

# On the Epistemology of Narrative Theory: Narratology and Other Theories of Fictional Narrative<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

The work of Gérard Genette in the field referred to as “narratology”<sup>2</sup> represents one of the most important contributions to narrative theory, considered as a branch of literary theory, in the second half of the twentieth century. I purposely say “one of the most important”, as there are other theoretical contributions, some of which I believe to be equally important though they are not as well known as Genette’s narratology, particularly in France.<sup>3</sup> These lesser-known theories are rich in epistemological reflection. In this article, I shall set out to compare different narrative theories by examining their epistemologies.

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1 For the title as well as the subject of two of the three sections of this article, I am indebted to Marc Dominicy’s article on Jakobson’s poetics (see Dominicy 1991). I hope he will take this as the tribute it is rather than as a flat emulation. The connection between Ann Banfield’s narrative theory which constitutes one of the objects of this article and Jakobson’s poetics is not fortuitous. Ann Banfield can be considered as the last representative of a formalist approach to literature, indexed to fictional narrative rather than to poetry (see McHale 1983, 39 and Banfield 1992, 358).

2 See Todorov 1969, 10: “[T]his work draws on a science that does not yet exist, let us say, *narratology*, the science of narrative” (my translation).

3 To give an example, Ann Banfield’s name does not appear in the articles “Narration”, “Récit (théories du)” and “Théories de la narration”, in the *Dictionnaire du littéraire*, recently published by PUF (see Aron et al. 2002, 391–393, 498–500, and 597–598). It is much better known amongst the Anglo-Saxons and is almost always associated with a theory of free indirect style in fictional narrative rather than with a general theory of fictional narrative. On this point, the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, which has just come out, constitutes an exception. One should note, nevertheless, that the term “no-narrator theory” used by this encyclopedia (see Herman, Jahn and Ryan 2005, 396–397 and *passim*) does not derive from Ann Banfield, but from the volume’s editors. Personally, I shall use the term “narratology” to indicate a particular type of narrative theory rather than to indicate narrative theory in general. This article will not cover the aspects of narrative theory related to structures of content (functions, sequences, etc.) in oral and written narratives.

What are these theories and how do they differ? I would say that their difference essentially resides in their way of viewing the function of language used in narration. On the one hand, there is a narrative theory based, more or less explicitly, on a linguistic theory which considers communication as the constitutive and ever present function of language: this is narratology, with its concepts of the narrator and the “narratee”, which are homologous to the speaker and the addressee of a situation of communication.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to this theory of narrative communication are those which posit the fictional narrative, or a certain type of fictional narrative, and communication as mutually exclusive categories. According to these theories, the fictional narrative is not or at least not always an act of communication. It is seen as the expression of another function of language. Taking the cue from Shigeyuki Kuroda, I shall refer to these narrative theories as “non-communicational” (see Kuroda 1976).<sup>5</sup>

I have organized my argument into three parts. The first examines the construction of the object in narrative theory and the problems arising when a theoretical object (in this case, the narrative), defined by a certain number of properties, is confronted with empirical or historical data (in this case, narratives, or more precisely, two types of narratives traditionally called “first person” and “third person” narratives). The second part is concerned with the question of “falsification”, in a Popperian conception of science or scientific theory (see Popper 1977). I will examine Genette’s assertion that “all narrative is, explicitly or not ‘in the first person’, since its narrator can at any moment identify himself by the pronoun I” in light of Ann Banfield’s theory of narrative and free indirect style. Finally, in the third section, I shall discuss the reductionism of narrative theory, or, in other words, the thesis of the reduction of narrative theory to linguistics, considered as a more general science. These three parts correspond to a “series of recurrent debates in epistemology”<sup>6</sup>. The question of the fictive narrator in fictional narrative is what connects them.

## The Object of Narrative Theory

I will begin here with a quotation taken from Gérard Genette’s preface to *The Logic of Literature* by Käte Hamburger, which appeared in French in 1986:

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4 I will focus essentially on the founding work of narratology, *Narrative Discourse* (1972, Engl. transl. 1980), on *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1983, Engl. transl. 1988), which sums up ten years of research in narratology, as well as on other books and articles by Genette. I will also take into account René Rivara’s attempt in *La Langue du récit: Introduction à la narratologie énonciative* (2000), to provide narratology with a linguistic foundation by drawing from the work of Antoine Culioli. On the “narratee”, see Genette 1980, 259–262; 1988, 130–134 and Prince 1973 (Rivara, however, does not use this notion).

