attaches only to women writers, as Miller surmised and as Miller's moment needed, or is more expansively a function of the dynamics of power and desire that attach to female characters under certain restrictive conditions.

In calling for an intersectional practice, I am not proposing to reduce literary texts to social programs, to impose crude categories onto complex characters, or to forge simplistic explanations for narrative events. I do think, however, that we might venture the kind of large-scale inquiry that Franco Moretti models in *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, bringing an intersectional understanding of time and place to an analysis of how individual narratives and groups of narratives work out the dynamics of identity (i.e., character) and movement (i.e., plot), and then map those dynamics across the vast field of the world's narratives in a new kind of historicist project that would offer a "distant reading" of narrative form. We might trace a single narrative practice—say, autodiegetic narration (i.e., by a protagonist), charting its rise in early seventeenth-century Spain and eighteenth-century France and England, its diminution in the nineteenth-century West and early emergences in nineteenth-century Japan and China, its imbrications with anticolonial struggles



in turn-of-the-century Latin America and postcolonial South Asia, and its massive worldwide popularity today. We might then correlate the identities and strategies of different kinds of narrators with what we know about their time, place, and authorship in order to see how these different patterns of narration map onto literary history. Such projects might help us to test the validity of studying texts according to the social identities of their writers and thus either reinvigorate, reshape, or put to rest the assumptions of authorial difference on which some feminist narratologists, myself included, have staked claims.

Queer narratology demands equally intersectional attention, along with a calibration between queer and feminist approaches that might explore, if not resolve, the thorny tensions between them that several contributors to this volume identify. For example, my own work on narrative voice has argued that the gender of an otherwise unmarked heterodiegetic (i.e., “third person”) narrator will derive from the gender of the textually inscribed author. So compelled was I to attribute gender to narrators that in some quarters that linkage came to be dubbed “Lanser’s rule.” I speculated, however, that the authority conventionally given to male voices might override that link in the case of a woman writer, in effect already queering my own proposition. A still queerer lens might suggest that when a heterodiegetic narrator’s gender is unmarked, heterodiegesis becomes the very emblem of gender indeterminacy. We’re all doubtless familiar as teachers with the students who say, “in this novel *it* says . . .”; perhaps that is not simply a sign of ignorance, as I certainly have lamented on more than one occasion, but a sign of the queerness, and historical instability, of heterodiegesis itself. What sex do today’s readers confer on the narrator of *Adam Bede*: the sex of George Eliot or that of Marian Evans? Might it be more accurate and more useful to say that the narrator of *Adam Bede* is queer? Robyn Warhol implies as much, *avant la lettre*, when she writes in *Gendered Interventions* that “assigning a gender” to this narrator “is no straightforward task” (115). Might heterodiegesis itself be sex-and-gender-queer in essence, enabling an indeterminacy open to the breadth and instability of human voice? And does feminist narratology lose something if, instead of insisting that the narrator of *Mansfield Park* who wants to let others dwell on “odious subjects” is female, we say that “it” is queer?

An intersectional queer narratology might likewise consider mapping free indirect discourse and its etiology. If Frances Ferguson is right that free indirect discourse is the novel’s “one and only formal contribution to literature” (159), then it would be all the more illuminating to ask whether novels attempting queer representation might make particular uses of FID as a

complex strategy of intimacy, authorization, and distance, or whether the genealogy of FID is dominated by outsiders from Lafayette and Austen to Hurston and Toomer. It might be worth putting to the narratological test D. A. Miller's proposal that formal innovation may be the displaced project of queer fiction. Is it accidental, for example, that Henry James, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, Marcel Proust, Colette, Nella Larsen, Djuna Barnes, Katharine Mansfield, and Gertrude Stein—and maybe James Joyce—were queer(ish) folk as well as modernists who pioneered the practice of FID? That is, would an intersectional narratology along either authorial or representational axes—in this case, queer writers or queer texts—help us to understand how and why particular narrative strategies are deployed in particular contexts?

