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Novel Beginnings: Initial Framings as a Historical Category of American Fiction

Abstract: As critical junctures of discourse, beginnings are reflexive moments, highly charged with creating expectations and setting the reader's attitude towards a novel. Thereby they preserve the socio-representational climate of a particular historical moment. Assuming that the beginning of a work contains important cues that illuminate the specific quality of the fictional space and its relation to the non-fictional surroundings, this essay reviews cognitive frame conceptions for their heuristic value for a frame theory of literature. I suggest looking at framings that occur at the beginning of a work as culture-specific signposts which shed light on the historical discourse situation of fiction. In a case study of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *The Minister's Wooing* I will test the historicity of initial framings as interfaces between text, author, reader, and cultural context.

As concepts that account for structures of expectations and provide guiding lines for interpretations, metaphors of frame and framing appear in a number of disciplines and fields of research. Frame conceptions are common in anthropology and sociology, psychology and psychotherapy, linguistics and the interdisciplinary research of cognitive science. This essay reviews important theoretical aspects of frame conceptions and discusses their relevance for the analysis of literary fiction. It expounds on the metaphorical notion of space and the sense of perspective that are two key features of frame conceptions.

The notion of space, outlined by the constraints of a physical, social, or psychological setting, and the sense of perspective, implied in the alignment of this space, characterize my use of the concept 'frame' and my attempt to synthesize social and cognitive uses of the term. Accordingly, frames are understood as cognitive tools by which we navigate through our symbolic universe. They organize familiar patterns of knowledge to establish correspondences or 'mappings' that guide comprehension, ranging from basic construction of meaning to the creation of complex (psychological) realities. A frame implies a certain perspective that shapes the focus of our attention. Thus, like the frame of a painting, conceptual frames influence what we perceive and how we perceive things.

1. Frame Conceptions in the Social and Cognitive Sciences

In an introductory survey of frame conceptions of understanding, Deborah Tannen (1993) discerns two major theoretical affiliations that characterize the predominant uses of the term. She suggests distinguishing between the notion of interpretive or interactive frames, introduced by the anthropologist Gregory Bateson and developed into an elaborate analytic framework by the sociologist Erving Goffman, and the notion of knowledge frames that like the psychologist Frederick C. Bartlett's concept of schemata have proved influential in the collaborative fields of cognitive science such as artificial intelligence research, cognitive psychology, and linguistics. While scholars, following Bateson and Goffman, stress the social dimension of frames, using them to explicate the organizational premises of interaction, cognitive scientists employ the term to account for inferences drawn in complex situations and predictions made about the consequences of actions and events.

In general, then, frames can be seen as basic resources for interpretation and understanding. Frames can be thought of as conceptual tools by which we navigate through mental landscapes and with which we construct and reconstruct them.[1] Bateson (2000) conceives of frames as meta-communicative in that they provide a meta-level description of what is going on. They set the terms in which a communicative occurrence is interpreted and the relation among participants is perceived. Similarly, Goffman's use and development of the term frame in his *Frame Analysis* aims at defining situations. He refers to frames as "principles of organization which govern events […] and our subjective involvement in them" (Goffman 1974, 10-1). Additionally, he underscores their multidimensional character or their 'layeredness' and shows how different layers of context shape events and situations, and how frames negotiate between different realms of experience and levels of reality. Frames in this respect serve to explain in greater detail the function of context to stabilize and regulate meaning, elucidating how aspects of the physical world interact with social, psychological, and institutional settings.[2]

The interdependency of context and meaning is also at the core of cognitive frame conceptions. In frame semantics, context is seen as an integrative element in the process of meaning construction.[3] More precisely, context is considered a schematic construct. It connects circumstantial aspects that are taken as relevant

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[1]   In his reflections on the figure of the frame in *La verité en peinture*, Derrida (1978) draws attention to the technological or prosthetic aspect of frames. In a deconstructive reading of Immanuel Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* he shows how "The Analytic of the Beautiful" is based on the same categorical frame (or *tableaux*) applied in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Derrida compares such frames to prosthetic devices like boards and carts (a notion that comes close to Heidegger's idea of *Ge-stell*) by which knowledge appears to be produced almost *automatically* – in the mechanical sense as well as in the sense of being ignorant of its premises. His critique is directed at the pseudo-ontological character of frames and the inflexible endeavor of Western thought to arrest, fix, and regulate *Being*.

[2]   On frame layers cf. also Collins (1988).

[3]   Cf. Fillmore (1982), Lakoff (1988), Coulson (2001).

to meaning with familiar patterns of knowledge or frames. Hence, frames represent sets of mental connections that – motivated by human experience, social institutions, and cultural practices – organize elements of knowledge into recognizable and readily accessible structures of relevancies.[4] In this view, perception and memory are seen as intricately linked in processes of pattern matching, which relate perceptions of events and situations to previous experience. Cognitive frames account for so-called top down or global processes of understanding, which Marvin Minsky describes as follows:

> When one encounters a new situation (or makes a substantial change in one's view of a problem), one selects from a memory a structure called *frame*. This is a remembered framework to be adapted to fit reality by changing details as necessary. (Minsky 1980, 1)[5]

2. Spaces of Understanding and Perspectives of Cognition

Underlying these frame conceptions of understanding is a metaphorical sense of space and an attendant sense of perspective.[6] Frames can be conceived of as confining certain structures of knowledge and defining a particular view on such structures. This point of view foregrounds certain aspects and shapes our attitude towards it. Space and perspective also inform the metaphorical transference to the linguistic origin of the term – the frame of a painting – as a device that serves to shape what we see and how we see it. In particular, references to the picture frame are made regarding (1) its focusing and finding function that draws attention to what is enclosed within the frame, (2) its delimiting and mediating function that signals the aesthetic closure of a work and situates it with respect to an extra-aesthetic surrounding, and (3) its function as an instructive and evaluative device that provides additional comments on the painting (and its frame) and reminds the viewer to interpret phenomena within the frame differently from those outside its boundary.[7]

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[4] The term frame is used here as a cover term for related concepts such as schema, plan, or script. De Beaugrande (1980, 163-8) proposes a framework for global patterns of knowledge that differentiates between frames, schemas, plans, and scripts as four knowledge perspectives that vary in degrees of "operational directionality and order" (164).

