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## The Logic of Narrative Possibilities\*

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SEMIOLOGICAL STUDY of narrative can be divided into two parts: on the one hand, an analysis of the techniques of narrative; on the other, a search for the laws which govern the narrated matter. These laws themselves depend upon two levels of organization: they reflect the logical constraint that any series of events, organized as narrative, must respect in order to be intelligible; and they add to these constraints, valid for all narrative, the conventions of their particular universe which is characteristic of a culture, a period, a literary genre, a narrator's style, even of the narration itself.

After examining the method used by Vladimir Propp to discover the specific characteristics of one of these particular domains, that of the Russian folktale, I became convinced of the need to draw a map of the logical possibilities of narrative as a preliminary to any description of a specific literary genre. Once this is accomplished, it will be feasible to attempt a classification of narrative based on structural characteristics as precise as those which help botanists and biologists to define the aims of their studies. But this widening perspective entails the need for a less rigorous method. Let us recall and spell out the modifications which seem indispensable:

First, the basic unit, the narrative atom, is still the *function*, applied as in Propp, to actions and events which, when grouped in sequences, generate the narrative.

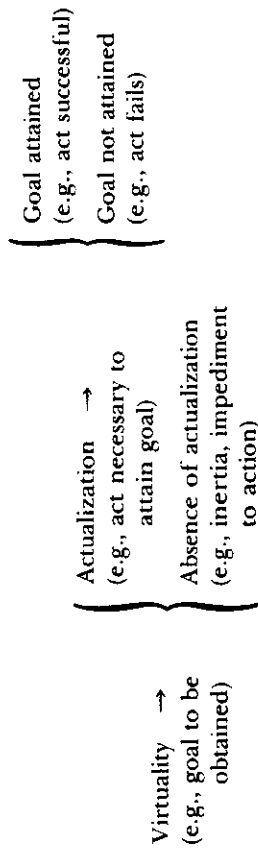
Second, a first grouping of three functions creates the *elementary sequence*. This triad corresponds to the three obligatory phases of any process: a function which opens the process in the form of an act to be carried out or of an event which is foreseen; a function which achieves this virtuality in the form of an actual act or event; and a function which closes the process in the form of an attained result.

Third, the foregoing differ from Propp's method in that none of these functions lead necessarily to the following function in the sequence. On the contrary, when the function which opens the se-

COVER DESIGN: René Magritte, *Le Château des Pyrénées*. Photograph by Carl Schramm. Reproduced from *La Belle Captive* by Alain Robbe-Grillet.

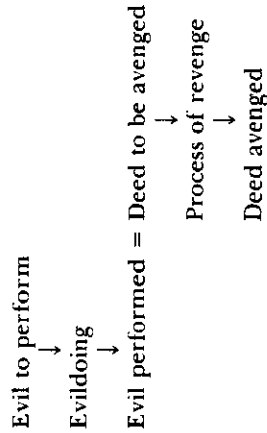
\* This article is a translation of "La Logique des possibles narratifs," *Communications*, 8 (1966), 60-76.

quence is proposed, the narrator always has the choice of having it followed by the act or of maintaining it in a state of virtuality: when an act is presented as having to be realized, or if an event is foreseen, the actualization of the act or of the event can just as well take place as not. If the narrator chooses to actualize the act or the event, he still has the choice of allowing the process to continue on to its conclusion, or he can stop it on the way: the act can attain or fail to attain its goal; the event can follow or not follow its course up to the end which was foreseen. The network of possibilities opened in this way by the elementary sequence follows this pattern:



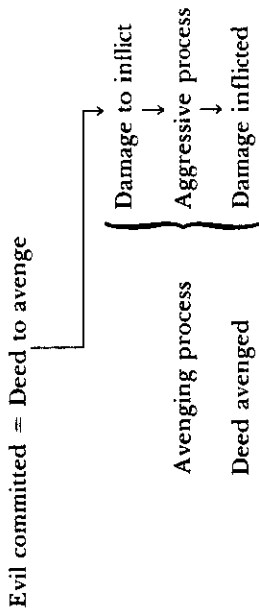
The elementary sequences combine so as to produce complex sequences. These combinations are realized according to variable configurations. Here are the most typical:

(1) The end-to-end series, for example:



The symbol = which we have used signifies that the same event simultaneously fulfills, within the perspective of a single role, two distinct functions. In our example, the same reprehensible action is qualified, from the perspective of an avenger, as the end of a process (evildoing) in relation to which he plays the passive role of witness and as the opening of another process in which he will play an active role (punishment).

(2) The enclave, for example:



itself will become the basis for a classification of the roles assumed by the characters in the story.

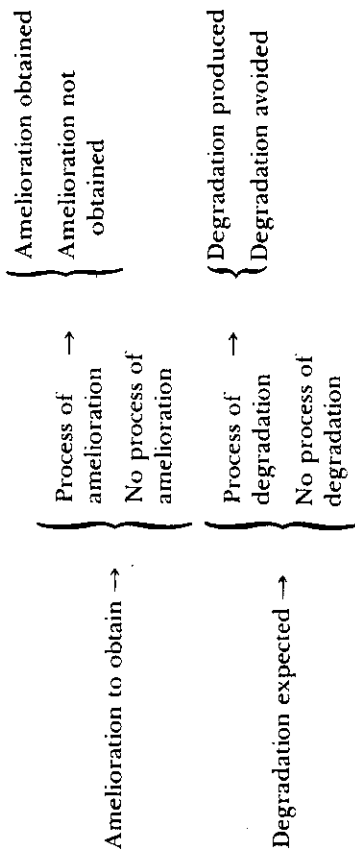
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### II. The Narrative Cycle

All narrative consists of a discourse which integrates a sequence of events of human interest into the unity of a single plot. Without succession there is no narrative, but rather description (if the objects of the discourse are associated through spatial contiguity), deduction (if these objects imply one another), lyrical effusion (if they evoke one another through metaphor or metonymy). Neither does narrative exist without integration into the unity of a plot, but only chronology; an enunciation of a succession of uncoordinated facts. Finally, where there is no implied human interest (narrated events neither being produced by agents nor experienced by anthropomorphic beings), there can be no narrative, for it is only in relation to a plan conceived by man that events gain meaning and can be organized into a structured temporal sequence.