Most importantly, I suggest, for both feminist and queer studies an intersectional narratology will demand much more attention to Asian, African, and Latin American narratives—and much more work in the archives—if it is to achieve a global and historical narrative knowledge. Indeed, the dual tracking of narrative elements with configurations of gender and sexuality over time and place could lay the narrative groundwork for astonishingly new insights into both the history and the possibilities of narrative. This “excavation of forgotten literary forms,” extended in space as well as time, might also assist the move from poetics to aesthetics that Margaret Cohen advocates in her “Narratology in the Archive of Literature,” which lays out a map for working with narrative historically in ways that could also be extended spatially.

Such projects of narrative mapping would be inductive and thus effectively empirical, working upwards to narratological theory from the careful study of many and diverse textual instances. They implicitly challenge a conviction, or at least a practice, dear not only to classical but to feminist and even queer narratologies: deriving general principles—whether about narrative, about gender, or about sexuality—from a reasoned understanding of social or textual behaviors without an extensive scrutiny of narrative works. Consider D. A. Miller's argument, for example, that gay narrative is simply not feasible. Miller uses for his touchstone Roland Barthes's painful recognition of exclusion when he comes upon a wedding at the church of Saint-Sulpice. Miller is right, of course, that this marrying couple “is in full and open possession of a story, a story, moreover, that one hardly exaggerates in our culture to call *the story*.” Miller goes on to opine that “the dismal more recent efforts to ‘homosexualize’ our culture's omnipresent marriage plot with stories of boy meeting boy, or girl getting girl, suggest that its heterosexist bias is at all corrigible through a policy of equal opportunity. The very notion of a ‘gay version’ here only tends to analogize gay experience to the structure of

its own thereby all the more deeply denied oppression,” that “the gay version never ceases to convey its own factitiousness in the comparison, not unlike one of the wedding ceremonies where the couple writes their own service, as though to conceal from themselves the compulsory character of the ritual whose established phrasing—‘man and wife!’—peals none the less through their clunking but forgettable modifications” (D. A. Miller 45–46). Miller’s judgments may be reasonable enough, and yet they tell us nothing, in the end, about actual “gay” marriage narratives and what they look like: how they are structured, how they resemble or depart from heterosexually hegemonic ones, what effects they might have on readers.<sup>6</sup>

The tension between deductive and inductive methodologies plagues the history of narratology as much as it plagues the history of sexuality and gender. In a provocative essay exposing this methodological faultline between classical and contextual narratologies, Roy Sommer argues that while a top-down imposition of narrative categories of the kind practiced by classical narratologists may be valid for projects attempting to describe all narrative possibilities, this approach falters for fields such as “postcolonial or intercultural narratologies” that are concerned with “specific features of specific texts embedded in specific cultural and historical contexts” (70). These contextual projects, Sommer claims, must therefore build an inclusive but specific corpus of texts from which to theorize.<sup>7</sup> Such a project puts texts and their intellectual frameworks ahead of narratological analysis for its own sake. Thus, even as Gerald Prince seeks a description of narrative that is “systematic and universal,” his “On Postcolonial Narratology” also recognizes the particular need for such a narratology to address “matters commonly, if not uncontroversially, associated with the postcolonial” such as “hybridity, migrancy, otherness, fragmentation, diversity, [and] power relations” (373). Rather than starting with categories and rubrics, Prince starts with the needs of a field, confident that a postcolonial narratology will already “likely take into account” many “(well-established) narratological concepts and achievements” (379). Allowing postcolonial topics precedence over standard narratological priorities—priorities often articulated in a daunting terminology—points the way toward a practice of narratology that can make its own case for relevance.

6. For one such inquiry, see Julia Wexler’s dissertation in progress (Brandeis University), “Queering Happily-Ever-After: The Evolution of Closure in Contemporary Gay & Lesbian Novels.” Miller is of course not alone in questioning the possibility of a “queer story”; see as well Judith Roof, *Come As You Are: Sexuality and Narrative* (New York: Columbia UP, 1996) and Lee Edelman, *Homographesis and No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004).

7. Given the universalizing tendencies of cognitive narratology, Sommer’s equation of “postclassical” with “contextual” could now be misleading.

