

# Quand la fiction déraile: le cas des métafictions littéraires

Louis Rouillé

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# Plan

Pourquoi la métafiction?

Essai de narratologie formelle

Fonctionnement et dysfonctionnement du dispositif fictionnel

- └ Pourquoi la métafiction?
  - └ D'un point de vue philosophique

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## Pourquoi la métafiction?

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## Énoncés fictionnels / métafictionnels

► Voici deux types d'énoncés à propos d'Harry Potter:

- (1) Harry James Potter est né le 31 juillet 1980. Il est le seul être humain connu pour avoir survécu au sortilège de la Mort, jeté par Voldemort.
- (2) Harry James Potter est le personnage principal de la série littéraire *Harry Potter* écrite par l'écrivain J. K. Rowling.

- (1) est un énoncé *fictionnel*: perspective interne, vrai dans la fiction;
- (2) est un énoncé *métafictionnel*: perspective externe, vrai dans le monde réel.

# Une distinction naturelle

- ▶ Cette distinction est très intuitive et correspond à un phénomène (linguistique et mental) bien identifiable:
  - ▶ c'est la distinction entre un fan-wiki (1) et Wikipedia (2);
  - ▶ cette distinction est revendiquée sur Wikipedia sous l'appellation "in-universe" vs. "real-world perspective" dans le **Manual of style/Writing about fiction**
- ▶ Depuis les années 1970, dans la philosophie analytique du langage:
  - ▶ elle est *devenue* technique (notamment à cause de Saul Kripke (1973/2013));
  - ▶ et centrale dans la "philosophie de la fiction" contemporaine
    - ▶ cf. le cours de François Récanati **Fiction, simulation, faire comme si** de 2021-22.

# Intérêt philosophique

- ▶ La distinction entre énoncé fictionnel et métafictionnel a été utilisée pour *prouver l'existence des personnages de fiction!*<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ Comment passe-t-on d'une distinction si innocente à une thèse aussi extravagante?
  - ▶ C'est certainement le génie de la philosophie (analytique) qui est à l'œuvre...
- ▶ *Réponse*: en 3 étapes.
  1. (2) est vraiment *vrai*;
  2. Donc, et qu'il y a donc un état de fait qui doit le *rendre vrai*;
  3. Cet état de fait, c'est le fait que J.K. Rowling a inventé ce personnage, que vous en avez entendu parlé, et il y a tout une institution qui fait d'Harry Potter une chose bien réelle.

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<sup>1</sup>cf., en particulier, Kripke (1973/2013) et Van Inwagen (1977).

# Illustration

- ▶ Pour illustrer le propos (Lamarque and Olsen 1994: 144):<sup>2</sup>

*Who created Frankenstein's monster? One answer, from the internal perspective, is of course: Frankenstein. Only from the external point of view must the reply be: Mary Shelley.*

- ▶ Ces “énoncés créationnistes” (*creationist locutions*) sont des manières d'affirmer qu'il y a des personnages de fiction.
- ▶ Et les philosophes de la fiction analysent tout cela très, très précisément.
- ▶ Pour ma part, le but de ma vie scientifique consiste à résister à l'extravagance (mais je ne vais pas vous ennuyer avec ça aujourd'hui)...

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<sup>2</sup>L'exemple remonte aux séances de question-réponse de (Kripke 1973/2013): il a marqué les esprits.

## Cas gênants, mais anormaux

- ▶ En fait, la distinction perspective interne/externe ne se généralise pas, car il y a des “complications” (Kripke 1973/2013: lecture 3; p.74 et fn.15):

*There are two types of predications we can make about Hamlet. [...] Let's take the statement “Hamlet was a fictional character.” That is not true in the work of fiction itself. [...] For (virtually) no fictional person is said in his own work of fiction to be a fictional person.*

*[Footnote: However, complications do occur, leading to my parenthetical qualification. See, for example, [...] The Comforters by Muriel Spark. In some other version of the present lectures, I discussed [such] works. But I won't give away any plots here.]*

- ▶ Mais ces cas sont manifestement *anormaux*, pathologiques, sophistiqués.
  - ▶ Donc, Kripke va généraliser...
  - ▶ ... et remettre l'analyse des cas compliqués à plus tard.