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According to whether they favor or oppose this plan, the events of a given narrative can be classed under two basic types which develop according to the following sequences:



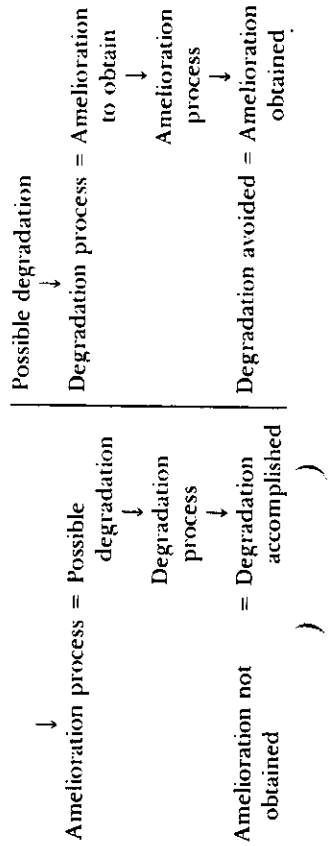
Each elementary sequence which we will eventually isolate is a specification of one or the other of these two categories, which thus establishes the first principle of dichotomous classification. Before examining the various sequences, let us specify the modalities according to which amelioration and degradation combine in a narrative:

(1) By end-to-end succession. It can immediately be seen that narration can alternate phases of amelioration and degradation according to a continuous cycle:

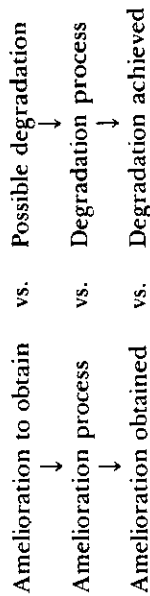


However, and this is not quite so obvious, this alternation is not only possible but necessary. Let us consider the beginning of a story which presents a deficiency affecting an individual or a group (in the form of poverty, illness, stupidity, lack of a male heir, chronic plague, desire for knowledge, love, etc.). For this beginning to develop, the situation must evolve; something must happen which will bring a modification. In what direction? One might suppose either toward amelioration or degradation. Rightfully, however, only an amelioration is possible. Misfortune may, of course, grow worse. There are narratives in which misfortunes follow one after the other so that each degradation brings on another. But in this case the deficiency which marks the end of the first degradation is not the real point of departure of the second. This intermediary interruption—this *reprieve*—is functionally equivalent to a period of amelioration, or at least to a phase which represents the preservation of what can still be saved. The departure point of the new phase of degradation is not the degraded condition, which can only be improved, but the still relatively satisfying state which can only be degraded. Likewise, two amelioration processes cannot follow one another, inasmuch as the improvement brought about by the first still leaves something to be desired. By implying this lack, the narrator introduces the equivalent of a phase of degradation. The still relatively deficient condition which results acts as a point of departure for the new amelioration phase.

(2) By enclave. The failure of a process of amelioration or degradation in progress may result from the insertion of a reverse process which prevents it from reaching its normal conclusion. In this case we have the following schemata:



(3) By coupling. The same sequence of events cannot at the same time and in relation to the same agent be characterized both as amelioration and degradation. On the contrary, this simultaneity becomes possible when the event affects at one and the same time two agents moved by opposing interests: the degradation of the fate of the one coincides with the amelioration of the fate of the other. This produces the following schema:

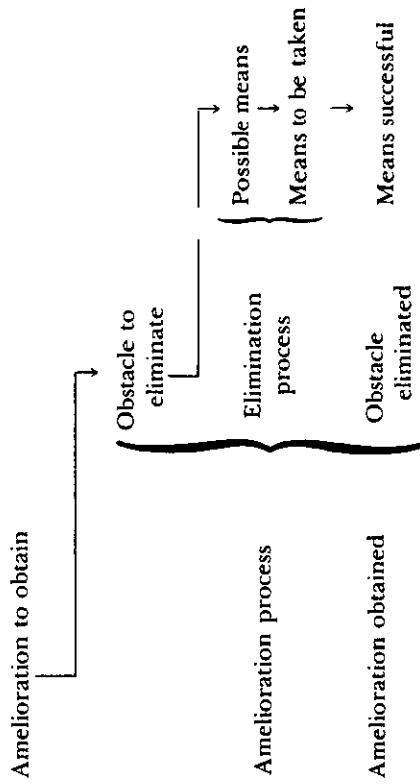


The fact that it is possible and indeed necessary to change viewpoints from the perspective of one agent to that of another is capital for the remainder of our study. It implies the rejection, at our level of analysis, of the notions of Hero, Villain, etc., conceived as labels and attached once and for all to the characters. Each agent is his own hero. His partners are defined from his point of view as allies, adversaries, etc. These definitions are reversed when passing from one perspective to another. Rather than outline the narrative structure in relation to a privileged point of view—the hero's or the narrator's—the patterns that are herein developed will integrate the many perspectives belonging to diverse agents into the unity of a single schema.

### III. Amelioration Process

The narrator can limit himself to indicating an amelioration process without explicitly outlining its phases. If he simply says that the hero solves his problems or that he gets well, becomes good, handsome, or rich, these specifications which deal with the contents of the development without specifying how it comes about cannot help us to characterize its structure. On the contrary, if he tells us that the hero solves his problems after a long period of trials, if the cure is the result of a medication or of a doctor's efforts, if the hero regains his beauty thanks to a compassionate fairy, his riches because of an advantageous transaction, or his wits following the resolutions he makes after committing an error, then we can use the articulations within these operations to differentiate diverse types of amelioration: the more detail the narrative provides, the further this differentiation can be carried out.

Let us first consider things from the perspective of the beneficiary of the amelioration. (It should be understood that the beneficiary is not necessarily aware of the process engaged in his favor. His perspective can remain in a potential state, like that of Sleeping Beauty while she waits for her Prince Charming.) His initial state of deficiency implies the presence of an *obstacle* which prevents the realization of a more satisfying state. The elimination of the obstacle implies intervening factors which act as means taken against the obstacle and in favor of the beneficiary. So that if the narrator chooses to develop this episode, his narrative will follow the schema:



At this stage we may be dealing with a single dramatis persona, the beneficiary of the amelioration, who benefits passively from a fortunate combination of circumstances. In this case neither he nor anyone else bears the responsibility for having brought together and activated the means which overturned the obstacle. Things "turned out well" without anyone's having seen to them.