While of course no narrative poetics is either entirely separable from or entirely dependent on individual instances, the more central difference beneath inductive and deductive thinking concerns the extent to which it is desirable, or even possible, to develop a meaningful narrative poetics that can account for all texts. In my view we need both the delineation of general rubrics built on an explicitly diverse textual canon, and an interrogation into specific intersectional formations; Prince too said as much when he agreed with Robyn Warhol in 1995 that expanding his excessive male-heavy canon would benefit narratology in general (“On Narratology” 74). We still don’t really know whether particular bodies of texts, whether delimited by authorship, genealogy, or representational emphasis, can be empirically differentiated. Large, digitally enabled studies suggest one path for addressing and perhaps provisionally settling some of the thornier issues, for example, about the relationship between authorial identities or intersectional context and textual properties, and we can surmise that the broader the corpus, the more precise and encompassing the narratological system. It may be useful to consider a provisional halt to deductive methods until our narratological findings are far more inclusive and diverse, and our understanding of them far more intersectional, than any narratologies, feminist and queer narratologies included, can currently boast.

Acknowledging not only that narrative is effectively intersectional but that intersectionality is effectively narrative may increase the value of narratological tools and methods across genres and disciplines by integrating formal patterns with social ones. Certainly we can see the limits of narratology’s purview when we venture beyond the disciplinary confines of the *MLA Bibliography*. Sandra Heinen, writing in the volume *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Research*, has already recognized that “the attempts to apply narratological theory to non-literary narratives” are “few and far between” (196). The interdisciplinary database Academic Search Premier confirms with impressive numbers the “narrative turn” in the humanities and social sciences, with over 25,000 subject entries on “narrative,” a good proportion of which are drawn from journals outside literary studies. And despite a similarly strong number of subject entries on the aggregate of feminism/gender/women/sexuality/lgbtq, the conjunction of these terms with narrative is but a modest 1,000. Moreover, if Academic Search Premier is a test case, the “narrative turn” in scholarship is not a turn to narrative theory as such; Academic Search Premier does not even recognize “narrative theory” as a rubric. Ironically, though, it does recognize “narratology” and codes as narratological some 300 items, though only 17 of these are subject entries, and the vast majority of the 300 are works by literary scholars about literary texts.

Still, that search does bring up a score of articles conjoining narrative with feminism, gender, or sexuality in journals as diverse as *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, *Boston College Journal of Law and Social Justice*, and *Nursing Philosophy* that reveal a broad range of narratological influences or use the term “narratology,” if in ways that literary narratologists might not recognize.<sup>8</sup> The journal *Nursing Philosophy* alone, for example, offers a good dozen essays that collectively use theoretical works ranging from Paul Ricoeur’s *Time and Narrative* to Susan Friedman’s *Mappings* in order to explore, for example, how “informed consent” might be understood in narrative terms when working with persons with dementia (McCormick), how dialogues on a hospital floor might reflect the split subjectivity of narrative voices (Cash), how a clinical picture might integrate the possibly fictional narratives through which patients tell their medical stories (Lorem), and how distinctions between narrative and story argue against the romanticization of narratives in health care (Paley and Eva). Indeed, probing below the surface of Academic Search Premier has also suggested that the relationship between narrative theory and the “other” disciplines need not be a one-way street; it seems clear that research projects like those described in *Nursing Philosophy* could help literary scholars to delineate approaches to narrative that might be most useful for studying both “natural” and “unnatural” narratives in ways that have fascinating “real-world” implications.

It might therefore also be useful for literary scholars to try our hand at “non-literary” explorations. In recent presentations, I have suggested that the concept of negative or reverse plotting might be one avenue for exploring the intersectional strategies not only of literary works but also of sociological formations, case histories, and feminist thought. I refer here to narrative situations in which specific event sequences or full stories take their meaning from textually triggered, though not necessarily textually inscribed, antitheses. In effect, one plot shadows the other, and the second plot derives its meaning from its relationship with its antecedent plot. A classic example would be the anti-fairy tale: Anne Hussey’s poem “Cinderella Liberated,” for instance, presents a speaker who “sleep[s] with / my feet in the fire / destroying the evidence / one glass shoe / melting like butter / both feet black as briquettes / while the prince / in a world of questions / searches for an answer.” While literature is rich with negative plotting and women writers may deploy it with particular frequency, I have also characterized the narrative dimensions of

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8. See, for example, Buser et al. and Zeiner.

feminist theory according to a set of “masterplots” that deploy the dynamics of negative plotting as a way to demonstrate the value of narratological thinking for feminist thought. In a similar vein, Ruth Page’s *Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology* provides a fruitful model for studying the press by exploring “media narratives of success and failure” concerning Hillary Clinton and Cherie Booth in their capacity as 1990s “first ladies” of the United States and the United Kingdom, respectively.