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Muriel Spark 1957/1991 *Les Consolateurs*

## Définition philosophique

- ▶ On peut appeler *métafiction* une œuvre telle que certains énoncés métafictionnels sont à la fois vrais dans la fiction et la réalité.
  - ▶ *Autrement dit*, ce sont des fictions qui internalisent (tout ou partie de) la perspective externe sur ses personnages.
  - ▶ *ex*: “Caroline Rose est un personnage de fiction”: vrai dans *Les Consolateurs* et vrai tout court.
  - ▶ *Autres exemples typiques*: les rencontres métafictionnelles (l’auteurice rencontre *son* personnage).
- ▶ Il est temps de se préoccuper de ces fictions “anormales”:<sup>3</sup>
  - ▶ parce que nous avons les outils pour ce faire;
  - ▶ parce que c’est un point de contact avec (tout ou partie de) la théorie littéraire.

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<sup>3</sup>Il y a *par ailleurs* un intérêt dialectique pour le débat réalisme/anti-réalisme dans la philosophie de la fiction, que je ne développe pas aujourd’hui.

# Auto-promotion

## Semantic foundations for narratology

August 5 - August 9 2024 (Leuven, Belgium)

ESLLI2024 Workshop

Overview Full description Program

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Many of us think that Kendall Walton's general theory of make-believe is the best available framework for theorising about fictional discourse. In this framework, modeling truth, reference and speech-acts in fiction starts from this idea that fictional texts are best construed as props in a game of make-believe. Within this "functionalist" framework, an

<https://rouillel.github.io/eslli-workshop.html>



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# Définition littéraire

- ▶ Les philosophes, pourrait-on penser, ont en fait découvert l'eau tiède:
  - ▶ la coïncidence des deux perspectives est une possibilité que les auteurices et les critiques littéraires connaissent très bien;
  - ▶ et dont la théorisation est l'objet de controverses tentaculaires.
- ▶ La "complication" est en fait le résultat de deux ingrédients: la fiction + la réflexivité.
  - ▶ Une *métafiction littéraire* est une fiction auto-référentielle, ou réflexive, en un sens qu'il s'agit d'expliquer.
  - ▶ *Informellement*, c'est une fiction qui a conscience d'elle-même, une fiction qui dit "je".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Juste après sont cours sur la fiction, François Récanati a fait une année de cours sur **la première personne** (2022-23)!

# Terminologies

- La terminologie parle d'elle-même, comme le commente Wenche Ommundsen (1993) (p. 14):

*The coinage was not particularly original: attention to 'meta-phenomena' has in the second half of the 20th century been common in a number of disciplines (William Gass himself mentions meta-theorems in mathematics and logic) and the French critic Roland Barthes (1972 Critical essays; p. 97) had in the short essay 'Literature and metalanguage', first published in 1959, identified the double consciousness of contemporary literature as both 'literature object' and 'metaliterature'. A great number of other names have been given to the same type of writing: self-conscious, reflexive (or self-reflexive), self-referential, introspective, introverted, narcissistic or auto-representational [...]*

*While some critical consensus seems to exist regarding the basic definition of metafiction or reflexive fiction (it is about fiction), critics vary considerably in their account of the phenomenon.*

## Quelques citations

- ▶ Robert Alter 1975 *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-conscious Genre*:  
*A self-conscious novel, briefly, is a novel that systematically flaunts its own condition of artifice and that by so doing probes into the problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality.*
- ▶ Linda Hutcheon 1984 *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (p. 14):  
*"Metafiction", as it has now been named, is fiction about fiction – that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity. "Narcissistic" – the figurative adjective chosen here to designate this textual self-awareness – is not intended as derogatory but rather as descriptive and suggestive [...]*
- ▶ Patricia Waugh 1984 *Metafiction : The Theory and Practice of Self Conscious Fiction*  
*[...] the lowest common denominator of metafiction is simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction. (p. 6)*  
*Frames are set up only to be continually broken. Contexts are ostentatiously constructed, only to be subsequently deconstructed. (p. 101)*