5 Among the proponents of non-communicational narrative theories are Émile Benveniste, in his article from 1959, Käte Hamburger, author of *The Logic of Literature* (1957, Engl. transl. 1973 and 1993), Shigeyuki Kuroda and Ann Banfield, both linguists trained in Noam Chomsky’s generative grammar. For a presentation of the debate on communicational and non-communicational narrative theories, see Galbraith 1995.

6 See Dominicy 1991, 153 (my translation).

[...] *one cannot simultaneously study fictional narrative as narrative and as fiction*, they remain disconnected: the “as narrative” of narratology implies by definition that one pretends to accept (the fiction of) the existence, *prior* to the telling, of a story to be told; by contrast, the “as fiction” of Käte Hamburger implies the refusal of this methodological hypothesis (or fiction) – and by the same token the notion of narrative itself, since there can be no narrative without a story; for which reason a fictional narrative is nothing more than a narrative fiction (Genette 1993b, xv–xvi).

With its lexical repetitions and ambiguous use of the term “fiction”, this quotation clearly illustrates the difficulties encountered by narratology’s construction of the object-narrative. We might wonder, for example, about this “one” who pretends to accept the existence of a story anterior to the narrative or independent of it: who is this “one” and what is his justification? The quotation also reveals Genette’s refusal, under the guise of dividing up the task, of any other theorization of the fictional narrative as such.<sup>7</sup>

To understand fully what Genette means by “story”, “narrative” and, in the end, “fiction”, it is best to return to the founding work of narratology, *Narrative Discourse*, published in 1972 (Engl. transl. 1980). In the introduction of this work, after having gone over the different meanings of the word “narrative” in its common usage and that used by narrative analysts and theoreticians, Genette suggests using the word “story” for the “signified or narrative content”, using the word “narrative” for the “signifier<sup>8</sup>, statement, discourse or narrative text itself” – the term “narrating” designating “the producing of narrative action and by extension, the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place” (Genette 1980, 27). He then assigns to the analysis of narrative discourse the task of studying the “relationships between narrative and story, between narrative and narrating, and (to the extent that they are inscribed in the narrative discourse) between story and narrating” (*ibid.*, 29). At this stage, one can already formulate an explicit and rigorous definition of what narrative is to narratology. The narrative can be defined by two necessary properties, which are:

1. The property of telling a story (in other words a succession of causally linked events) “without which it would not be narrative (like, let us say, Spinoza’s *Ethics*)”, writes Genette (*ibid.*, 29).
2. That of being told by someone (who we could call a “narrator”) “without which (like, for example, a collection of archeological documents) it would not in itself be a discourse” (*ibid.*).

These two properties allow us to distinguish the object-narrative from other types of discourse (for example Spinoza’s argumentative discourse) and from other

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<sup>7</sup> And this is explicitly what Käte Hamburger’s *Logic of Literature* is driving at with the notion of “epic fiction” (see Hamburger 1993, 59–194 and *passim*).

<sup>8</sup> Taken from the linguist Saussure, the terms “signifier” and “signified” are synonymous here with “form” and “content” or the “manifestation plan” as opposed to “content plan”. They are not used by Genette 1988.

ways of telling a story<sup>9</sup> (the second example of archeological documents is, in this sense, much less telling<sup>10</sup>). I would like to point out that this definition of narrative as narrative discourse is implicitly accepted by René Rivara, who writes in the first chapter of *La Langue du récit*:

We only have access to the narrative (to the text), which alone informs us both of the story (the narrated content) and of the narrating (the act of creating the narrative), or at least of the pertinent aspects of the narration, which are detectable thanks to the linguistic and narratological traces it leaves in the text [...] (Rivara 2000, 19, my translation).

However, if we follow Genette's formulation (and hence also Rivara's), it remains unclear whether it concerns narrative in a general sense or specifically fictional narrative. This leads us to make the hypothesis that in addition to the properties of (1) telling a story and (2) being told by a narrator, the fictional narrative possesses a specific property which enables us to distinguish it from the narrative of real facts, historical or autobiographical (or "factual" narrative in Genette's terminology, see Genette 1993a, 55 ff.<sup>11</sup>). It is not easy to identify passages in Genette's work which explicitly describe this third property – I will simply mention this passage in *Fiction and diction* (Genette 1993a, 70): the "rigorous identification [of the author and the narrator], insofar as it can be established, defines factual narratives – in which, in Searle's terms (see Searle 1979)<sup>12</sup>, the author assumes full responsibility for the assertions of his narrative", "[c]onversely, their dissociation [...] defines fiction". It nevertheless seems to me that the repeated assertion of the narrator's fictive nature in fictional narratives, in both *Narrative Discourse* (Genette 1980, 214, 259) and *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (Genette 1988, 101, 139, 140, 141), fulfils the exact same function and I would not hesitate to define the third property as:

3. the property of having a fictive narrator.