[5] Similarly, Mandler describes the function of schemas: "A schema provides a type of information that is useful in guiding comprehension and a base of information upon which to construct the inferences that are necessary to understand connected text. A schema also provides a retrieval mechanism in the form of temporally guided search plans, as well as a reconstructive mechanism to fill in gaps in memory" (1982, 309-10).

[6] Cf. Minsky's account of frames, which illustrates the concept with regard to spatial orientation before discussing its relevance for language and discourse processing: "For visual scene analysis, the different frames of a system describe the scene from different viewpoints, and the transformations between one frame and another represent the effects of moving from place to place. For non-visual kinds of frames, the differences between the frames of a system can represent actions, cause-effect relations, or changes in conceptual viewpoint" (Minsky 1980, 1).

[7] Among the functions mentioned, the delimiting and mediating functions are perhaps the most elementary. The central function of the frame to set up an imaginary (aesthetic) space is closely linked to the original role of ornaments. The decorative function of the ornamental as mere embellishment, like the functions of the frame as finding/focusing device as well as one

These three functions of frames play a key role in understanding theories of text processing. They are particularly relevant for two dimensions of texts: (1) the construction of discourse or text worlds[8] and (2) the reconstruction of the specific ways in which texts are put to use.

As cognitive tools that provide background knowledge, cognitive linguists describe frames as referential structures that guide and accommodate the mental spaces[9] that make up a text world. The construction of textual worlds is a dynamic process that involves adaptations and revisions in the selection of frames. For instance, the reference to a character's "prosthetic arm jerking monotonously as he filled a tray of glasses" (Gibson 1986, 3) at the beginning of a novel may trigger in the reader's mind a textual world inhabited by pirates. The preceding paratextual framings, however, identify the novel as William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, published as an Ace Science Fiction Book, and unambiguously guide the reader towards constructing a science fictional storyworld.

In a similar way, frames inform inferences made about the other dimension of texts, which concerns their integration into a communicative and interactive context. Goffman calls such a context "frame space" (1981, 240) in the sense of a realm or field of activity where certain rules, norms, or conventions of behavior apply. Inasmuch as the meaning of words is achieved with reference to frames, texts become communicative only within frames of interaction.

The communicative frame space of the printed text is illustrated best with regard to the difference between oral and written discourse. As partial records of discourse, texts project virtual or potential spaces of communication, which need to be situated and accommodated when processed and interpreted. As Konrad Ehlich suggests in his communicative definition of texts: In the absence of a joint negotiation of meaning between sender and receiver, processing a text is to resume a communication within a 'distended speech situation' ("zerdehnte Sprechsituation"; 1983, 32). While textual communication and the respective means of distribution associated with its particular media configuration allow extending the temporal and spatial constraints of face-to-face conversation, it does so at the expense of the comprehensiveness provided by an immediate situational context and the possibility of immediate reciprocal negotiations of meaning. In order to compensate for illocutionary deficits, written communication resorts to descriptive commentary, metalinguistic markers, or conventions that may or may not be explicitly signaled by the text. In *The World on Paper*, David R. Olson refers to such explicit and implicit framings that reveal how a text is to be taken as a device of "management of illocutionary force" (1994, 92 and *passim*). It includes cues on lexical and syntactic levels, punctuation, graphic elements and illustrations, rhetorical theories and

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that allows for additional commentary, appear to be later developments of specialization (cf. Luhmann [1995, 195]). On central forms and functions of the frame in nineteenth-century painting cf. Kemp (1995).

[8] Following De Beaugrande (1980, 77), text world is defined as the "cognitive correlate in the mind of the text user for the configuration of concepts activated in regard to the text."

[9] For accounts of 'mental space theory' that inform much of contemporary cognitive linguistics see Fauconnier (1985).

hermeneutic techniques, interpretive communities, and institutionalized discourse types and genres.

In general, the necessity of framings increases with the distancing from an immediate physical surrounding and the invocation of more abstract and symbolic worlds involving different modes of existence. This also points to the tenuous line of difference between textualization and fictionalization; written discourse is discourse enacted by proxy, where, as Walter J. Ong contends, "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction" (1977, 53-81). The conventionality of this 'fiction' provides extended spaces of communication that can accommodate serious or sincere encounters as well as playful and fictional exploitations of them. In sum, then, the frame of textual communication encompasses the cultural and technological *habitué* that governs the use of texts and compensates for their detachment from an immediate context.

Before turning to the discussion of the novelistic frame, some remarks are due concerning the limits of the analogy of the picture frame. While the analogy between the physical frame of a painting and conceptual frames is illustrative of the latter's central functions, it has also given rise to terminological confusions between the notion of frame as a mental concept and the signaling of frames in the act of framing or through frame markers.[10] Yet, as Bateson has already cautioned against the plasticity of the analogy in his seminal essay "A Theory of Play and Fantasy,"

> the analogy of the picture frame is excessively concrete. The psychological concept we are trying to define is neither physical nor logical. Rather, the actual physical frame is, we believe, added by human beings to physical pictures because these human beings operate more easily in a universe in which some of the psychological characteristics are externalized. It is these characteristics we are trying to define, using the externalization as an illustrative device. (Bateson 2000, 187)

For a historical frame theory this distinction becomes crucial, since changes in framing practices can inform us about historical and cultural dispositions of mental frames as well as about conceptual changes within those frameworks. This is particularly important for research where the access to reader-based framing, i.e. the reader's selection of interpretative frames, is limited.[11] In accordance with this terminological distinction, general aspects and structural issues of the novelistic frame will be outlined, followed by a typology of literary framings based on Werner Wolf's (1999 and 2006) proposal to systematize framing phenomena in literature and other media.