## Distinctions liminaires

- ▶ Ne pas confondre *métafiction* et:
  - ▶ *Mise en abyme*:<sup>5</sup> une partie d'une représentation qui duplique, réfléchit ou reflète (tout ou partie) de la représentation entière.
    - ▶ La mise en abyme est une technique (générale, i.e. pas spécifiquement littéraire) qui peut (ou pas) servir à construire une métafiction littéraire.
  - ▶ *Metalepse* (Genette 1972):<sup>6</sup> transgression d'une des frontières diégétiques, d'un niveau de réalité dans l'économie narrative.<sup>7</sup>
    - ▶ Les métafictions sont un cas particulier de métalepses: il s'agit de la transgression de la frontière réalité/fiction.
    - ▶ *ex*: Woody Allen dans *The purple Rose of Cairo* (ou dans *The Kugelmass Episode*) fait passer des personnages d'une fiction dans la fiction à la fiction (ou inversement); métalepse, mais pas métafiction.
    - ▶ *Vocabulaire technique*: "métalepses ontologiques" (Fludernik 2003); (plus précisément encore) "métalepses d'auteur référentielles" (Lavocat 2016: 499).

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<sup>5</sup>Le terme vient de Gide (1983 *Journal*).

<sup>6</sup>Voir (Genette 1980) pour la traduction anglaise; et (Genette 2004) pour une élaboration/théorisation.

<sup>7</sup>La métalepse correspond (à peu près) aux "boucles étranges" (*strange loops*) de Douglas Hofstater (1980 *Gödel, Escher, Bach*), si ça vous parle.

# Débats littéraires importants

- ▶ La métafiction est-elle un genre? (anti-mimétisme, post-modernisme)
  - ▶ ou un phénomène inhérent à un récit fictionnel par opposition à un récit factuel? (formalisme, structuralisme, déconstructionisme)
- ▶ Y a-t-il des thèmes transversaux pour les métafictions littéraires?
  - ▶ la création – religion, sexe, art;
  - ▶ la mort, le suicide;
  - ▶ la théorie – la réalité-l'histoire, la politique-l'autorité.

# Objectif et hypothèse de travail

- ▶ *But*: explorer systématiquement l'espace logique des métafictions possibles.
  - ▶ Ce qui permettra de dresser une liste de lecture (ou d'écriture, s'il reste des métafictions à écrire);
  - ▶ et, à l'avenir, de comprendre le rôle dialectique des métafictions (s'il y en a un), dans le champ de la philosophie et de la théorie littéraire.
- ▶ *Hypothèse de travail*: une métafiction est une fiction qui fait systématiquement dérailler le dispositif fictionnel mis en place.
  - ▶ C'est un *artefact dysfonctionnel*.
    - ▶ L'hypothèse est non-controversée, car vide tant qu'on a pas spécifié ce qu'il faut entendre par "dispositif fictionnel".

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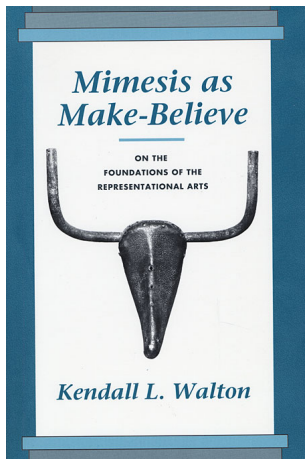
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## Games of make-believe



(Walton 1990)



Winsor McCay 1905

# La grande continuité waltonnienne

► (Walton 1990: 11-12):

*Children devote enormous quantities of time and effort to make-believe activities. And this preoccupation seems to be nearly universal, not peculiar to any particular cultures or social groups. The urge to engage in make-believe and the needs such activities address would seem to be very fundamental ones. If they are, one would not expect children simply to outgrow them when they grow up; it would be surprising if make-believe disappeared without a trace at the onset of adulthood.*