There is no such solitude when the amelioration, rather than being ascribed to chance, is attributed to the intervention of an agent endowed with initiative who assumes it as a *task to accomplish*. The amelioration process is then organized into behavior, which implies that it takes on the structure of a network of ends and means which can be analyzed ad infinitum. In addition, this transformation introduces two new roles: on the one hand, the agent who assumes the task for the benefit of a passive beneficiary acts, in relation to that beneficiary, no longer as an inert means, but as one endowed with initiative and with his own interests: he is an *ally*. On the other hand, the obstacle confronted by the agent can also be represented by an agent, also endowed with initiative and his own interests: this agent is an

*adversary*. In order to take these new dimensions into account we must examine: the structure of the completion of the task and its possible developments, the full details of the alliance relationship brought about by the intervention of an ally, and the modalities and the consequences of the action undertaken against an adversary.

#### IV. Completion of the Task

The narrator can limit himself to mentioning the performance of the task. If he chooses to develop this episode, he must make clear first the nature of the obstacle encountered, then the structure of the measures taken to eliminate it—intentionally, and not by chance this time. The agent can be lacking these means, perhaps intellectually if he is ignorant of what he must do, or materially if he does not have the necessary tools at his disposal. The recognition of this lack is equivalent to a phase of degradation which, in this case, takes on the specific form of a problem to solve and which, as before, can be dealt with in two ways: things either work out by themselves (heaven may unexpectedly provide the sought-for solution) or an agent may assume the task of arranging them. In this case, this new agent acts as an ally intervening for the benefit of the first who becomes in turn the passive beneficiary of the assistance thus given him.

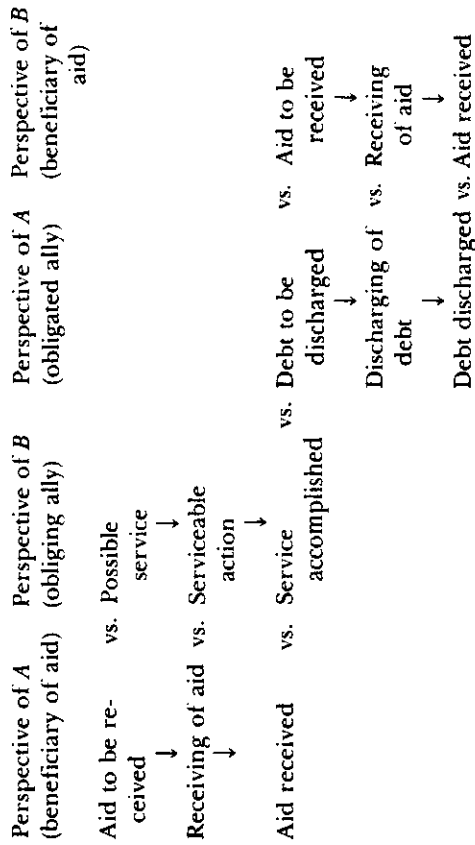
#### V. Intervention of the Ally

It is possible that the ally's intervention, in the form of an agent who takes charge of the amelioration process, not be given a motive by the narrator, or that it be explained by motives having no link with the beneficiary (if the aid is involuntary). In this case one cannot really speak of the intervention of an ally: deriving from fortuitous encounter between two tales, the amelioration is the product of chance.

Things are quite different when the intervention is motivated, from the ally's point of view, by the merits of the beneficiary. In that case the aid is a sacrifice consented to within the framework of an exchange of services. This exchange itself can assume three forms: either (1) the aid is received by the beneficiary in exchange for assistance which he himself offers his ally in an exchange of simultaneous services: the two parameters are in this case jointly responsible for the accomplishment of a task of mutual interest; or (2) the aid is offered in gratitude for a past service: in this case the ally acts as the beneficiary's *debtor*; or (3) the aid is offered in the hope of future compensation: in this case the ally acts as the beneficiary's *creditor*.

Three types of allies and three narrative structures are thus determined by the chronological ordering of the services exchanged. If two associates are jointly interested in the completion of a single task, the perspective of the beneficiary and that of the ally come so close together as to coincide: each one is the beneficiary of his own efforts united with those of his ally. In a final stage there could be a single character split into two roles: when an unhappy hero decides to right his fate by "helping himself," he splits into two dramatic personae and becomes his own ally. The completion of the task represents a voluntary degradation, a sacrifice (a fact which is supported by the expressions "to do something with great pain," "to toil," etc.) whose purpose is to pay the price of an amelioration. Whether it is a question of a single character who divides in two, or of two interdependent characters, the role configuration remains identical: the amelioration is obtained through the sacrifice of an ally whose interests are the same as those of the beneficiary.

Rather than coincide, the perspectives oppose one another when the beneficiary and his ally form the couple creditor/debtor. Their roles then take on the following form: for example, *A* and *B* must each obtain an amelioration distinct from that of the other. If *A* receives *B*'s aid in order to achieve amelioration *a*, *A* becomes *B*'s debtor and will be obliged in turn to help *B* achieve amelioration *b*. The narrative will follow the schema:



The three types of allies that we have just distinguished—the interdependent associate, the creditor, the debtor—act according to a pact which regulates the exchange of services and guarantees the repayment of services rendered. Sometimes this pact remains implicit (it is understood . . . *at hard work*) is worthy of payment, that a son must

obey the father who gave him life, that a slave obey the master who saved his life, etc.); sometimes the pact is the result of a particular negotiation, spelled out in the narrative more or less specifically. Just as it was necessary to search for means before implementing them when their lack constituted an obstacle to the completion of the task, so aid must be negotiated when an ally does not cooperate spontaneously. Within the framework of this preliminary task, the abstention of a future ally makes of him an adversary who has to be convinced. This negotiation, soon to be discussed, constitutes the peaceful way of eliminating an adversary.