Like the frame of a painting, framings are characterized by prominent positions in that they are set off against what they frame or are signaled in some way or

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[10]   For example, MacLachlan and Reid, whose preference "to use the term 'framing' wherever possible" because it "implies something more provisional, more negotiable than the substantive term 'frame'" mars their attempt at "terminological clarifications between the often synonymously used terms 'frame', 'framing' and 'framework'." They "regard a 'frame', whether material or conceptual, as a result of an act of 'framing', and a superordinate set of frames as a 'framework'" (MacLachlan / Reid 1994, 17).

[11]   For historical research on American fiction that draws reader-based framings such as writing journals and glosses cf. Davidson (1986 and 1989).

other on a meta-level.[12] Information about conceptual differences is, as Bateson argues, typically stacked at the edges of events.[13] While framings are not restricted to the edges that spatially or temporally mark the beginning and ending of events, framings that occur at the beginning and the end are more frequent than framings positioned in the midst of events. Given the predominately temporal organization of novelistic discourse, the ensuing analysis will concentrate on incipient framings as these tend to be most critical in setting up the novelistic frame.

3. Novelistic Frame and Framings[14]

Drawing on Niklas Luhmann's distinction between communication and perception (1995, 187-8), one can conceive of two basic levels that are constitutive of the novelistic frame as a complexly shaped experience that typically involves emergent levels of reality: an overall communicative level, in the light of which the novel represents a social practice of cultural communication, and a presentational level on which the novel serves as a vehicle of imaginary perception.

The communicative level embeds novelistic discourse in the world associated with the historical author and the actual reader. This level relates to the pragmatic constitution of fiction, its uses and functions as negotiated between author, reader, and cultural context. As an institutionalized discourse type, novels partake in what Robert Darnton schematically describes as a

> communication circuit that runs from the author to the publisher (if the bookseller does not assume that role), the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader. (Darnton 1989, 30)

The presentational level concerns the novel as a medium of private intuition, where language is used as a means of imaginary perception, allowing readers to contemplate different orders of reality. The reception of literary fiction is a highly individual experience and typically involves a low degree of pragmatic constraints. The imaginative and emotional content that readers invest in reduplicating and visualizing certain aspects of a story is idiosyncratic and largely incommunicable. This imaginative license and the fact that there is no immediate necessity to continue the communication contribute to the recreational effect of reading fiction (cf. Luhman 1995, 187).

Reading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* we engage in a communicative act with an author, whom we can identify as Samuel L. Clemens or Mark Twain. The

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[12] Cf. Wolf (1999). Similarly, Young distinguishes between 'frames' and 'boundaries:' "Boundaries locate the literal or physical border [indicative of differences – C.Q.] between realms. Frames locate their conceptual limits. Events are bounded, realms are framed. Or, more precisely, events are framed as to their realm status" (Young 1987, 22). Alternative terms and related concepts that designate the marking of frames are 'bracketing' (Bateson 2000), 'keyings,' 'footing' (Goffman 1974 and 1981), 'edgework' (Young 1987), in part also 'frame-builders' (Coulson 2001).

[13] Cf. Bateson, Unpublished Lecture at the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, 1973), quoted in Young (1987, 22).

[14] This section expands my preliminary findings published in "Frame Analysis and Its Contribution to a Historical and Cultural Theory of Fiction" (Quendler 2006, 231-2).

content of this communication (i.e., the presentation of the story) is conveyed by the homodiegetic narration of the novel's eponymous hero. While our critical response to the novel addresses the author and his contributions to the history of literary communication, our immediate imaginative response is made to Huck Finn, who frames our perception of the storyworld. The famous beginning of the novel, in which the character Huck Finn takes over the role of the narrator previously performed by the author-persona Mark Twain exemplifies well the paradoxical entanglement of the level of communication and the level of presentation that is characteristic of the novelistic frame:

> You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,* but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth mainly. (Twain 1885, 1)

Literary fiction is at once communicated imagination and imagined communication. This duplicity lies at the core of fictional games, which Wolfgang Iser describes as the simultaneity of a speech act and the staging of the same (1991, 430). Resolving this entanglement in favor of either its communicative or its presentational dimension inevitably terminates the fictional game by subsuming the fiction under a thoroughly pragmatic domain or relegating the fiction to the realm of private fantasies.[15]

Framings are critical in activating the novelistic frame and mediating between its constitutive levels of communication and presentation as well as additional subordinate (hypo-)diegetic levels or emergent levels of reality. In sum, novelistic framings can be understood as frame-setting meta-messages or signals that (1) relate to a communicative frame in the sense of a specific communicative situation and its discourse rules, (2) indicate important knowledge frames that inform contextual inferences in the construction of a textual world, and/or (3) signal the latter's alter-

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[15]   Rainer Warning describes this duplicity of fictional discourse as 'a simultaneity of two situations' that have their own respective deictic systems (1983, 193). Narrative genres, he argues, can be seen as a variant of dramatic discourse in that they reduplicate the external communicative situation between the teller and hearer by internalizing it. Alternatively, the entanglement of these two levels of the novelistic frame can be explained as a variant of conversational narratives. As Katherine Galloway Young (1987 and 2004) points out in discussing the narrative laminations of conversational narratives, the realm of storytelling, unlike the world of narrated events and experiences, "is part of the intersubjective world of sociality and communication, an enclave in conversation, one orienting to another realm, the Taleworld" (Young 1987, 16). The realm of storytelling also differs from the surrounding conversational realm in terms of the interaction format and the participants' attitudes toward speech activity. Tellers are usually conceded longer turns of speech and, as a rule, they also exert more control over the shaping of the story, which on the part of the hearer correlates with a lessening of the communicative tension. Investigating conversational narratives along with written literary ones, Monika Fludernik (1996) draws attention to the functional similarities and differences of their respective narrative frames. She underscores differences in the role modification of participants and the structural differences concerning the distribution of the level of narration and embedding levels that comment or evaluate the narrative content. In literary exchanges there is a higher degree of non-identity between speaker and subject of speech (e.g. author and narrator) and the addressee and the subject of address, and the level of narrative content and the embedding level of commentary or orientation tends to dissolve "into one amorphous and uni-level structure" (80). Cf. also Genette (1990) and Cohn (1990) on non-identity between author and narrator as a feature of fictional narratives.