*It doesn't. It continues, I claim, in our interaction with representational works of art (which of course itself begins in childhood). The forms make-believe activities take do change significantly as we mature. They become more subtle, more sophisticated, less overt .*

## Le cadre waltonien

- ▶ **Def:** un *prop* est un objet réel qui génère des propositions fictionnelles dans le contexte d'un jeu de faire-semblant.
  - ▶ N'importe quel objet *naturel* peut servir de *prop*:<sup>8</sup>
    - ▶ *ex:* les nuages, une banane, des souches d'arbre...
  - ▶ Mais il y a aussi de nombreux *props* artefactuels:<sup>9</sup>
    - ▶ Exemples paradigmatiques d'artefact pour jeux d'enfant: une poupée, une petite voiture, un déguisement...
    - ▶ Exemples paradigmatiques dans les arts: un tableau, un film, des comédiens ...
- ▶ **Def:** un *principe de génération* est une règle, une convention qui établit quel aspect du *prop* génère quoi.
  - ▶ Il existe de nombreux débats sur la classification générale des principes de génération que je passe ici sous silence.

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<sup>8</sup>Voir cependant (Currie 1990) pour une discussion critique de la catégorie des "*props* naturels".

<sup>9</sup>Enrico Terrone les appelle des **artefacts expérientiels**.

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# Le contrat fictionnel

- ▶ **Pb:** trouver le principe de génération qui s'applique à tous et seulement aux textes de fiction.
  - ▶ i.e. qui distingue les fictions littéraires des autres artefacts pour l'imagination (ludiques et artistiques).
- ▶ Un bon candidat, c'est le "contrat fictionnel" de Genette qui "*consiste précisément à nier que la fiction est une fiction*" (Genette 2004: 23).<sup>10</sup>
- ▶ Ou bien, le "principe du rapport factuel" (Everett 2013: 32):<sup>11</sup>

*We will treat the fictional text or narrated story essentially as if it were purported factual report. This is in certain ways close to the "report model" of our engagement with literary fiction, on which we pretend or imagine that the fictional text we are reading is a factual report.*

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<sup>10</sup>Attention: il ne s'agit pas d'une analyse phénoménologique, car on fait abstraction de l'état d'esprit (manifestement) charitable des lecteurs...

<sup>11</sup>C'est la base des discussions sur la "vérité dans la fiction", cf. (Macdonald 1968), (Searle 1975), (Lewis 1978).

## Interpretation stricte du contrat fictionnel

- ▶ Il y a en fait une ambiguïté (Everett 2013: 32):

*In fact the report model can be understood in two different ways, depending on whether or not we understand the texts themselves to be present within the scope of the imaginings they prompt.*

(IS) Dans la fiction, le texte est un texte non-fictionnel.<sup>12</sup>

(IL) Ça n'est pas le cas que (IS).

- ▶ (IS) est compatible avec bien des fictions:

- ▶ *ex*: dans *Lolita*, Humbert écrit ses mémoires;

- ▶ dans *Le Berceau du Chat* de Vonnegut (ch. 123) on peut lire: “*A curious six months followed – the six months in which I wrote this book.*”.

- ▶ Mais il y a bien des fictions qui sont incompatibles avec (IS):

- ▶ Exemples *ad hoc* qui se terminent par “*and no one was left to tell the tale*” (Lewis 1978: 266); ou des “fictions sans esprit” (Voltolini 2021).

- ▶ Plus généralement, c'est le problème du le problème du *Seeing the Unseen; Reporting the Unreported* (Walton 2013: §4).

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<sup>12</sup>Bien que “rapport” et “texte” suggère l'écrit, rien de tel ne doit être présupposé, cf. (Fludernik 2002).

# Interprétation large du contrat fictionnel

- ▶ (IL) est donc la seule candidate à la généralisation (Everett 2013: 33):

*Understood in the second, weaker way, the report model holds that when we consume fiction we treat the text as if it were a source of factual information, although the text itself is not a denizen of my pretence . Rather we are to let the text guide our imaginings as we would let a real text guide our beliefs.*

- ▶ **Pb:** que peut bien signifier “guider” ici?
  - ▶ *Réponse:* déployer une double structure de feinte.