## VI. Elimination of the Adversary

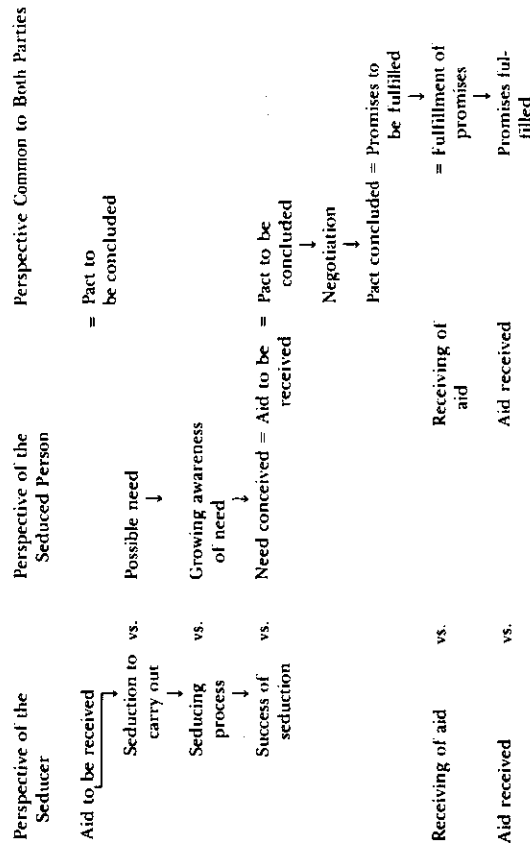
Among the obstacles which prevent the completion of a task, some, as we have seen, present only an inert force; others take on the form of adversaries, agents endowed with initiative who can react through chosen acts to the procedures undertaken against them. The result is that the procedure for eliminating the adversary must be organized according to more or less complex strategies in order to take this resistance and its diverse forms into account.

We need not consider the case in which the adversary disappears without the agent's bearing the responsibility for his elimination (if he dies of natural causes, falls under the blows of another enemy, becomes more accommodating with age, etc.): in that case there is only a fortuitous amelioration. Taking into account only cases where the elimination of the adversary is attributable to the initiative of an agent, we will distinguish two forms: (1) peaceful—the agent tries to influence the adversary so that he cease opposition to the agent's plans. This is *negotiation* which transforms the adversary into an ally; (2) hostile—the agent attempts to inflict damage upon the adversary which will incapacitate him and therefore prevent him from any longer opposing the agent's endeavors. This is aggression, which aims to suppress the adversary.

## VII. Negotiation

The negotiation consists for the agent in defining, in agreement with the ex-adversary and future ally, the modalities of exchange of services which constitute the goal of their alliance. But it is still necessary that the principle of such an exchange be accepted by both parties. The agent who takes such an initiative must act so as to create a

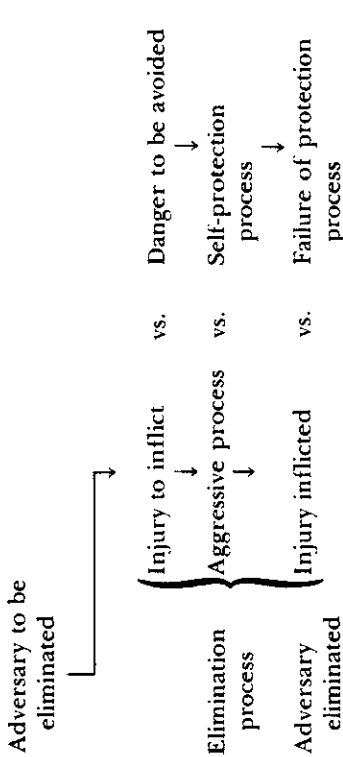
corresponding desire in his partner. In order to obtain this result he can use either *seduction* or *intimidation*. If he chooses seduction he will try to create the need for a service that he will offer in exchange for the one he needs; if he chooses intimidation he tries to create fear of the harm he can cause, but spare just as well, and which can act as a payment for the service he wants to obtain. If this operation succeeds the two partners are equal. *A* desires a service from *B* as *B* does of *A*. The conditions which make the search for an agreement possible are established. There remains to negotiate the modalities of the exchange and to guarantee that all engagements will be faithfully carried out. The following is a simplified schema of negotiation by seduction:



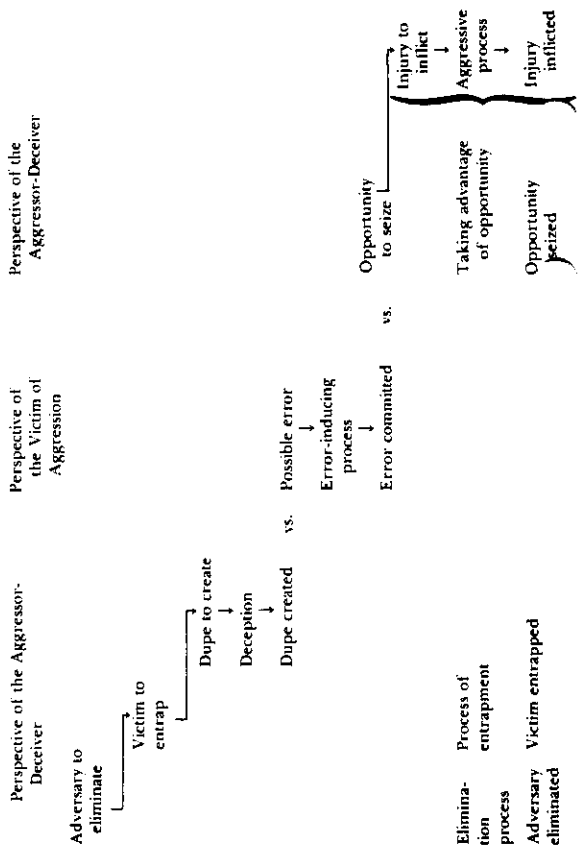
## VIII. Aggression

When he opted for negotiation, the agent chose to eliminate his adversary by an exchange of services which transformed him into an ally; when opting for aggression, he chooses to inflict an injury which will do away with the adversary (at least insofar as he is an obstacle). From the perspective of the victim of aggression, the beginning of this process constitutes a danger which, if it is to be avoided, will normally require an act of self-protection. If this act fails the following occurs:

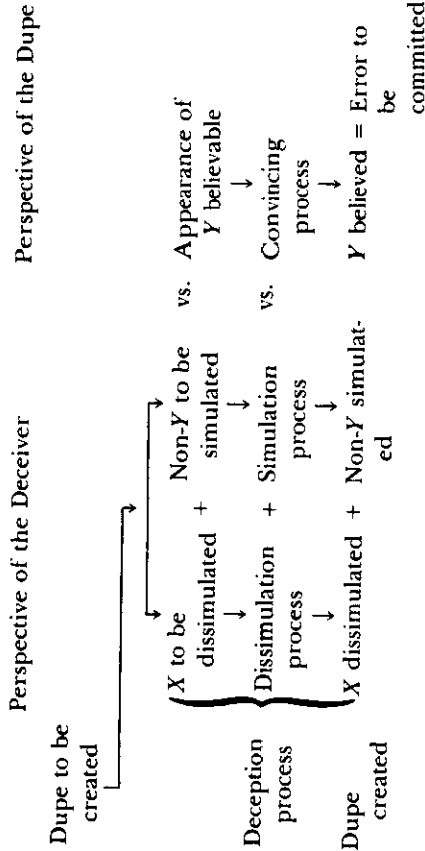
Perspective of the Aggressor  
 Adversary to be eliminated