native relation to accepted models of the 'real world,' i.e. framings that address the novel's specific fictional status and the way it is put to use. These include contextualizing cues that situate the textual world with respect to a non-fictional context, mark the fictional transformation of its references, or allude to the role modification of those involved (or engrossed) in literary communication.

Drawing on Wolf's typology of "framings in/of fiction" (1999, *passim*), textual framings can be classified according to the form and place of appearance (verbal vs. non-verbal framings, paratextual vs. intratextual) and according to the narrative level (extra- vs. intra- vs. hypodiegetic framings), propriety to the text and authorship (extra-compositional vs. intra-compositional framings), and according to the extension of validity (total vs. partial framings).[16]

'Non-verbal framings' comprise illustrations, graphic elements, and physical aspects of the book that provide clues concerning the content and intention and trigger off specific expectations. As regards the pragmatic (and aesthetic) function of verbal and non-verbal textual framings, their thematic and fictional/non-fictional relation to the text, the question of propriety is of special interest. Following Pearson (1990) and Wolf (1999) a distinction between 'extra-compositional' and 'intra-compositional framings' can be made. In their verbal form, framings may occur in the paratextual apparatus of a work[17] such as titles, subtitles, blurbs, dedications, prefaces, chapter headings, footnotes, etc. Equally important are questions concerning the authorship of framings: can they be attributed to the author? And if so, what is the role or function the author assumes in a paratext? This concerns especially pragmatic aspects of the propositional mode (the status of the sender, his or her relation to the receiver, and the set of the *dictum*).[18]

Distinct from 'paratextual framings' are 'intratextual framings,' which occur in the main text and frame it in its entirety (such as fairy-tale beginnings, the constitution of a narrator and a narratee, and metafictional comments on the entire text) or in part (as is the case in introductions and comments to embedded narratives and in metafictional comments on parts of the text).

4. Framings and Beginnings

Due to the predominantly temporal nature of narrative fiction, initial framings play a key role in negotiating between the levels of communication and presentation. As initial framings subsume both framings that occur in the paratext and at the beginning of the novel, a few words need to be said on the particularities of novelistic beginnings. In *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1997) Edward Said characterizes novelistic beginnings as highly charged with claims for new discursive, literary, or imaginative grounds. He defines novels as "aesthetic objects that fill gaps in an

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[16]   Recently, Wolf has revised his typology of framings for literature and other media (Wolf 2006).
[17]   Following Wolf, paratexts are (re-)defined as verbal texts that are set apart from the main text by devices of layout or typography and distinct from other non-verbal aspects of a book that encircle the main text (1998, 414).
[18]   Cf. Lanser (1981).

incomplete world: they satisfy the human urge to add to reality by portraying (fictional) characters in which we can believe" (Said 1997, 82).[19] This feature of novels as extension of reality and explorations of alternative worlds is particularly manifest in what may be called the responsive and prospective moments of beginnings. As special discursive turns, beginnings typically present what ensues them as a peculiar response to what has or has not preceded them.[20]

Like endings, beginnings represent peculiar discontinuities of the text, which can be distinguished from other notable textual discontinuities such as pauses or breaks. Unlike pauses in spoken texts or gaps in written texts, beginnings and endings characterize an asymmetrical relation with the surrounding discourse. Unlike breaks or interruptions the discontinuities of beginnings and endings are not ruptures caused by lack or loss of discursive control, but intentional acts that designate the borders of a discrete discursive unit. For Said this is the most important aspect of a beginning, which he describes as *"the first step in the intentional production of meaning"* (1997, 5; emphasis in the original).[21] The beginning of a work marks a reflexive moment where the link to its conception and gestation appears to be most pertinent. At the same time the beginning responds to the work in its entirety.[22]

Beginnings in this sense are nodal points between an 'intentional beginning' (i.e. the pre-compositional event that prefigures the work) and the intended meaning 'read out' from the entire text. Beginnings become an end for the ending; their teleological character is charged with centripetal energy. As one can always envision events preceding or leading up to a temporal or conceptual beginning, beginnings are carefully constructed and typically subdued 'responses.' Beginnings in this sense represent peculiar discursive turns, which emerge not in response to a specific discursive exchange but, as Said observes, along an adjacent relationship to one or several lines of discourse (1997, 10). In contrast to other forms of turn-taking the response is made as a transfer, which marks the discontinuity and endows the beginning with a sense of authority. With novelistic exchanges a considerable degree of authority is in fact created by the channel and the medium of the ex-

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[19] Cf. also Bakhtin's characterization of the novel as an uncompleted genre: "The novel is the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding. [… I]t best of all reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making; it is after all, the only genre born of this new world still in the making" (1981, 7). On the discursive matrix that shaped the historical beginnings of the novel cf. Davis (1987), Hunter (1990), and McKeon (2002).

[20] Cf. also Said: "Every novel is at the same time a form of discovery and also a way of accommodating discovery, if not to a social norm, then to a specialized 'novelistic' reading process" (1997, 82).

[21] Cf. ibid: "[…] a 'beginning' is designated in order to indicate, clarify, or define a *later* time, place, or action. In short, the designation of a beginning generally involves also the designation of a consequent intention."