## Fiction primaire et secondaire

- ▶ Voici une description très intuitive de celle-ci (Walton 2013: 23):

*I think [one should] recognize a world, call it the “primary” story world, containing the events of the story but not the narrator (perhaps this is what is meant when a narrator is said not to be a character). It is fictional in this world that the events occur but not that the narrator reports them. Readers do imagine the narrator’s reporting them (and probably expressing attitudes about them in doing so), but this imagining does not belong to the cluster associated with the primary story world. We can recognize a “secondary” story world, in which the narrator does report the events of the story.*

## Point terminologique

- ▶ Cette distinction entre fiction *primaire* et *secondaire* a été faite mainte fois dans le champ philosophique:
  - ▶ Walton (1990) distingue “le monde de l’œuvre” du “monde du jeu” (cela ne s’applique pas uniquement aux fictions littéraires);
  - ▶ “fiction secondaire” vient de Marcel Vuillaume (1990);
  - ▶ récemment Stefano Predelli (2020) a introduit la jolie expression “périphérie fictionnelle”.
- ▶ C’est aussi un *topos* de la narratologie “structuraliste”:<sup>13</sup>
  - ▶ cf. *story* vs. *discourse* (Culler 2011);
  - ▶ Prince (2003) recense les paires suivantes:
    - ▶ *histoire* vs. *discours*;
    - ▶ *fabula* vs. *sjuzet*;
    - ▶ *narrated* vs. *narrating*;
    - ▶ *fiction* vs. *narration*;
    - ▶ *Erzälte Welt* vs. *Besprochene Welt*;
    - ▶ *content plane* vs. *expression plane*, ...

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<sup>13</sup>Tous ces modèles sont appelés “réalistes” ou “communicationnels” et comparés dans (Fludernik 2009).

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## Les personnages de la fiction secondaire

- ▶ La fiction secondaire est une *fiction*, peuplée de 3 personnages/entités:<sup>14</sup>
  - ▶ le texte qui se veut factuel;
  - ▶ côté réception un.e narrataire;<sup>15</sup>
  - ▶ côté production un.e narrateurice.<sup>16</sup>
- ▶ *Image*: Ces personnages de la fiction secondaire sont *comme des fantômes* qui assistent (plus ou moins) directement aux événements de la fiction primaire:
  - ▶ Comme l'écrit Théophile Gautier dans *Le Capitaine Fracasse*: "L'écrivain qui fait un roman porte naturellement au doigt l'anneau de Gygès, lequel rend invisible."

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<sup>14</sup>Elle contient aussi une structure temporelle, et des aspects linguistico-stylistiques.

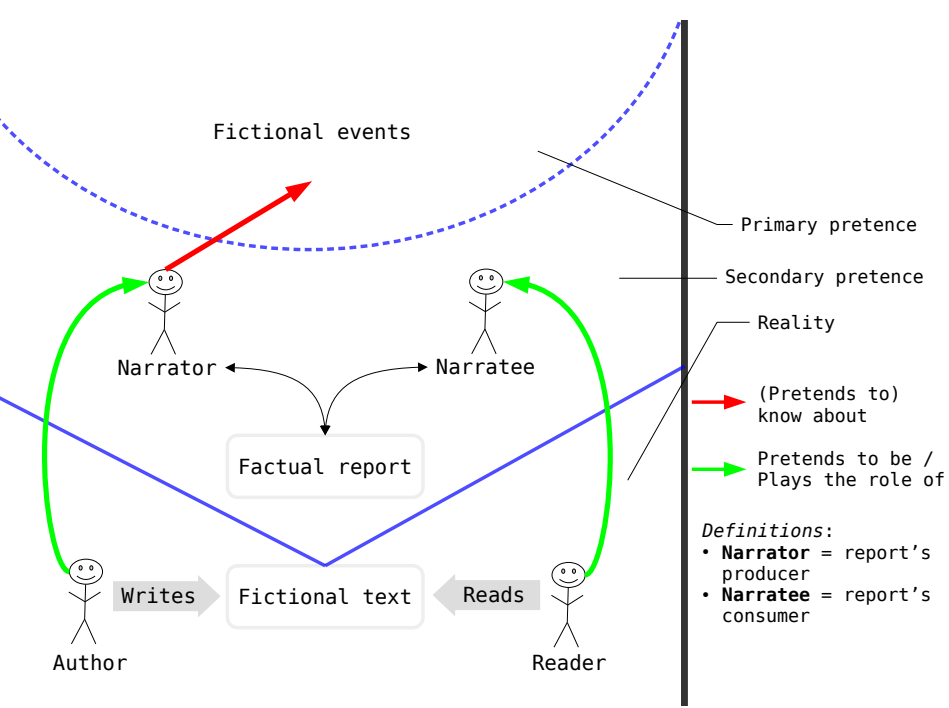
<sup>15</sup>Le terme narrataire vient de Genette, mais son étude en tant qu'entité séparée doit plutôt à (Prince 1996): "The reader of a fiction [...] should not be mistaken for the narratee. The one is real, the other is fictive."