When reading the works of Genette and other narratologists such as René Rivara, one rapidly notices the importance of this property in justifying narratology's methods and categories. It allows narratology to examine the fictional narrative "as narrative" and not "as fiction", in other words according to the same narratological and pragmatic modalities as factual narratives. I would like to insist on the fact that this is a construct. It is in no way obvious that a fictional narrative, which tells a fictive

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9 On the difference between "telling a story" and "being a narration", in the sense of being told by a narrator, see Schaeffer 1999, 302 ff. (in this chapter, Jean-Marie Schaeffer argues against the systematic use of the notion of narrator in film). Also see the former article by Michel Mathieu-Colas 1986, specifically pp. 94–96.

10 From a theoretical point of view, it is interesting to see Genette implicitly recognize the existence of texts outside of the communicational framework. On this type of text, see Philippe 2002.

11 Other theoreticians, such as Dorrit Cohn, prefer that of the "referential narrative", which gains meaning within their own theoretical system (see Cohn 1999, specifically 9–17 and 109–131).

12 In this article, Searle defines fiction's assertions as being feigned assertions.

story, is conceived as being told by a fictive narrator, telling a story made up of what he sees as real facts. Rivara considers that the distinction between real author and fictive narrator as well as between serious assertions and pseudo-assertions is an intuitively correct description of what happens in fictional narratives. It nevertheless needs to be supplemented by a precise linguistic analysis of the operation which establishes a fictive utterer-narrator and a fictive situation of utterance. Such an analysis would draw on the notion of “fictive locating” as developed by Antoine Culioli (see Rivara 2000, 300–307).<sup>13</sup>

The question remains whether the conception of the narrative according to Genette’s narratology and Rivara’s enunciative narratology can be successfully applied to all cases of narratives inherited from the past. It is important to remember that historically (see Fusillo 1991) the novel has offered examples not only of one, but two types of narratives, traditionally called “first person” and “third person” narratives.<sup>14</sup> In the first case, the narrator who designates himself by saying “I” is given as a character of the fiction (for example des Grieux telling his story to “l’homme de qualité”, or Félix de Vandenesse, introduced by Balzac as “a character who recounts the story in his stead” [Balzac 1978, 915, my translation], or the Proustian narrator). He is clearly fictive and his action of narrating is equally fictive. In the case of third person narratives, not only is the narrator not a character but his very existence generally goes unnoticed. It is obvious that the qualification of “fictive” applied to the narrator does not have the same meaning in both cases. To put it a bit bluntly: it either refers to the author’s creation, or to a creation or elaboration of the theory.<sup>15</sup>

Before continuing, I will briefly examine how Käte Hamburger constructs the object-narrative in *The Logic of Literature*. Firstly, one notices that no particular property defines the fictional narrative and the factual narrative as belonging to the

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13 We encounter the notion of “fictive locating” in the description given by Culioli of how hypothetical propositions function (e.g., “I would have left if he hadn’t called me”), the use in French of “bien” with the conditional (e.g., “Je boirais bien un verre de bière”, Engl. transl. “I’d like to drink a glass of beer”), as well as the case of games (e.g., “You are the robber, I’m the policeman”). “Fictive” means “an utterance in relation to a imaginary subjective location, unconnected to the current subject and enabling a complex representation: “<r> is the case’ is not necessarily the case”, in which <r> symbolizes the predicative relation, for example “He called me” (Culioli 1999a, 160, my translation).

14 I am well aware that these expressions are unsatisfactory, principally because of the misleading symmetry they establish between the two types of narrative. The “first person” narrative is a narrative in which the narrator designates himself by using the first person pronoun. The “third person” narrative is not a narrative in which the narrator designates himself by using a third person pronoun (which would correspond, if we are to stretch a bit, to the case of the “third person autobiography”, see Lejeune 1980, 32–58), but a narrative which only contains third person forms. Genette’s polemical rejection of the notion of the third person narrative will be examined in the second part of this article.