[22] Norbert Miller goes so far as to consider the beginning a microcosm that reflects the macrocosm of the entire work: "Tatsächlich spiegelt der Mikrokosmos eines Romaneingangs in seinen Stilmöglichkeiten und Variationen, in seiner Konventionalität oder in seiner Originalität, kurz in seinem Verhältnis, den Makrokosmos des Romans und die Konzeption seiner jeweiligen Autoren" (1968, 8).

change:[23] the very presence of the book as artifact and the fact that it partakes in an institutionalized exchange of literary fiction. Indeed much of the paratextual apparatus of a novel serves this end of giving authority to the proper beginning of the main text. It reverberates in the paradoxical fact that although the reading of a novel usually starts with its paratexts, we conventionally discard them when we identify the beginning of a novel.[24]

The beginning of a novel can be said to begin with the text that follows the paratextual section of a work and that introduces a fictive world or voice. Typographical conventions that set off the main text from the paratext usually make it easy to locate the beginning of a novel. However, the end of a beginning tends to be less evident. In the absence of typographical or explicit markers that terminate a beginning, the end of a beginning can be said to set in when at least two of the following conditions are fulfilled: a) an expository situation is presented in ways that the overall plot that ensues will be comprehensible, (b) a central thematic point of interest of the entire work is presented, and/or (c) the plot has reached what Chatman refers to as a 'kernel' in the sense of a major event in the plot, which allows at least two alternative possibilities of story development (1978, 53).[25]

Given the multi-leveled organization of novelistic fiction, one can distinguish between basic types of beginnings: extradiegetic beginnings ("openings with a comment" [Bonheim 1982, 194]) and intradiegetic beginnings with which the narration starts on the level of the story. A common rhetorical formula found in extradiegetic beginnings is the *exemplum*, which presents the ensuing narrative as an illustration of a general statement or maxim that contextualizes the ensuing story. Intradiegetic beginnings can be subdivided according to the mode of discourse in which the narrative starts. Besides extradiegetic beginnings that open with a comment or general sentence, Bonheim distinguishes between three types of intradiegetic beginnings: "openings with description," "openings with report," and dramatic beginnings "opening with speech" (1982, *passim*).

Alternatively, intradiegetic beginnings can be analyzed in terms of the relation between story-time and discourse time. In his *Ars Poetica* (ll. 136-152), Horace introduced the well-known distinction between *ob-ovo* beginnings (*ordo naturalis*) for narratives that start with the earliest possible chronological point of the story and *in-media-res* beginnings (*ordo artificialis*), which start in the middle of the story.

5. Interfaces of Discourse in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *The Minister's Wooing*

The initial structure of Harriet Beecher Stowe's historical novel *The Minister's Wooing* (1859) presents an interesting case of framing a beginning. In combining and reframing different types of beginnings, Stowe fleshes out a number of initial

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[23]   On the idea of authority as product of discursive formation cf. Foucault (1969).
[24]   Cf. Genette (1987), Retsch (2000).
[25]   I am indebted to Werner Wolf (unpublished lecture) for these useful criteria. An alternative concept to Chatman's kernel, which can be helpful in discerning the end of a beginning, is what Pfister calls the "point of attack" in the development of a story (Pfister 1977, 365).

framing strategies. Besides being a concise compendium of competing framing conventions, Stowe's beginning sheds light on the historical discourse situation of its time and places her novel between conventional popular fiction and the so-called serious fiction of canonical authors like Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe.[26] In fact, one may even go as far as to interpret the initial framings in *The Minister's Wooing* as an explicit and implicit response to the discursive matrix of nineteenth-century fiction.

The novel begins as follows:

Mrs. Katy Scudder had invited Mrs. Brown, and Mrs. Jones, and Deacon Twitchel's wife to take tea with her on the afternoon of June second, A.D. 17—.	in-medias-res beginning
When one has a story to tell, one is always puzzled which end of it to begin at. You have a whole corps of people to introduce that *you* know and your reader doesn't; and one thing so presupposes another, that, whichever way you turn your patchwork, the figures still seem ill-arranged. The small item which I have given will do as well as any other to begin with, as it certainly will lead you to ask, "Pray, who was Mrs. Katy Scudder?" – and this will start me systematically on my story.	intratextual framing: meta-fictional comment on composition
You must understand that in the then small seaport-town of Newport, at that time unconscious of this present fashion and fame, there lived nobody in those days who did not know "the Widow Scudder."	intratextual framing: comment on historicity
In New England settlements a custom has obtained, which is wholesome and touching, of ennobling the woman whom God has made desolate, by a sort of brevet rand which continually speaks for her as a claim on the respect and consideration of community. The Widow Jones, or Brown, or Smith, is one of the fixed institutions of every New England village, – and doubtless the designation acts as a continual plea for one whom bereavement, like the lightening of heaven, has me sacred.	beginning with historical background of the story
The Widow Scudder, however, was one of the sort of women who reign queens in whatever society they move; nobody was more quoted, more deferred to, or enjoyed more unquestioned position than she. (Stowe 1859, 1-2)	beginning of the sketch of Katy Scudder

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[26] As Reynolds argues in his seminal study *Beneath the American Renaissance* (1988), Stowe's work often assumes a reconciliatory position in the nineteenth-century literary spectrum. Reynolds bases his argument on Stowe's functionally complex use of character types: "Like Hawthorne, Stowe gathered under one fictional roof both dark, iconoclastic women characters and brighter ones as well. There is a crucial difference, however, between these writers' treatment of women: because Stowe *mixes* but does not *fuse* character types, she retains a reassuringly simple division of functions absent from Hawthorne's more complex texts" (1988, 388).