<sup>16</sup>La théorie littéraire féministe (cf., en particulier, (Lanser 1992), (Gilbert and Gubar 2000)) pose la question du genre du couple narrateurice/narrataire: quels indices? biais?

# Interface fiction primaire/secondaire

- ▶ Au-delà de l'image, la frontière primaire/secondaire est caractérisée par:
  1. Une interaction impossible: barrière *métaphysique*;
  2. Un flux d'information possible: porosité *sémantique*.





- ▶ Pour déployer la double structure de feinte, j'ai choisi la route *épistémologique*:
  - ▶ Il s'agit de répondre à la question "qui sait et comment le sait-on?"
  - ▶ C'est une manière de mettre en valeur l'entité "rapport" de la fiction secondaire.
- ▶ Il y a (au moins) deux autres routes possibles:
  - ▶ Étude du fonctionnement des *temps verbaux* dans la fiction, cf. (Vuillaume 1990);
  - ▶ Étude du fonctionnement de la *référence* dans la fiction, cf. (Predelli 2020).

# L'espace conversationnel narrateurice/taire I

- (3) Maintenant, il faut que le lecteur franchisse avec nous la Seine, et nous suive jusqu'à la porte du couvent des Carmélites de la rue Saint-Jacques. (Dumas, A., *Vingt Ans Après*, 1064)
- (4) Voilà ce qu'il était nécessaire d'apprendre au lecteur avant de lui montrer M. Cagliostro causant d'affaire avec M. de Crones. Maintenant, nous pouvons l'introduire dans le cabinet du lieutenant de police. (Dumas, A., *Le Collier de la reine*, t.II, 393)
- (5) Usant du privilège du privilège du romancier, nous allons sauter, sans transition aucune, du sombre bouge que nous venons de décrire, dans une élégante maison du West-End. Cet écart, loin de nous éloigner de notre histoire, nous y ramène. La scène est bien différente, mais nous n'avons pas cherché le contraste. (Gautier, Th., *Partie Carrée*, 55)
- (6) - Je n'ai pas dormi, s'écria-t-elle. C'était la jeune fille admirablement belle que nous avons vu entrer tout à l'heure chez M. de Gonzague. (Féval, P., *Le Bossu*, 121)
- (7) Une sentinelle cachée dans les broussailles veillait à ce qu'aucun profane ne vînt troubler l'important conciliabule auquel, en notre qualité de romancier, c'est-à-dire de magicien à qui toutes les portes sont ouvertes, nous allons faire assister nos lecteurs. (Dumas, A., *Le Page du duc de Savoie*, t.I, 15)