15 This confusion between literary and heuristic or methodological fiction is made apparent in the quotation of Genette’s preface to Hamburger 1986 (see above). Rivara seems to take more epistemological precautions when he writes: “Although the word ‘fictive’ is defined here in technical terms, in the framework of a specific linguistic theory, we have reason to think that this type of locating plays a predominant role in the enunciative analysis of ‘fictive’ narratives (in the usual sense of the term)” (Rivara 2000, 297, my translation). But as the reason is not given, we come up with about the same results.

same category. The specificity of the fictional narrative is posited from the outset in terms that discredit narratology's proposals:

[...] epic fiction, the product of narration, is not an object with respect to the narrative act. Its fictivity, that is, its non-reality, signifies that it does not exist independently of the act of narration, but rather that it only *is* by virtue of its being narrated, i.e., by virtue of its being a produce of the narrative act (Hamburger 1993, 136).

Narration is defined as a function or as a sum of introduction techniques (combining the narrative, properly speaking, the dialogue and the monologue, the free indirect style, etc.), that produces the fiction. It is fundamentally different from the utterance to which the historical narrative and "natural" narration belong (see Hamburger 1993, 68–71).

It should be specified that in Käte Hamburger's theory, the prototypical narrative is the third person narrative, traditionally referred to as omniscient. What Hamburger says is that the supposed dissociation between the author and the narrator in this type of narrative could be more aptly described as the absence of a narrator. The author is not a narrator: he does not "recount" in the usual sense; he uses the narrative function to constitute a fictive world, with fictive characters and events (his role is closer to that of a film maker than to that of an historian). Nor does he delegate the narrative to a fictive representative. Käte Hamburger's definition has the merit of clearing away the epistemological haze that surrounds the notion of the fictive narrator: "[...] only in cases where the narrative poet actually does 'create' a narrator, namely the first-person narrator of the first-person narrative, can one speak of the latter as a (fictive) narrator" (*ibid.*, 140). In her description of the first person narrative, we find all the properties of the fictional narrative in general as defined by narratology.

## Falsification

All narrative theory which aims to be considered as scientific theory must contain a certain number of hypotheses that can be submitted to falsification. To tie this into the first part of my article, I should say firstly that it seems to me that the hypothesis of the fictive narrator in Genette's narratology and Rivara's enunciative narratology is not falsifiable. Indeed, one can interpret any aspect – whether it be the system of tenses in the narrative or the double play of recounting in a constative mode a partially or totally imagined story – as justifying the hypothesis of the fictive narrator. Narratology's capacity for interpretation sometimes seems unlimited to me.<sup>16</sup> This does not mean that there are not, in its corpus, falsifiable hypotheses or hypotheses

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16 So it seems in this passage of Genette 1988, 101: "Even the first sentence of *The Killers* (the knee-jerk representation of "objective" narrative) – *The door of Henry's lunch room opened* – presupposes a narrator capable, among other things, of accepting the fictive familiarity of "Henry", the existence of the lunchroom, and the singleness of its door and thus, as it has so well be put, of *entering* into the fiction".

that possess a high degree of falsifiability. This is the case of Genette's assertion: "In my view every narrative is, explicitly or not, 'in the first person' since at any moment its narrator may use that pronoun to designate himself" (Genette 1988, 97).

Here I have quoted from *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, but this assertion was already made, in a slightly different form (using "virtually" instead of "explicitly or not" and with the cause formulated less clearly in linguistic terms), in the first *Narrative Discourse* (see Genette 1980, 244).<sup>17</sup> Moreover, in both cases it plays the same role, which is to confirm the need for a new typology of narratives, in terms of narrative relationship, "homodiegetic" or "heterodiegetic"<sup>18</sup>, rather than in terms of person. In Rivara we find the same argument pointing to the possibility of a narrator designating himself as "I" in a third person narrative (or an "anonymous" narrative in his own terminology, see Rivara 2000, 22 ff.).<sup>19</sup> In both Genette and Rivara, the anonymous or heterodiegetic narrator is thus the speaker of a narrative that is not in the first person (and who can, like any speaker, designate himself as "I"), just the same as the "I" is the speaker of a first person narrative. This hypothesis is testable, falsifiable and has been falsified, as we are going to see, by the work of Ann Banfield. However, the narratologists did not take into account this falsification and made the theory unfalsifiable.

Contrary to what one often hears, Banfield's argument does not solely depend on the existence of free indirect style in the novel as, on the one hand, there are other definitions of free indirect style<sup>20</sup> and on the other, free indirect style, as she defines it, only makes up one of these "unspeakable sentences" of which she tries to theorize.