Infusion from the disciplinary “outside” of literary studies constitutes yet another way in which the implications of narratology for literary study—feminist, queer, and otherwise—remain to be mined. But this mining ultimately rests not simply on Morettian mappings or on interdisciplinary sleuthwork; it rests first and foremost on how we read. It is worth noting as well that while such practices would seem to fall within the realm of “distant reading,” which Moretti identifies with “an ambition [that] is now directly proportional to the distance from the text” (“Conjectures” 57) a narratological version of large-scale study actually entails the *close* reading of specific aspects of narrative form that, I argue, must rightly be understood as textual content. And though what I’m going to suggest is far from novel, it remains undervalued in what are still, in the profession at large, mimeticist hermeneutics. Which brings me back to Henry James and the story that won’t literally tell. In her famous essay “Turning the Screw of Interpretation,” Shoshana Felman makes the case for narratology when she looks at the dilemma posed by James’s novel and indeed by story in general: “Our reading of *The Turn of the Screw* would . . . attempt not so much to *capture* the mystery’s solution, but to follow, rather, the significant path of its flight; not so much to solve or *answer* the enigmatic question of the text, but to investigate its structure; . . . The question underlying such a reading is thus not ‘*what* does the story mean?’ but rather ‘*how* does the story mean?’” (119). Felman’s position here is strikingly close to that of Susan Sontag’s pathbreaking “Against Interpretation”: “Interpretation, based on the highly dubious theory that a work of art is composed of items of content, violates art . . . . What is needed, first, is more attention to form in art. . . . What is needed is a vocabulary—a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, vocabulary—for forms. . . . The function of criticism should be to show how [a text] is what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show what it means” (sections 8–9).

Is this not precisely what narratology offers, even in its low-level definition by the *OED*: “the study of the structure and function of narrative, esp. (in structuralist and post-structuralist theory) as analogous to linguistic structure; the examination and classification of the traditional themes, conventions, and symbols of the narrated story”? And what is perhaps especially

memorable about Sontag's understanding of criticism is that her very next sentence, the one that crowns "Against Interpretation," links that *how*—the study of form—with "an erotics of art": When she connects the pleasure of the text with the function of the form, effectively uniting the narratological and the postmodern Roland Barthes, Sontag also marries poetics and aesthetics.

But whether or not one wishes to eschew interpretation, feminist and queer narrative studies are particularly diminished, I think, when we forget that form functions *as* textual, historical, and social content. The narratological study of narrative offers us the opportunity to learn precisely what the story doesn't tell "in any literal, vulgar way." Literary theorists from Aristotle to Jameson have long acknowledged that form is a kind of content and, as such, socially meaningful. Yet the relationship between narrative theory and novel theory—to take one important example—still remains something of a standoff, and nowhere more vividly than on the turf of history. In 2010, the journal *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* issued a call for papers that reads as follows:

Is there a place for "formalist" criticism in the study of the eighteenth-century novel? Given the current dominance of historical, thematic, and cultural studies approaches to the eighteenth-century novel, can we usefully speak of novelistic form? Does the novel as a capacious and almost anti-formal "form" leave any space for formalist approaches? Does the sheer variety of narrative types that constitute the novel in the eighteenth century render the notion of "novelistic form" meaningless? Or is there in the period an emerging and dominant formal pattern, a consensus about the properly novelistic form of narrative fiction, that is worth extracting and articulating? (as posted on C18-L)