The double beginning of *The Minister's Wooing* represents a particularly conspicuous discontinuity of discourse, which illustrates in a self-reflexive and equally accessible fashion characteristic features of the novelistic frame and novelistic beginnings. The first sentence of the novel starts *in medias res*. It sets out to report on a tea party arranged by a certain Mrs. Katy Scudder on a June afternoon. The use of a past perfect form ("had invited") and the way the characters are introduced as already known are characteristic of the *in-medias-res* beginning.[27] In the third paragraph, another, 'systematical' attempt at beginning the novel is made. This time the authorial narrator provides a general historical description of the time the story is set in. In contrast to the first sentence, the description moves from the general to the particular. It introduces the special standing of widows as "one of the fixed institutions of every New England village" before it closes in on Mrs. Scudder as a particularly representative widow.

Between the two beginnings two intratextual framings are inserted: a metafictional remark on the difficulties of starting to tell a story and another comment, which – emphatically directed to the contemporary reader – draws attention to the historical setting of the novel. The two framings mark the act of beginning as a critical and highly reflexive moment in the mediation of a story. In fact, the metafictional digression after the *in-medias-res* beginning comes close to Said's conception of the beginning as the intersection of initial intention (e.g. the author's pre-compositional question which character to introduce first) and intended meaning (e.g. the reader's inquiry about Katy Scudder; s. Said 1997, 32 and 81-100).

From the author's point of view this framing reiterates what I have described as the twofold structure of the novelistic frame: The author's knowledge or 'intuition' of the story relates to the presentational dimension of fiction, whereas the imperative or impulse to tell the story addresses the communicative level of the novelistic frame. Knowing the story gives the author the freedom to contemplate it from various angles; communicating the story demands a transformation of the story into a discrete unit of coherent discourse. Again, the issue of discreteness is linked to a question of authority: To tell a story is to know how to begin.

In the narrator's mind, the story presents itself as an endless net of causality ("one thing presupposes another"). There appears to be no 'natural' beginning, as every approach entails some kind of distortion ("whichever way you turn your patchwork, the figures still seem ill-arranged"). Stowe's solution to this problem is refreshingly simple: since no beginning will do justice, any beginning will do. The seeming arbitrariness of the story's point of departure attests the constructed nature of the beginning. Yet, the notion that any item of information could serve as a starting point undermines the teleological quality of the beginning. If beginnings are convenient fictions, what is the rationale that informs Stowe's beginning?

On the most general level the opening paragraphs reflect an important aspect of novelistic beginnings: the imperative to catch the reader's curiosity by exploring new discursive and imaginary realms. In this sense, the playful staging of the be-

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[27]   Cf. Retsch (2000, 139-45).

ginning as a writing-in-progress and its reframing through an imagined dialogue with the reader represent a 'writerly' gesture of sophistication that bring to mind experimental and humorous framing strategies of novelists like Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe, who often indulge in lengthy prefatory arguments elaborating on the gestation of the story and its intricate process of transmission.

In a closer reading, the double beginning marks the hybrid generic alignment of the novel with both domestic and historical fiction. Or, more precisely, the double beginning points to the novel's feminist rewriting of New England's Calvinist legacy within the generic frame of domestic fiction. Significantly, the *in-medias-res* beginning, which is emblematic of the work's domestic fictional strain, is set in Katy Scudder's kitchen. Notwithstanding the novel's concern with public disputes on Calvinist principles and slaveholding, the plot for the most part takes place in what are considered mid-nineteenth century women's domains. By referring to the widows as "fixed institutions," the second beginning, which introduces the historical dimension of the novel, provides another important cue for Stowe's domestic history of New England: the characters the narrator introduces at the beginning are all women.

Despite the novel's title and the invocation of the famous theologian Samuel Hopkins, men play only marginal roles in the novel. While the Saxon genitive in *The Minister's Wooing* emphasizes the 'wooer,' the novel focuses on the 'wooed.' This prominent paratextual framing is at once misleading and programmatic in that it orchestrates Stowe's critique of paternalistic reasoning which favors the creator over the creation, the possessor over possession, and the origin over what comes after. Thus, in order to fully appreciate the novel's title, it should be read along the novel's gendered dichotomy that associates the *ab-ovo* beginning with principled and dogmatic male religious discourse. By contrast, the *in-medias-res* beginning is linked to female discourse focused on religious practice. While the *ab-ovo* beginning (like the Minister as a reference to the origin of the wooing in the novel's title) is deemed necessary, it is 'too remote' to catch the reader's curiosity. At the beginning of the second chapter Stowe pokes fun at *ab-ovo* beginnings by confessing that her reiterated historical sketch falls short of the great model of the Bible:

> As I before remarked, Mrs. Katy Scudder had invited company to tea. Strictly speaking, it is necessary to begin with the creation of the world, in order to give a full account of anything. But for popular use something less may serve one's turn, and therefore I shall let the past chapter suffice to introduce my story, and shall proceed to arrange my scenery and act my little play, on the supposition that you know enough to understand things and persons. (Stowe 1859, 14)

In *The Minister's Wooing* the kind of speech associated with the *in-medias-res* beginning is chatter: a discourse directed towards emphatic exchange with often surprising turns and uncertain outcomes. On a thematic level, the opposition between 'aimless' chatter and systematic discourse on religious truths reflects the debate on the Calvinist tenet of predestination and its refinement by Samuel Hopkins's *System of Theology* that is about to be published in the course of the novel. Ironically, at the beginning of the novel it is chatter (evoked by the inferred

reader's question "Pray who was Mrs. Katy Scudder?") that provides the narrator's model to unwind the story "systematically." Exploiting the deictic indeterminacy of the novelistic frame, the reader becomes a convenient fiction to embed the narration in the natural course of a conversation.

Introducing fictive readers and framing beginnings dialogically are, of course, devices that can be traced back to the very beginnings of writing and print (cf. Ong 1982). In the history of the American novel we can observe historical fads of dialogic and conversational framings that reflect changing historical functions of the novel. In early American novels we frequently encounter open letters and dialogic prefaces that account for the gestation of the story and give reasons for its publication. Such paratextual and supposedly extra-fictional representations of authors and their first readers are indicative of the emerging critical and literary institutions in the Early Republic. They also reflect cultural negotiations on a dimension of the novelistic frame that appeared particularly precarious to early detractors of the novel: namely, the introduction of imaginary perception into a cultural practice of public communication.[28] By contrast the fad for dialogic framings in novels of the American Renaissance has been interpreted in the light of a self-reflexive romantic return to the oral beginnings of literature.