Banfield's starting point, since her article in 1973, establishes a comparison between direct and indirect speech and a list of elements and constructions limited to either of these two modes of reported speech (the inversion of the subject in questions, exclamations, repetitions and hesitations, "incomplete" sentences, etc., in direct speech; the subordination of a verb of communication in indirect speech). In order to take into account the elements and constructions linked to direct speech and which are impossible to subordinate, Banfield suggests modifying the base postulate of generative grammar according to which each sentence consists of a nominal group followed by a verbal group (symbolically:  $S \rightarrow NP + VP$ ). She introduces an initial symbol which dominates S, noted as E (for "expression"), and

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17 The English translation does not contain "virtually".

18 These terms indicate, respectively, the presence or absence of the narrator as a character in the story he tells (see Genette 1980, 245 ff. and 1988, 97–98).

19 More precisely, he uses Danon-Boileau's (1982) terminology. Contrary to Genette, Rivara does not put the distinction between first person and third person narratives into question.

20 See, for example, Fludernik 1993, who insists on what she calls "non-standard" forms of free indirect style (which are not in the third person, which are not in the past and which appear in corpora other than the modern novel) and on the existence of oral free indirect speech. In France, the term "free indirect speech" is often assigned to a certain type of polyphony (or the use of the "words of others", see Authier 1978), which is neither direct nor indirect speech. Also see the debate on the question of whether free indirect style can be defined in strict linguistic terms or not.

of which the sentence NP + VP is only one of many possibilities amongst other “sentences” or other elements non-derivable from sentences.<sup>21</sup> What differentiates E and S is that E is not a recursive element (in other words, it does not have capacity to reappear an indefinite number of times in the same derivation): this is what explains that the elements and constructions dominated by E and different from S cannot be used in a subordinate sentence, most notably in the subordinate sentence of indirect speech. Let us take, for example, this “sentence” from *Mrs Dalloway* reported in direct speech: “*In love!*” *she said* (Woolf 1992, 49). It is an incomplete sentence, immediately dominated by E, which cannot be subordinated, and therefore reported as: \**She said that in love*. The symbol E is associated with a general interpretive principle which Banfield formulates as follows: “For every expression (E), there is a unique referent of *I* (the SPEAKER), to whom all the expressive elements are attributed, and a unique referent of *you* (the ADRESSEE or LISTENER)” (Banfield 1982, 57). In the example of *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa is the speaker and Peter Walsh her listener.

Free indirect style, which Banfield considers to be a characteristic technique of writing, neither complies with the syntax of direct speech nor with that of indirect speech and cannot be derived from underlying structures of both modes of reported speech. It seems evident that sentences of free indirect style are dominated by E and not by S. They possess all of its syntactical properties, in particular that of never being subordinate. Like sentences reported in direct speech, they can contain subject inversions in the interrogative form, exclamations, repetitions and hesitations, incomplete sentences, etc. We can see this at work in the following example, taken again from Virginia Woolf’s novel: *He was in love! Not with her! With some younger woman, of course!* (Woolf 1992, 49). In sentences such as these, the previously established relationship between the first person and the subjective expression no longer holds. We therefore need to reformulate the principle “1 E / 1 SPEAKER”, by dividing it into two basic principles:

<1 E / 1 SELF>: For every node E, there is at most one referent, called the “subject of consciousness” or SELF, to whom all expressive elements are attributed. That is, all realizations of SELF in E are coreferential.

<Priority of SPEAKER>: if there is an *I*, *I* is coreferential with the SELF. In the absence of an *I*, a third person pronoun may be interpreted as SELF (Banfield 1982, 93).

Following this principle of the speaker’s priority, the presence of a speaker who designate himself as “I” necessarily implies the presence of a subject of consciousness co-referent to the “I”; yet in other sentences of free indirect style, those with a subject of consciousness designated as “he” or “she”, the first person is ruled out (as is the second person, which characterizes the situations of communication).

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21 Initially listed by Quang Phuc Dong 1969 (Engl. transl. 1971): for example, “Shit on the flag”, “Hurrah for her”, etc. See also Milner 1978, 226–245, on the isolated use of “qualitative nouns”.



This can be verified by a simple test. In this sentence by Flaubert, for example: *Qu'importe! elle n'était pas heureuse, ne l'avait jamais été* (*What does it matter! She wasn't happy and never had been* [Flaubert 1951, 550, my translation]), the exclamation is attributed to "she", which refers to Emma Bovary. But if we add an "I", which would read something like: *Qu'importe! elle n'était pas heureuse, ne l'avait jamais été, à mon avis* (*What does it matter! She wasn't happy and never had been, to my mind*), the exclamation must be attributed no longer to Emma, but to the referent of the first person pronoun; there is no longer any trace of a subject of consciousness designated by using a third person pronoun. "Since no first person may appear in represented speech and thought except one interpretable as the E's SELF [...], this means that represented Es cannot be simultaneously attributed to a covert or "effaced" narrator" (Banfield 1982, 97). In other words, free indirect style as defined by Banfield presents a singular case of observation which falsifies narratology and Genette's hypothesis.