In the above schema it is the aggressor who retains the advantage. However, this is obviously not always the case. If the adversary seems to have at his disposal efficient methods of self-protection, it is desirable for the aggressor to catch him off guard. In that case the aggressor takes on the more complex form of a trap. To use a trap is to act so that the victim of aggression, instead of protecting himself as he could, cooperates unknowingly with the aggressor (by not doing what he ought to, or by doing what he ought not to). The trap is set in three stages: first, a deception; then, if the deception succeeds, an error committed by the dupe; finally, if the error-inducing process is brought to its conclusion, the deceiver exploits his acquired advantage, which places a disarmed adversary at his mercy:



The deception, first of the three phases of the trap, is in itself a complex operation. Deception consists of several actions carried on simultaneously: the dissimulation of what is, the simulation of what is not, and the substitution of what is not for what is in order to create a semblance of truth to which the dupe reacts as if it were real. In any deception two combined operations can thus be distinguished, a *dissimulation* and a *simulation*. Dissimulation itself is not sufficient to constitute the deception (except insofar as it simulates the absence of dissimulation); neither does simulation by itself suffice, for an open simulation (that of an actor, for example) is not a deception. In order to go after the bait, the dupe must think it real and be unaware of the hook. The following diagram outlines the deception mechanism:



When the classification is further developed, several types of deception can be distinguished. Differences are created by the type of simulation used by the deceiver to disguise the aggression being planned: (1) the deceiver can simulate a situation implying the absence of any relationship between him and the future victim; he pretends not to be there, literally (if he hides) or figuratively (if he pretends to be asleep, to look away, to lose his mind, etc.); (2) the deceiver can simulate peaceful intentions: he proposes an alliance, tries to seduce or intimidate his victim, while he secretly prepares to break off the negotiations or to betray the pact; (3) the deceiver simulates aggressive intentions so that the dupe, busy defending himself against an imaginary assault, leaves himself open and defenseless against the real attack.

### IX. Retributions: Recompense and Vengeance

The injury (inflicted by ) aggressor on his victim can be consid-

ered as a service in reverse, no longer consented to by the creditor but extorted by the debtor and requiring in return the infliction of an injury of similar proportions, comparable to receiving payment for an open debt: the debtor pays, despite himself, the amount of a loan he was forced to incur. Reward for a service rendered and vengeance directed against an incurred wrong are the two faces of retribution. Like payment for services, payment for wrongs is the consequence of a pact which is at times implicit (all evil acts deserve punishment, an eye for an eye, etc.), at times explicit, spelled out in the terms of a specific alliance which outlines a threat against breaking a contract.

A new type, the *retributor*, and two subtypes, the *rewarding retributor* and the *avenging retributor*, appear here. The retributor is, so to speak, the guarantor of contracts. From his point of view every service becomes a good deed which requires reward and every injury an evil deed which calls for punishment. His role coincides with that of the debtor who pays his debts on time, making up for the failings of the insolvent or recalcitrant debtor.

## X. Degradation Process

An amelioration process which has been brought to a conclusion brings about a state of equilibrium which can signal the end of the narrative. If he chooses to go on, the narrator must recreate a state of tension, and in order to do this, he must introduce new obstacles or activate potential dangers temporarily dormant. A degradation process is then initiated. At times this process is the result of unmotivated and unplanned factors, such as when the hero becomes ill, begins to weary, sees new clouds come up over the horizon, without these factors—the illness, the cares, or the clouds—being presented as responsible agents endowed with initiative, whose actions could be considered as behavior apt to bring about a specific result. In this case the degradation process remains unspecific or explained only by bad luck or by a combination of unfortunate circumstances. At other times, however, it can be the result of the initiative of a responsible agent (a man, an animal, an object, an anthropomorphic entity). This agent can be the beneficiary himself if he commits an error which has serious consequences; he can be an aggressor; he can even be a creditor to whom the beneficiary is indebted (following the performance of a service or the infliction of an injury). Finally, he can be a debtor in favor of whom the beneficiary resolutely chooses to sacrifice himself.

We have already encountered these forms of degradation. They are not only opposites of the forms of amelioration, but, since it is possible

to pass from one perspective to another, they can be considered complements: (1) degradation brought about by sacrifice consented to for the benefit of an indebted ally corresponds to amelioration achieved through service received from an allied creditor; (2) degradation caused by fulfilling an obligation to an allied creditor corresponds to amelioration due to a service received from an indebted ally; (3) degradation undergone by submission to aggression corresponds to amelioration achieved through the infliction of aggression; (4) degradation through error (which can be considered as the opposite of a task: by doing, not what he ought, but what he ought not to, the agent attains a goal which is opposite to the one envisaged) corresponds to amelioration brought about by the success of a trap; (5) degradation caused by punishment endured corresponds to amelioration realized through vengeance obtained.

The degradation process initiated by these factors can develop without encountering obstacles, either because these obstacles do not appear on their own, or because no one has the desire or the ability to intervene. If on the contrary obstacles occur, they act as devices which protect the satisfactory state which came before. These devices may be purely fortuitous, resulting from a fortunate combination of circumstances; they can also represent the resistance of an agent endowed with initiative. In this last case they form a pattern of acts whose structure depends both on the shape of the danger and on the tactics chosen by the protector.

These protective devices can succeed or fail. If they fail, the degradation which follows opens the possibility of compensating amelioration processes from among which certain ones, as we will see, take on the form of a reparation specifically adapted to the type of degradation undergone.

## XI. The Error

The process of error can be characterized as a task accomplished in reverse: since he is induced to err, the agent sets in motion means necessary to attain a result opposite to his goal or to destroy the advantages he wants to conserve. As this reverse task proceeds, harmful processes are considered as means, whereas the rules made to gain or keep an advantage are treated as obstacles.