The face-to-face style of journalism of the 1840s was another important discursive force that shaped this conversationalist story-telling in mid-nineteenth-century novels and set the model for domestic and sensational fiction. At the beginning of the second chapter to *The Minister's Wooing* cited above, the narrator justifies her deviation from the biblical *ab-ovo* model by reference to "popular use." This remark can be read as an allusion to contemporary magazine culture, particularly when one considers the novel's first appearance as a serial in the *Atlantic Monthly*. The self-conscious opening critiques the formulaic narrative beginnings found in serialized fiction and non-fiction.[29] The beginning of *The Minister's Wooing* provides a mild parody of the stereotypical beginnings of serialized fiction. After a descriptive paragraph (typically about an atmospheric or social setting), these beginnings lead rather heavy-handedly to an extended sketch of a central character, a sketch that usually consists of a brief genealogical account, the character's upbringing, his or her physiognomy, and his or her current station in the storyworld. The beginning of "Miss Wimple's Hoop," a serialized sentimental romance by J. W. Palmer, which started in the *Atlantic Monthly* only two months before Stowe's, is illustrative of such a case:

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[28]   On this creation of a reading public see Warner (1990) and Gilmore (1989).

[29]   As Dorothy Z. Baker (2000) points out, the novel is highly responsive to the contextual framings provided by the *Atlantic Monthly*. Among other fictional and non-fictional items that appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* along with *The Minister's Wooing*, Baker draws attention to the thematic echoes between Stowe's novel and Oliver Wendell Holmes's column "The Professor at the Breakfast Table."

In Hendrik on the Hudson, fifty miles from New York, there was, winter before last, a certain "patent seamless." –	in-medias-res beginning
But a hooped skirt with a history, touching and teaching, is no theme for flippancy; so by your leave, I will unwind my story tenderly, and with reverential regard for its smooth turns of sequence.	intratextual framing: metafictional comment on the story
The Wimples, of whom Sally is the last, were among the oldest and most respectable of Hendrik families. (Palmer 1858, 566)	beginning of the biographical sketch

The initial pattern (i.e., an *in-medias-res* beginning marked by the temporal preposition "before last," a metafictional digression, and the resumption of the story with a biographical sketch) minutely resembles the beginning of *The Minister's Wooing*. Yet, although Stowe, too, continues her story with a lengthy biographical portrait of Katy Scudder, she ridicules this convention by exposing it metafictionally and hinting at the arbitrary nature of such first paragraphs: "The small item which I have given you will do as well as any other to begin with." Stowe's deviation from the initial pattern of serialized sentimental fiction and paper-stories lies in the framing rather than the framed content of the ensuing introductory sketch. While she follows the conventional script of beginning a novel, she distances herself metafictionally from this convention.[30] Thus, the intratextual framings in *The Minister's Wooing* can be read as a self-reflexive gesture to set the novel off from other serialized sentimental fictions while appropriating the appeal of this popular format.

In this sense, Stowe's parody of contrite framings of introductory sketches represents the inverse framing strategy that Nathaniel Hawthorne employs in the introductory "Custom-House" sketch to *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). Whereas Stowe parodies the very conventions of the genre and the popular serial format in which it was composed, Hawthorne uses this conventional introductory element as a sensational device to frame his romantic romance. In a fictionalization of the author's life, which covers his transition from working as a custom-house officer to his becoming an author of romances, Hawthorne includes a satirical portrait of his real-life employers and colleagues. As the author-persona puts it, the proper story of *The Scarlet Letter*, is framed by

> a few extra touches, to give a faint representation of a mode of life not heretofore described, together with some of the characters that move in it, among whom the author happened to make one. (Hawthorne 1850, 3)

Much to the amusement of the author, the effect of this sensational *exposé* was considerable. In the preface to the second edition of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne comments that

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30 The unconventional opening does, however, set the tone for other deviations from the stereotypical patterns of the sentimental romance, such as the marriage plot; cf. Baker (2000, 32).

> his sketch of official life, introductory to The Scarlet Letter, has created an unprecedented excitement in the respectable community immediately around him. It could hardly have been more violent, indeed, had he burned down the Custom-House, and quenched its last smoking ember in the blood of a certain venerable personage, against whom he is supposed to cherish a particular malevolence. (Hawthorne 1850, n. pag.)

Curiously enough, his response to the propriety of "The Custom-House" sketch is itself ambivalent. On the one hand, he concedes that "[t]he sketch might, perhaps, have been wholly omitted, without loss to the public, or detriment to the book" (n. pag.); on the other hand, he insists on reprinting the sketch in the second edition because "it could not have been done in a better or kindlier spirit […] with a livelier effect of truth" (n. pag.).

Hawthorne's paradoxical re-framing of the introductory sketch suggests that while public response to his topical sketch seems to exceed the author's intentions, the sensational lure of an *exposé* of living characters provides popular frames of reference for aesthetically situating the ensuing romance.[31] As summarized in Hawthorne's hyperbolic description quoted above ("It could hardly have been more violent, indeed, had he burned down the Custom-House"), his use of 'sensational realism' aims at underscoring the higher reality of the mystic symbolism that lies at the core of *The Scarlet Letter*.