For Banfield, free indirect style signifies the withdrawal of the author as utterer (and all the more so of the narrator considered as the author's creation): it is the author who withdraws from the narrative while effacing all traces of his utterance<sup>22</sup>. In the study of the context in which free indirect style occurs, Banfield draws on Benveniste's analysis of utterance which he calls "historical" (and which Banfield suggests renaming "narrative" or more precisely "narration"): "there is [...] no longer even a narrator<sup>23</sup>. The events are set forth chronologically, as they occurred. No one speaks here; the events seem to narrate themselves. The fundamental tense is the aorist, which is the tense of the event outside the person of a narrator" (Benveniste 1971, 208). What remains is the objective function of the sentences, without a speaking subject or traces of subjectivity.<sup>24</sup>

Genette's presentation of Banfield's narrative theory in *Narrative Discourse Revisited* reads like something of a caricature. Here is a passage from his conclusion:

Narrative without a narrator, the utterance without an uttering, seem to me pure illusion and, as such, "unfalsifiable". Who has ever refuted the existence of an illusion? I can therefore set against its devotees only this regretful confession: "Your narrative without a narrator may perhaps exist, but for the forty-seven years during which I have been reading narratives, I have never met one". *Regretful* is, moreover, a term of pure politeness, for if I were to meet such a narrative, I would flee as quickly as my legs could carry me: when I open a book, whether it is a narrative or not, I do so to have the author *speak to me*. And since I am not yet deaf or dumb, sometimes I even happen to answer it (Genette 1988, 101–102).

22 See again Philippe 2002 for the description of the "formal device" of the effacing utterance.

23 I must specify that the word "narrator" here designates the author as narrator, *i.e.* that he recounts a narrative, and not the narrator of narratology whose conception was subsequent.

24 Which does not preclude there being, in "historical" or "narrative" texts, interventions of the author or a narrator created by the author in the "discourse" mode. For a description of utterance discontinuity in the narrative, see Kuroda 1976, 240 and Galbraith 1995, specifically 46–48.

This “realistic” judgement, in Bachelard’s sense<sup>25</sup>, does little to advance the theory. Moreover it is inexact to say that the hypothesis of an utterance without an utterer in free indirect style is not falsifiable. To refute Banfield’s hypothesis, one would need to prove not only that the intervention of a narrator who designates himself as “I” is possible in the free indirect style sentences of a particular narrative<sup>26</sup>, but also that such an intervention is systematically possible in the language and therefore capable of being formalized in the grammar of this language.

## Reductionism of Narrative Theory

This third and last part of my article concerns the question of identifying those elements which, in the literary text, and particularly in the narrative text, belong to language, as the object of formal linguistics, and those belonging to the narrative alone (even if it is made of linguistic matter). I will now set aside the Genettian narratology which never showed much interest in the “language of the narrative” (I will add that this is the title of Rivara’s work, see also Rivara 2000, 12 and *passim*<sup>27</sup>) and turn my attention to Rivara’s enunciative narratology and Banfield’s theory of narrative and free indirect style.

The reductionist character of Rivara’s enunciative narratology first appears in the assertion that “narrating, the activity of producing narratives, is nothing more than a particular type of utterance characterized by a specific situation of utterance” (Rivara 2000, 21, my translation), and in the two formulated theses: (a) “With the exception of time, [...] the categories of narratology (mode, voice, point of view) can only be defined subsequent to a purely linguistic analysis of the utterance” and (b) “[t]he failures and shortcomings of contemporary narratology, the confusion surrounding the term ‘focalization’, the fruitless efforts to establish even a rudimentary typology for narratives are due solely to the absence of enunciative linguistics indispensable to the study of literary narratives” (*ibid.*, 22, my translation). This is reasserted several times, for example in the chapter entitled “The utterance of the narrative”, which contains a new revision of Benveniste’s opposition of “history” and “discourse”<sup>28</sup>: “If one were to take very literally Benveniste’s assertion that ‘no

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25 “Listen to the realist argue: he *immediately* has an advantage over his adversary, because he believes he alone possesses the real, *the richness* of the real, while his adversary is caught up in illusions. In its naive form, in its emotional form, the realist’s certitude proceeds from a miserly bliss” (Bachelard 1993, 158, my translation). The “psychoanalysis of the realist” takes part in the denunciation of epistemological obstacles.