The narrator can present these rules as if they were impersonal, deriving from the simple "nature of things"; if they are transgressed, harm is suffered only by the imprudent one who, by setting off a fatal chain of cause and effect, himself sanctions the error he has committed.

ted. But these rules can also be interdictions issuing from the will of a legislator. In this case it is a question of restrictive clauses when an "obliging" ally enters into a treaty with an "obliged" ally. The latter is urged to observe them in order to profit from or go on profiting from a service (to stay in Eden, etc.). Transgression of the rule harms the "ally-creditor," and it is this injury which may bring about the intervention of a retributor punishing the betrayal of the pact. The error consists, in this case, not in the infraction itself, but in the illusion of being able to break the rules with impunity.

Since the fault is primarily caused by blindness, this form of degradation brings on a specific form of protection, either a warning which forestalls the error or an attempt at enlightenment which dissipates the illusion. Sometimes events opportunely take over the protection process; in other cases shrewd allies assume the task. When stating or restating the rule, they tend to incarnate it even if they did not originate it; if the dupe ignores their advice, this stubbornness is injurious to them, and the catastrophe which follows acts at the same time as the punishment for this new transgression.

While the ally who incarnates the rule is treated as an adversary, the adversary who helps to break it is treated as an ally. If he is unaware of the consequences of the pseudo-help he is furnishing, he himself is a dupe; but if he is aware of them, he is a deceiver. In the latter case the deception takes place as the preparatory phase of a trap, in an aggression maneuver.

Degradation resulting from an error can mark the end of the narrative. The meaning of such a story is contained in the difference between the desired goal and the actually achieved result: the psychological opposition which corresponds to this meaning is presumption vs. humiliation. If the narrator chooses to go on, he disposes of the various types of amelioration which we have pointed out. Among these, however, there is one which is specifically suited to repairing the consequences of the error because it represents the opposite process: that is, the completion of a task through which the agent, this time with adequate means, uses his ability to reinstate the prosperity ruined by his foolishness.

## XII. The Debt

We have already discussed the case of amelioration obtained through the assistance of an ally-creditor. This loan which requires the beneficiary to pay his debt later on provokes a degradation phase. This will occur in the same way each time the one who is "obliterated" is

required to perform an unpleasant duty. Obligation, as we have seen, can result from a properly drawn up contract explained in a previous phase of the narrative (e.g., selling one's soul to the devil). It can also derive from the "natural" dispositions of society: a son must obey his father, a vassal his lord, etc.

Called upon to perform his duty, the debtor can try to protect himself against the threat of degradation. His creditor becomes an aggressor from whom he tries to escape either by breaking contact (by fleeing) or by peaceful and honest means (by negotiating a revision of the contract) or by aggressive means (by provoking a revolt strength or setting a trap). In a case where he thinks he has been the victim of deceit, avoiding his promises aggressively seems to him not only an act of self-defense, but a way of reestablishing justice. From the perspective of the creditor, on the other hand, avoiding the promises doubles the debt: the debtor will have to pay not only for a service but also for an injury.

If, on the other hand, the debtor cannot or will not shirk his duties, if he honors them willingly, or if he is despite himself forced to fulfill them, his resulting state of degradation can mark the end of the narrative (e.g., *Jephthah's Daughter*). If the narrator wants to go on, he can resort to the various forms of amelioration that we have mentioned. One of them, nevertheless, is privileged: it consists of transforming the accomplishment of the task into a sacrifice worthy of merit, which in its turn requires recompense. Paying the debt is thereby turned into a reopening of credit.

## XIII. The Sacrifice

Whereas other forms of degradation are processes which must be endured, sacrifice is a voluntary act, performed with the idea of acquiring merit or at least of becoming worthy of reward. A sacrifice occurs every time an ally renders a service without being so obliged, whether a pact spells out the expected return payment or such payment is left to the discretion of a retributor.

Sacrifice thus presents the twofold aspect of precluding protection and of calling for reparation. Normally, the sacrificial process must proceed to a conclusion with the help of the victim (if the sacrifice appears to be folly, allies can give warnings, but this protection is carried out against the decision, which constitutes an error, and not against the sacrifice itself). On the other hand, degradation resulting from a sacrifice calls for a reparation in the form of recompense, and it is at this stage that protection can intervene. The pact, with the guarantees (oaths, hostages etc.) which accompany it, so provides.

#### XIV. Aggression Endured

Endured aggression differs from other types of degradation in that it results from behavior which intentionally proposes committing harm as an end to an action. To attain his goal, an enemy can either act directly with a frontal attack or maneuver obliquely, trying to bring about and use other forms of degradation. Two of these are well suited to this maneuver: *error*, through which the victim of aggression, led to err by his enemy, lets himself be led into a trap; *obligation*, through which the victim of aggression, bound to his aggressor by an irrevocable engagement, must perform a duty which ruins him (it happens frequently that the aggressor combines the two processes: he deceives his victim by suggesting a bargain which fools him, then eliminates him by requiring the execution of the contract).

The victim of aggression has the choice of protecting himself or not. If he chooses protection, the available means can be regrouped into three strategies: first, to try to suppress all relationships with the aggressor, to escape from his field of action, to *flee*; next, to accept the relationship with him, but to try to transform the hostile rapport into a peaceful rapport, to *negotiate* (see above); finally, to accept the hostile relationship, but to render blow for blow, to *give battle*.

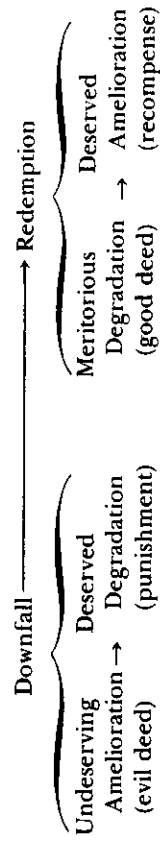
If these protective measures are inefficient, the aggressor inflicts the expected damage. The state of degradation which results can indicate the end of the narration for the victim. If the narrator chooses to continue, a phase dealing with reparation of the injury is opened. This can be achieved according to any of the modalities of amelioration which we have defined (the victim can get better, can take on the task of repairing the harm, can receive charitable help, can turn against other enemies, etc.). However, in addition to these measures, a specific form of reparation exists: *vengeance*, which, rather than restore to the victim payment equivalent to the damages incurred, inflicts on the aggressor the equivalent of the harm he caused.