While narratologists might groan at the possibility that one could study the novel *without* considering its formal qualities, literary historians might equally groan at how "little interest" narratologists have shown, as Monika Fludernik has noted, "in the history of narrative forms and functions" (331). John Brenkman makes a similar claim when, concerning "voice," he speaks of "narrative theory and novel theory as antagonistic genres" (281)—and this almost a half century after Lucien Goldmann argued that "the novel form seems to me, in effect, to be the transposition on the literary plane of everyday life in the individualistic society created by market production. There is a rigorous homology between the literary form of the novel . . . and the everyday relation between man and commodities in general, and by extension between men and other men, in a market society" (7). Of course both

novel historians and narrative theorists acknowledge that some of the most important contributions to narrative studies are rich amalgams of theory and history; think for example of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, Ian Watt's *Rise of the Novel*, the work of Bakhtin, Gyorgy Lukács, and Goldmann himself, and we might recall that Fredric Jameson's *Political Unconscious* relies almost as much on Greimas as on Marx. Such examples easily support Ansgar Nünning's conviction that "the more narratological literary and cultural history becomes and the more historically and culturally oriented narratology becomes, the better for both" (345).

An essay I published in Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik's *Postclassical Narratology* offers a modest contribution to that aim by studying narrative form as sexual content in the context of lesbian literary history. In tracing one structure—first-person narration by female narrators to their female narratees—across the long eighteenth century, I hope to have shown that we have something to learn about both the history of sexuality and the history of the novel from studying narrative form. By attending to *narrative relations* rather than to textual events, I can argue that female same-sex desire underwrites the eighteenth-century novel in ways that disrupt the conventional totalizing argument that the "rise" of the novel entailed only the formation of heterosexual subjects under the sign of sexual difference. By looking at the structures of *confidence* in domestic novels, I suggest that erotic intimacy between women is preserved at the level of narrative interaction and that the interaction sometimes also bleeds into the plot. In ways too little noticed, this imbrication characterizes—and queers—the mid-eighteenth-century's two most famous novels, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747–48) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1762), in which movement beyond the plot's ostensible closure turns a death sentence into a fleeting fantasy of same-sex marriage. Here form is effectively the outing of content, which makes the novel's history of gender and sexuality incomplete unless it encompasses a history of formal practices. And this is but one aspect of what I hope could become a history and geography of narrative form *as* narrative content, all the more in arenas such as sexuality where content may have been closeted by circumstance—as is arguably true of *Turn of the Screw*—and where the story thus can't tell in any literal let alone vulgar way.

A rapprochement between novel theory and narrative theory could also help to advance what I believe is still narratology's thinnest arena: the study of character, a particularly challenging topic because it raises so many mimetic traps. I've been surprised at the rather slim attention by narrative theorists to a book that I consider among the most promising recent contributions to the formal study of character, Alex Woloch's *The One vs. the Many: Minor*



*Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*. Although the book made a splash in Victorian studies and does get mentioned in Robert Scholes's revised *Nature of Narrative*, it remains underknown to narratologists because it falls on the other side of the narrative theory / novel history divide despite Woloch's own characterization of his work as narratological, just as Hilary Dannenberg's award-winning *Coincidence and Counterfactuality* suffers from falling on the other side of this dividing line and thus being understudied by novel theorists despite its historical span and historicist investments. Woloch's project, as he describes it, is "to redefine literary characterization in terms of [a] distributional matrix: how the discrete representation of any specific individual is intertwined with the narrative's continual apportioning of attention to different characters who jostle for limited space within the same fictive universe." Woloch's method rests on the creation of what he calls "two new narratological categories," the temporality of "character-space" and the spatial distribution that he calls "the character-system" (13–14). I would love to see a broader narratological project that takes us beyond "flat" and "round" characters and shows form as the "outing" of character by looking at complex character spaces and systems of the kind Woloch describes—in conjunction with Suzanne Keen's theories of empathy, Jim Phelan's rhetorical rubrics (mimetic, synthetic, thematic), and the familiar Greimasian and Proppian notions of actants and functions—to provide a holistic theory of character that also grapples with the intricate relationships between mimesis and semiosis that lie at the heart of fictional representation but that avoids mimeticist traps. And I would argue that nowhere is the narratology of character more sorely needed as an intervention against such entrapment than vis-à-vis the cathexis with characters as if they were "real" people. Notwithstanding the signal importance of "caring about" literary characters as a project of empathy and "poetic justice," to borrow terms from Blakey Vermeule and Martha Nussbaum respectively, it may take a narratological deconstruction of the sign systems that produce character to inhibit the more imitative and uncritical investments in literary character that we see, for example, in the current fandom around Jane Austen's heroines.