26 See, for example, McHale 1983, especially 37–38 (quoted as a post-scriptum addition in Genette’s bibliography 1988, 169). I am well aware of the innumerable discussions sparked by the publication in English of Banfield’s work; as interesting as some of them are, I consider that none can claim to have successfully falsified the main hypothesis of the theory.

27 One must not confuse this appeal to linguistics and its concepts and methods with what Genette himself (1980, 30) calls “linguistic metaphor”, which presides over the choice of the terms “time”, “mode” and “voice” to indicate the categories of narratology.

28 The first attempt of this sort can be attributed to Genette 1966 (Engl. transl. 1982, 138–143); also see Genette 1988, 99 (quoted by Rivara 2000, 50).

one speaks' in a narrative or historical text, one would come to the conclusion that enunciative linguistics is incapable of shedding light on this kind of text" (*ibid.*, 146). There is little need to stress the limitations of this reasoning, but I would like to point out that there are other definitions of the utterance which, not being founded on the couple utterer-situation of utterance, enable an analysis of "historical" or "narrative" texts from the standpoint of enunciative linguistics.<sup>29</sup> Yet what is even more important to point out, at least from my own epistemological perspective, is that the program of Rivara's enunciative narratology is based on a series of poorly justified reductions (such as his reducing fiction to "fictive locating") and that he allows clear contradictions to surface:

Apart from very rare cases [...], the anonymous narrator does not have the power to designate or describe himself as a person. Conversely, he is invested, as we have said, with powers which the speaker does not possess (unless we want to turn linguistics into a study of superhuman language) (Rivara 2000, 307, my translation).

We cannot maintain throughout a work of three hundred pages that the author and the narrator of the narrative are identifiable as, respectively, the "speaker" and the "fictive utterer" of Culioli's theory, and in the end be led to believe that the narrator of third person narratives is not an utterer – for we do not know what a "purely superhuman" language might be. This conception is not scientific and does not lend itself to investigation of this kind.<sup>30</sup>

Banfield is also reductionist though she never uses the term: "There can [...] be no *formal* literary theory that is not in some sense a linguistic theory" (Banfield 1983, 230). Yet unlike Rivara, she systematically explains and makes explicit the steps leading to this reductionist position (see Banfield 1982, 1–21 and Banfield 1983).

Above all, Banfield highlights the important distinction between "competence" and "performance" in linguistic theory (see Chomsky 1965, 3–15)<sup>31</sup>, and asks the following question: Is it possible to conceive a model of literary competence distinguished from the performance that texts are? The idea of literary competence should not be surprising; by literary competence we simply mean the capacity of certain utterers to produce literary texts identifiable as such, and that of other utterers to understand and interpret these texts.<sup>32</sup> Banfield, however, considers this

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29 See Ducrot 1984, 179: "What I am indicating by this term ['uttering', in French *énonciation*] is the event by which an utterance appears [...] I am not saying that the uttering is the act of someone producing an utterance: to my mind, it is simply the fact that an utterance appears [...]" (quoted by Philippe 2002, 26, my translation).

30 On the notion of the omniscient narrator, see Kuroda 1979, 256.

31 Competence is defined as "the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language"; the performance as "the actual use of language in concrete situations" (*ibid.*, 4). This distinction makes a non-functional, formal linguistic theory possible.

32 This aspect of literary competence can be simulated by computer. See the work of the Cognitive Science Research Group of the University of New York at Buffalo in Duchan *et al.* 1995.

conception of literary competence too vague. Most factors on which the creation and comprehension or interpretation of texts depend are erratic by nature and therefore escape attempts to formalize them. “What is required is an idealization of the text that – if inspired by linguistic analogy – is as adapted to the particular qualities of the literary as was Chomsky’s idealization from the utterance to the sentence” (Banfield 1983, 203). To Banfield’s mind, the style (or what she also calls the “language of narration” or the “language of fiction”) provides the type of idealization sought after, the style being, like the sentence, a notion that the utterers intuitively possess and a notion that can be given a definition or precise description in literary theory. On the other hand, everything not considered style is seen as performance; this is where disciplines such as literary history, criticism in all its forms, and even stylistics in its current incarnation regain their status. Banfield concentrates on the study of free indirect style, a sub-category of style (or “represented speech and thought” in her own terminology<sup>33</sup>). As we have seen in the second part of this article, the study of free indirect style defined as represented speech and thought clearly favors non-communicational narrative theory, which identifies the narrative’s sentences as either having a subject utterer or not, over communicational theory and in particular narratology.