Whereas in the fiction of the American Renaissance introductory sketches were typically framed on a paratextual or extradiegetic level, in realist novels criticism of this convention is often voiced covertly on the level of diegesis. A case in point is William Dean Howell's *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885). The beginning of this novel critiques the stereotypical use of a biographical sketch and exposes the compositional practice of sensational journalism in a dramatic way, namely by introducing the eponymous hero through a magazine interview. In contrast to *The Minister's Wooing*, the exposure of the journalistic fabrication of the story is not overtly voiced in an authorial metafictional remark. Typical of realist framing strategies, the sketch is itself embedded in the story on a hypodiegetic level, namely in the journalist Bartley Hubbard's initial sketchbook entry: "'In personal appearance,' wrote Bartley in the sketch for which he now studied his subject, while he waited patiently for him to continue, 'Silas Lapham is a fine type of the successful American. He has a square, bold chin, only partially concealed by the short reddish-gray beard, growing to the edges of his firmly closing lips'" (Howells 1885, 2). The ensuing paragraphs that deal with Lapham's childhood and upbringing contrast the laconic way in which Bartley conducts the interview with the sensationalist printed version of the interview:

> 'Mr. Lapham,' he wrote, 'passed rapidly over the story of his early life, its poverty and hardships, sweetened however, by the recollections of a devoted mother, and a father who, if somewhat her inferior in education, was no less ambitious for the advancement of his children. They were quiet, unpretentious people, religious, after the fashion of that

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[31] Cf. the discussion of initial framings in *The Scarlet Letter* in Pearson (1990) and Quendler (2004).

time, and of sterling morality, and they taught their children the simple virtues of the Old Testament and Poor Richard's Almanac.' (Howells 1885, 4)

This so-called authorial removal in realist fiction and the tendency to voice metafictional critique implicitly through embedded representation rather than overt metafictional remarks bring me to the last discursive force with which I want to contextualize the beginning of Stowe's novel: the increasingly independent state of fictional speech and the concomitant change in the late-nineteenth-century conception of fiction.

A rather inconspicuous indication for this development can be inferred from the fact that the first book edition of *The Minster's Wooing*, published by Derby and Jackson (New York), issued the book without prefatory framings. Historically, the use of prefatory framings in novels of the American Renaissance decreased significantly when compared to paratextual framing practices during the Early Republic. Still the majority of writers prefaced their novels, albeit in an often mannered and self-conscious way.[32] Notwithstanding idiosyncratic reasons for this drop in prefatory framings, one can read this decrease as a tentative sign for the consolidated state of fictional speech as a cultural practice, where the paramount function of prefatory framings to situate the fiction with respect to other discursive practices such as history and biography could be increasingly muted.[33]

An explicit cue that corroborates this change in conceiving literary fiction as an increasingly independent realm is provided by the intratextual framing in the second paragraph of *The Minister's Wooing*. The storyworld is described as a kind of parallel universe. Hence the difficulties that arise are, first, how to connect to this parallel venture that appears to be an organic whole where "one thing so presupposes the other" and, second, how to overcome the asymmetrical distribution of information between narrator and narratee. While the question raised at the beginning of the text resonates the religious theme of the novel, its metafictional implications are symptomatic of a changing conception of fiction. They point to the emerging realistic paradigm to create 'the illusion of an all-embracing world' and 'the fiction of independence from the author and a mediating narrator' (Stanzel 1965, 34). Thus, the narrator's involvement in presenting this world to the reader inevitably runs the risk of violating the autonomy of the storyworld. In late nineteenth-century realist fiction, we can observe a clear disjunction in the triadic relation between author, text, and character. Contextual and paratextual framings of the professional author who stands in critical detachment to his or her work finds an intratextual correlate in the so-called depersonalization or even the disappearance of the narrator and the attempt to turn the reading activity into an experiential rather than communicative processing of the world. Yet, in contrast to later realist writers,

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[32]   In a survey based on a sample of 450 novels published between 1790 and 1900, I found that about three quarters of the novels from the Early Republic were prefixed with some kind of prefatory framings. During the American Renaissance roughly two thirds came with prefatory framings.

[33]   Again serialization had a decisive impact on this development as it provided a congenial venue for fiction to align with non-fictional discourse on its own. On this cf. Michael Lund (1993).

Stowe solves this dilemma through a strategy that Barbara Hochman dubs "friendly reading," i.e. by construing an imaginative dialogue with the reader (2001, 9). While framing novels as a friendly exchange between author and reader lasted well into the late nineteenth century, they became increasingly associated with popular fiction. *The Minister's Wooing* can be placed at the end of a literary tradition that attempts to write a history of New England through a personalized friendly exchange. As in *The Scarlet Letter* this exchange begins by turning the initial act of writing into an act of reading. Yet, unlike *The Scarlet Letter*, where the initial act of reading signifies the birth of the romantic author-persona, *The Minister's Wooing* begins with the reader.

In *The Minister's Wooing*, the reader serves as a convenient fiction. It allows the narrator to shift the attention from the author's omniscient god-like perspective to the process of reception. The initial paragraphs of the novel represent a beginning within a beginning that places the novel at a crossroad in nineteenth-century fiction. As a historically rather late fictional treatment of New England's history, *The Minister's Wooing* bends to the genre of the domestic novel. Despite the narrator's pretense of having begun the novel in an arbitrary manner, the beginning is in fact highly determined. On the level of content it points to the novel's thematic interest in a moral conflict between dogmatic principles and religious practice. On a discursive level it represents a mild parody of the formulaic beginnings found in the popular fiction of the time. However, in contrast to Hawthorne's or Melville's aesthetic re-writing of popular patterns of fiction, Stowe's parody is affirmative in the sense that she self-consciously draws on popular fiction as a venue for a feminist cultural critique. As I have tried to show in contextualizing the beginning of *The Minister's Wooing*, initial framings anticipate not only larger dimensions of the text itself but also larger socio-historical conditions of literary production. While theories of beginnings and initial framings often focus on proleptic and text-centered functions,[34] analyzing initial framings as interfaces between text and cultural context sheds light on a historical theory of fiction and allows us to revisit literary key concepts such as author, reader, and text in their cultural-historical configurations.

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[34] Cf. esp. Sternberg's influential study *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (1978).

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