#### XV. Punishment

From the perspective of a retributor any inflicted injury can become an evil deed to be punished. From the point of view of the accused, the retributor is an aggressor, and the punitive action he begins is a threat of degradation. The accused may either submit to or defend himself against the danger thus created. In the latter case, the three strategies indicated above—flight, negotiation, *fest* of

strength—are equally possible. However, we will concern ourselves here only with negotiation, for it supposes the collaboration of the retributor and refers us to an examination of the conditions in which he may allow himself to be persuaded to give up his task. In order for the situation, *Evil deed to be punished*, to disappear or at least to be no longer perceived, one of the three roles (the guilty person, the victim, or the retributor himself) must lose its designation. The victim is disqualified by a *pardon* which enables the retributor to reestablish the normal conditions of a pact between the former guilty party and the victim. Pardon is always conditional, for it retroactively transforms the injury inflicted into a service obtained and demands a proportional service in exchange. The retributor disqualifies himself by *corruption* (obtained by seduction or intimidation) which establishes between the guilty party and himself the relationship of parties to a pact (he transforms the harm to be inflicted on the guilty one into a service to be rendered him and obtains in exchange a proportionate service). Finally, the guilty one is disqualified by the dissimulation of his evil deed. He induces the retributor to err by pretending to be innocent or possibly by having an innocent person appear guilty in his place.

If these protective measures fail, the degradation which results from the punishment can mark the end of the narration, which is in this case constructed according to the opposition *Evil deed/Punishment*. If the narrator chooses to go on, he must introduce an amelioration obtained through sacrifice: corresponding to the evil deed—which is an attempt at undeserved amelioration carrying with it a degradation through punishment—is redemption, which is an attempt at meritorious degradation carrying with it the rehabilitation of the guilty one, according to the schema:



Amelioration, degradation, reparation: the narrative circle is now closed, opening the possibility of new degradations followed by new reparations according to a cycle which can repeat itself indefinitely. Each of the phases can itself be developed ad infinitum. But in the course of its development it will become specified, through a series of alternative choices, into a hierarchy of enclaved sequences, always the same, which exhaustively determine the field of the narratable. The linking of functions in the elementary sequence, then of elementary sequences in a complex sequence, is both free and controlled at the

same time: free (for the narrator must at every moment *choose* the continuation of his story) and controlled (for the narrator's only choice, after each option, is between the two discontinuous and contradictory terms of an alternative). It is therefore possible to draw up a priori the integral network of choices offered; to name and to place in the sequence each type of event brought about by these choices; to link these sequences organically in the unity of a role; to coordinate the complementary roles which define the evolution of a situation; to link evolutions in a narration which is at one and the same time unpredictable (because of the play of available combinations) and codifiable (because of the stable properties and the finite number of combined elements).

At the same time this production of narrative types is a structuring of human behavior patterns acted out or undergone. They furnish the narrator with the model and substance of an organized evolution which is indispensable to him and which he could not find elsewhere. Whether it be desired or feared, their end rules over an arrangement of actions which succeed one another and form hierarchies and dichotomies according to an inviolable order. When man, in real life, maps out a plan, explores in his mind the possible developments of a situation, reflects on the course of action undertaken, remembers the phases of a past event, he forms the first narrations of which we can conceive. Inversely, the narrator who wants to order the chronological succession of the events he is relating, to give them a meaning, has no other recourse but to link them together in the unity of an action directed toward an end.

Thus to the elementary narrative types correspond the most general forms of human behavior. Task, contract, error, trap, etc., are universal categories. The network of their internal articulations and of their mutual relationships defines the field of possible experience a priori. By constructing from the simplest narrative forms, sequences, roles, and series of more and more complex and differentiated situations, we can establish the bases of a classification of the types of narration; moreover, we define a framework of reference for the comparative study of these behavior patterns which, always identical in their basic structure, are diversified ad infinitum according to an inexhaustible play of combinations and options, according to cultures, periods, genres, schools, and personal styles. Although it is a technique of literary analysis, the semiology of narrative draws its very existence and its wealth from its roots in anthropology.

## Postface

My first reaction, after rereading my 1966 essay, is a sigh of relief: I need deny nothing of what I wrote at that time. Then my relief is colored by new misgivings: what progress have I made in the last fourteen years? And how can I explain my groping attempts, not yet brought to fulfillment, to apply this method to diverse corpora of narrative?

I must then admit that this description, as accurate as it still may seem to me, stops short of its stated project. It is not false, but it is not *economical*. Scorning the principle *maximum effectum minimo sumptu*, it tolerates a plurality of concurrent solutions for the coding of each text. Consequently, it does not provide the instrument needed for a clear characterization and an indisputable classification of the events of the narrative. A patient attempt to bring together categories of analysis, to reduce the number of pertinent actions, and to grade these units according to their degree of generality or specificity must still be undertaken in order to make this model operative.

Having learned from experience, how would I rewrite this text today? Without attempting to explain all the details of my present method, I shall try to indicate its general direction in relation to a central point. Moreover, the 1966 analysis will authorize me to take certain shortcuts.

Any plot can be divided into a series of simultaneous or successive events (or "processes"). There are two types of processes: on the one hand, those that tend to *modify* the situation; on the other, those that tend to *preserve* it. According to another division, each time that these processes affect human characters (or anthropomorphic beings), they are presented by the narrative as being *favorable* or *unfavorable* to these characters. By intersecting these two distinctions we will construct four fundamental processes:

Process:	<i>Favorable</i>	<i>Unfavorable</i>
Modification:	Amelioration	Degradation
Preservation:	Protection	Frustration

Certain essential narrative schemata, like the opposing retributive sequences *Merit*→*Reward* and *Blame*→*Punishment*, can be easily analyzed according to the positions envisaged by this diagram (which is, of course, an adaptation of the logical construct known as "Aristotle's Square"):