We have also seen that the behavior of elements and constructions characteristic of free indirect style can be expressed by means of the symbol E, which allows to take into account the relation of implication between a subject and the expression of a subjectivity: “1 E / 1 ‘I’” in sentences of ordinary speech, for example in a sentence reported by using direct speech; “1 E / 1 SELF” in free indirect style sentences without an “I”. The E symbol or entity is an integral part of the ontology of Banfield’s theory (and that of Jean-Claude Milner in his *De la syntaxe à l’interprétation*). For both, the entity E exists as an element of linguistic reality. Yet this conception is far from being unanimously accepted by linguists. Some, as is the case with Antoine Culioli, see the symbol E as a pure theoretical artifact (see Culioli 1999, 59–61).<sup>34</sup> Others, such as Nicolas Ruwet, in his debate with Jean-Claude Milner, argue against using the E symbol and against the idea of its being made the initial symbol of grammar.<sup>35</sup> This being the case, we can at least say that Banfield’s reductionist assertion – according to which the behavior of elements and constructions characteristic of free indirect style are part of the language and can

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33 Adapted from Jespersen’s terminology 1965 (1924). See Banfield 1978a and b, and 1982, n. 14, 277–278. Until recently, the English language did not have a widely recognized term to refer to this style. The most currently used term, “free indirect discourse,” was adapted from the French.

34 It should be pointed out that Culioli’s critique concerns Banfield 1973 alone.

35 Among these arguments are those concerned with syntax (“The expansion of E according to Banfield is a syntactic holdall”, Ruwet 1982, 298) and others dealing with the association of the syntactical particularities of E, in particular that of never being subordinated, and of the interpretation principle reformulated by Milner, according to which the E necessarily expresses an emotion of the utterer (*ibid.*, 299 and 314). In conclusion, Ruwet suggests returning to a derivational approach of the “expressions” question.

be formalized in the grammar of this language – is inseparable from the elaboration of “another grammar”<sup>36</sup>, which is to say, another conception of language.<sup>37</sup>

Ending on this point, I will add that Banfield’s theory, as a scientific theory, is undeniably superior to other narrative theories and in particular narratology<sup>38</sup>, due simply to the fact that it explains more things than narratology does. It alone offers an explanation for the role of writing, as opposed to the oral, in the production and, as it happens, in the reception of narratives. In Banfield’s theory, it is by writing, in the sense of written composition and not of transcription of the oral, that a form such as free indirect style can be realized in the performance. This ties into the assessment already made by certain linguists (see, among others, Benveniste 1971; Simonin-Grumbach 1975) and corroborated by certain writers and critics<sup>39</sup>, that writing is the extra-linguistic factor that enables the author to withdraw from being the utterer of the narrative.

## Conclusion

We must rework or at least put into perspective our models for analyzing fictional narratives. As Bachelard wrote: “Through usage, ideas unduly *gain value*. A value in and of itself is opposed to the free movement of values. This is a factor of mental inertia” (Bachelard 1993, 17, my translation). The idea that all narratives have a fictive narrator who can, at any moment, identify himself as “I”, is an adamantly upheld “value” in narratology. In this sense, it is opposed to the rectification of errors and, in the end, to the very movement of ideas. Moreover, by renouncing the hypothesis of there being a narrator in all narratives, we are better able, I believe, to advance our understanding of the reader’s cognitive activity concerning the fictional narrative.<sup>40</sup>

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36 Milner (1978, 334) implicitly recognizes this difference when he speaks about “a grammar that uses Banfield’s concept of E” (my translation).

37 I should specify that these remarks do not invalidate the falsifying impact of Banfield’s argument, as presented in the second part of this article.

38 For a critique of oral interaction considered as a model or as a mode of communication by default, see Fludernik 1993, 58–65. See also her critique of the voice metaphor in Fludernik 2001, 619 ff.

39 One thinks, of course, of Maurice Blanchot’s reflections: see Blanchot 1982, specifically 26–28, and 1993. See also Banfield 1985 and 1998, two articles devoted wholly and in part to the work of Blanchot.

40 I would like to take for proof Schaeffer’s difficulties reconciling narratology and cognitive psychology’s contribution to understanding fiction (see Schaeffer 1999, specifically 255–256 and 269–270). For a more developed theory of the cognitive processes associated with reading fiction, see Duchan et al. 1995 (this work is not mentioned in Schaeffer’s bibliography).

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