Throughout this essay, I have insisted on the word "narratology" despite pressures from within feminist and queer narrative theory to eschew it. Indeed, as my title means to emphasize, I want to argue strongly for the retention of narratology as word, concept, and critical practice for the structural rigor and illuminative capacities of its approach. I have tried to suggest through the examples I've chosen that the most classical narratological inquiry can help us to map not only texts but their social contexts because, as Gerald Prince has persuasively argued, those contexts are already embedded

in the formal practices of texts, not least in the construction of narratees that Prince's work has enabled. But in making the case for narratology "proper," I must also confront the problems laid out in Ansgar Nünning's witty insider history of the field:

Narratologists turned out to be ingenious model-builders, manic systematizers, and unbeatable coiners of fanciful terms. They soon became renowned for their mind-boggling taxonomies . . . and highly scientific language, consisting almost entirely of unintelligible neologisms, which sounded awe-inspiring and arcane to anyone who did not happen to belong to the elect few. Structuralist narratologists developed a special predilection for unusual compounds beginning with prefixes like extra- and intra-, or meta- and hypo-, especially those ending with the word 'diegetic.' To the utter bewilderment and dismay of generations of undergraduates, even narratological terms beginning with the prefixes hetero- and homo- did not have anything to do with sex. (347)

In my view, the worst effect of this terminological mania is not that it turns off would-be practitioners—though that is certainly a large problem—but that it flattens the field, implicitly giving equal importance to every distinction. Surely some distinctions matter more than others, at least in specific contexts and perhaps *tout court*. I worry that narratology is still doing a good deal of business the significance of which is not readily apparent, which is why I have quipped that narratology may be too important to be left to narratologists. Like the spot the size of a shilling at the back of one's head that Virginia Woolf describes in *A Room of One's Own*, narratology's blind spots need to be exposed by theorists and scholars whose primary commitments lie outside narratology.

I would thus call on feminist and queer scholars of narrative to engage in two simultaneous projects: to scrutinize narrative concepts so as to promote those with broad applicability and resonance, and then to scrutinize and re-evaluate the terms we associate with those concepts. Let us use the lens of the outsider—the radical queer theorist or the reader of, say, *Nursing Philosophy*—to learn which concepts they find particularly fruitful. Let us interrogate the terms associated with those concepts to ask whether they need to remain literally or figuratively "Greek"—whether Greek in origin, or "greek to me." This may also mean—to evoke yet another coded meaning of Greek—that our terms and concepts might be *queerer*; from my *Narrative Act* onward, I have argued that binaries are less useful than spectra, and in an age of both gender-queer and digital morphing we might also ask where blurring the boundaries

is useful, as I've suggested might be the case with heterodiegesis. Certainly the thin line between ghost story and psychodrama continues to haunt James's *Turn of the Screw* and to dupe its readers into seeking an impossible reduction; knowing that the *very same* formal strategies enable this literal duplicity might also encourage us to dislodge narratology from equating precision with exclusion and singularity. As Laura Buchholz's work on free indirect discourse as "morphing" also reminds us, and as digital photography makes even more evident in such images as the series of "George W. Obama / Barack O'Bush" transformations that are ubiquitous on the internet, both/and may be more accurate than either/or, rendering word as well as image as queer as *The Turn of the Screw* renders story.

Although I have been emphasizing exhortation over celebration in this essay to emphasize the necessity of forward movement that keeps any field vital and to chart some of the directions in which that forward movement might take us, I want to close by honoring the indisputable: feminist and queer narratologies have changed the literary landscape and, if more modestly, the feminist/queer landscape as well, and in ways unthinkable when Wayne Booth published his *Rhetoric of Fiction* or Genette his *Figures III*. (Indeed, one wonders whether any *double-entendre* was even envisioned when Genette acknowledges that in exploring narrative poetics he "went regularly to the most *deviant* aspects of Proustian narrative" [265; emphasis in original].) David Lodge may have speculated in 1984 that narratology was dying, but in fact the field has continued to grow fruitful and multiply. With so many new directions to follow, and with our own ingenuities female, male, and queer, it's probable that the project of a queer/feminist narratology—indeed the project of *narratology*—has just begun.

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