(1) *Merit and Blame*

*Amelioration:*  
X acquires merit

*Degradation:*  
X acquires blame

*Protection:*  
X avoids acquiring blame

*Frustration:*  
X fails to acquire merit

(2) *Retributions*

*Amelioration:*  
X rewards Y

*Degradation:*  
X punishes Y

*Protection:*  
X protects Y from punishment

*Frustration:*  
X deprives Y of reward

The situation becomes more complex when the narrative presents not only one character who is solely an agent or a patient, but several characters mutually related, i.e., agents and patients at the same time. Indeed, in this case each one acts on himself in order to act on the other, or acts on the other in order to act on himself. He treats himself as an end and treats the other as a means, or he treats the other as an end and consequently treats himself as a means. The character treated as a means can be assimilated with a patient *vicim*, the character treated as an end with a patient *beneficiary*: the first, in fact, undergoes a degradation which "buys" the amelioration of the second, or a frustration which "buys" the protection from which the second benefits. If we call the agent X and the other character Y, the relationships between X and Y, such as they are determined by X's action, can be inscribed as follows in our square:

Amelioration of X (end)	Degradation of X (means)
by	for
Degradation of Y (means)	Amelioration of Y (end)
Protection of X (end)	Frustration of X (means)
by	for
Frustration of Y (means)	Protection of Y (end)

The *degradation* and the *frustration* of the character who serves as a means can take two forms: the peaceable form of the *prestation* of services, the hostile form of *aggression*. There result two specifications of the preceding diagram:

(1) *Prestations*

*Amelioration of X:*  
X obtains a benefit from Y

*Degradation of X:*  
X furnishes a benefit to Y

*Protection of X:*  
X avoids furnishing a benefit to Y

*Frustration of X:*  
X fails to receive a benefit from Y

(2) *Aggressions*

*Amelioration of X:*  
X assaults Y

*Degradation of X:*  
X exposes himself to Y's assault

*Protection of X:*  
X avoids Y's assault

*Frustration of X:*  
X fails to assault Y

Information processes can be considered as specific cases of *prestation* (if the information, being true, acts as a *revelation*), or of *aggression* (if the information, being false, acts as a *deception*, an *inducement to err*). This situation produces the following two squares:

(1) *Revelations*

*Amelioration of X*  
by

*Degradation of X*  
for

*Degradation of Y:*  
X obtains a revelation from Y

*Amelioration of Y:*  
X furnishes Y with a revelation

*Protection of X*  
by

*Frustration of X*  
for

*Frustration of Y:*  
X hides from Y that . . .

*Protection of Y:*  
X fails to obtain the revelation furnished by Y

(2) *Inducements to err*

*Amelioration of X*  
by

*Degradation of X*  
for

*Degradation of Y:*  
X induces Y to err

*Amelioration of Y:*  
X lets himself be induced to err by Y

*Protection of X*  
by

*Frustration of X*  
for

*Frustration of Y:*  
X discovers Y's deception

*Protection of Y:*  
X fails to induce Y to err

The processes of *influence*, through which one agent motivates another to adopt a certain plan of action, can, in the same way, be subdivided, on the one hand into a process of *persuasion* (which leads to a *modification*), on the other, into a process of *dissuasion* (which leads to *preservation*). In another respect they can also be divided into two categories, according to whether they induce the agent to perform an act *favorable* or *unfavorable* to himself. The influence process which induces the agent to perform a modificatory act which is favorable to him is *seduction*; the one which induces the agent to perform a modificatory act which is unfavorable to him is the *notification of duties*; the one which induces the agent to perform a favorable preservative act is *intimidation*; finally, the one which leads the agent to an unfavorable preservative act is *interdiction*:

Inducement of X To Perform an Act:	<i>Favorable</i>	<i>Unfavorable</i>
Modificatory	Seduction (= desire of amelioration)	Notification of Duties (= duty of degradation)
Preservative	Intimidation (fear of degradation)	Interdiction (= duty of nonamelioration)

These few indications should suffice to measure the progress made in the last fourteen years. It seems to me that the most serious fault was to have attempted to construct the network of narrative possibilities taking explicitly into account only the *modificatory* processes (essentially *amelioration* and *degradation*). Every action, however, is coupled with a reaction. The modificatory processes are continually exposed to blockage by preservative counter-processes (essentially *frustration* and *protection*). The dynamics of the plot rest on the constant tension between these contrary forces, on the repeated imbalances which affect the situation to the benefit of some and to the detriment of others. Although I was aware of these facts, my first construction does not strike an equal balance between the modificatory processes and the preservative processes: the latter are, so to speak, envisaged only through pretermission. In the elementary sequence, nonactualization of the virtuality stands opposite to its actualization, the failure of the engaged action to its success: these negations of modification carve in intaglio a place for the process of preservation. But this solution errs in that it envisages *preservation* only as the simple absence of *modification* and not as an action having the same degree of reality and calling for the same attempt at categoriza-

tion and at decomposition into sequences. Further on, when the analysis takes up processes of preservation (*protection*, in particular, for *frustration* is not mentioned), the correlation which makes the two types of processes interdependent is not recognized. Failing this articulation, the system grows lax, bringing about by degrees a wavering of all our categories of actions.

Another correlation which was neglected in 1966 and which my present method masters more easily is the reciprocity of the roles of patient and agent. The same actions (*amelioration* and *degradation*, for example) can be considered in relation to a patient's role (the *beneficiary*, the *victim*) or to an agent's role (the *ameliorator*, the *degrader*). Instead of recording these roles separately (according to the 1966 version), we can condense these two interdependent roles into a single formula (as in the present form, *X furnishes a benefit to Y*). This second option is obviously more economical. It will no doubt be necessary to take into account cases in which no specific agent bears the responsibility of the action engaged upon ("the patient gets well" rather than "the doctor cures the patient"). But these borderline cases can be treated as various zero degrees of the specification of the agent and do not really cause any difficulty.

In the same way, the 1966 model was rather awkward in its approach to the case of an agent who undertakes a task in order to better or to degrade his own fate, a case which is, moreover, too universal to be pertinent. Our present solution accomplishes a double simplification: on the one hand it unifies the roles of agent and patient in a formula which condenses them (*X betters X*); on the other hand it reduces the amelioration of X by X to a particular case of *prestation* (*X obtains a benefit from X* or *X furnishes a benefit to X*).

The very abstract categories of *modification* and *preservation*, of *amelioration* and *degradation*, of *protection* and *frustration* have not been eliminated. Much to the contrary, they build more thoroughly than ever the armature of the narrative system. These categories make possible the first division of the narrative, its *scansion*. But their very generality makes them inapt for characterizing actions. Their combination with the notions of *prestation* and *aggression* makes it possible to replace them by a set of categories much more concretely determined, thanks to which our present model can hope to achieve more satisfying results at a lesser cost.

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