## L'espace conversationnel narrateurice/taire II

- (8) Accrochons-nous à la corde de M. Jackal: elle est assez solide pour nous porter tous les deux, et même tous les trois, cher lecteur, – et tâchons de reconnaître la mystérieuse et funèbre localité où se passe la scène que nous avons à décrire. (Dumas, A., *Les Mohicans de Paris*, 250)
- (9) As we cannot therefore at present get Mr. Joseph out of the inn, we shall leave him in it, and carry our reader on after Parson Adams. (Fiedling, H. 1742 *Joseph Andrews*, 104)
- (10) As we have now brought Sophia into safe hands, the reader will, I apprehend, be contented to deposit her awhile, and to look a little after other personages, and particularly poor Jones, whom we have left long enough to do penance for his past offences, which, as is the nature of vice, brought sufficient punishment upon him themselves. (Fielding, H., 1749 *Tom Jones*, Book XI)
- (11) Leaving it [the coach] to pursue its journey at the pleasure of the conductor aforementioned [...] this narrative may embrace the opportunity of ascertaining the condition of Sir Mulberry Hawk, and to what extent he had, by this time, recovered from the injuries consequent on being flung violently from his cabriolet, under the circumstances already detailed. (Dickens, C., 1838-9 *Nicholas Nickleby*, ch.38)

## L'espace conversationnel narrateurice/taire III

- (12) Let me take you into the dining room [...] We will enter, very softly [...] the walls you see, are new. [...] He will perhaps turn around by and by and in the meantime we can look at the stately old lady. (Eliot, G., 1858 *Adam Bede*, 49-50)
- (13) Orlando looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, without showing signs of discomposure, and went, presumably, to his bath. We may take advantage of this pause in the narrative to make certain statements. Orlando has become a woman – there is no denying it. (Woolf, V., 1928 *Orlando: A Biography*, 138)
- (14) Writing, when properly managed, (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation: As no one, who knows what he is about in good company, would venture to talk all; – so no author, who understands the just boundaies of decorum and good breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself. (Stern, L. 1759-67 *Tristram Shandy*, II.11.)

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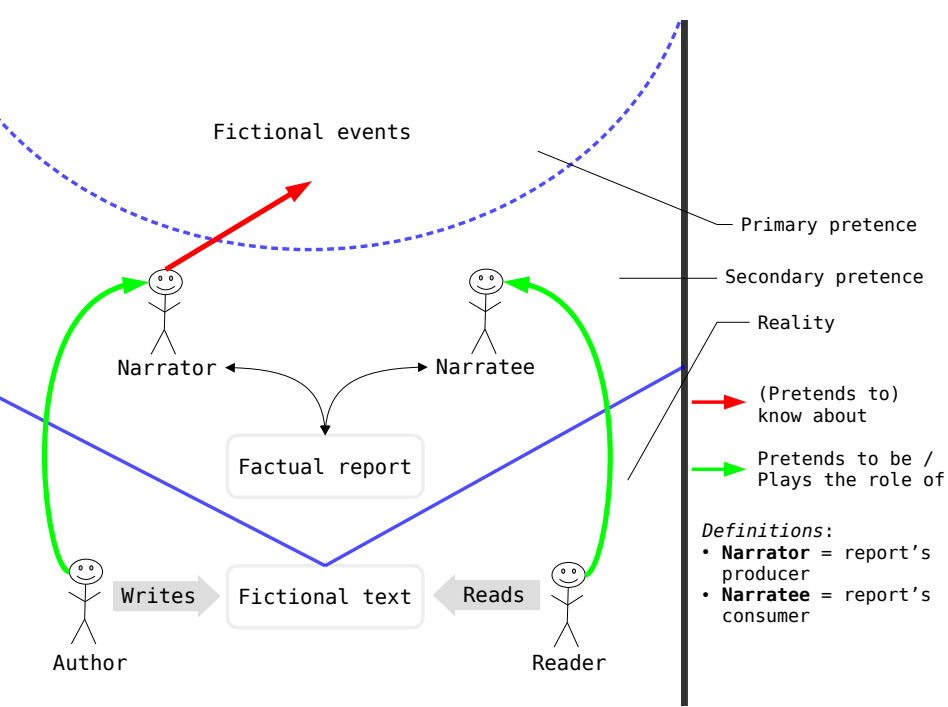
## Distinctions liminaires

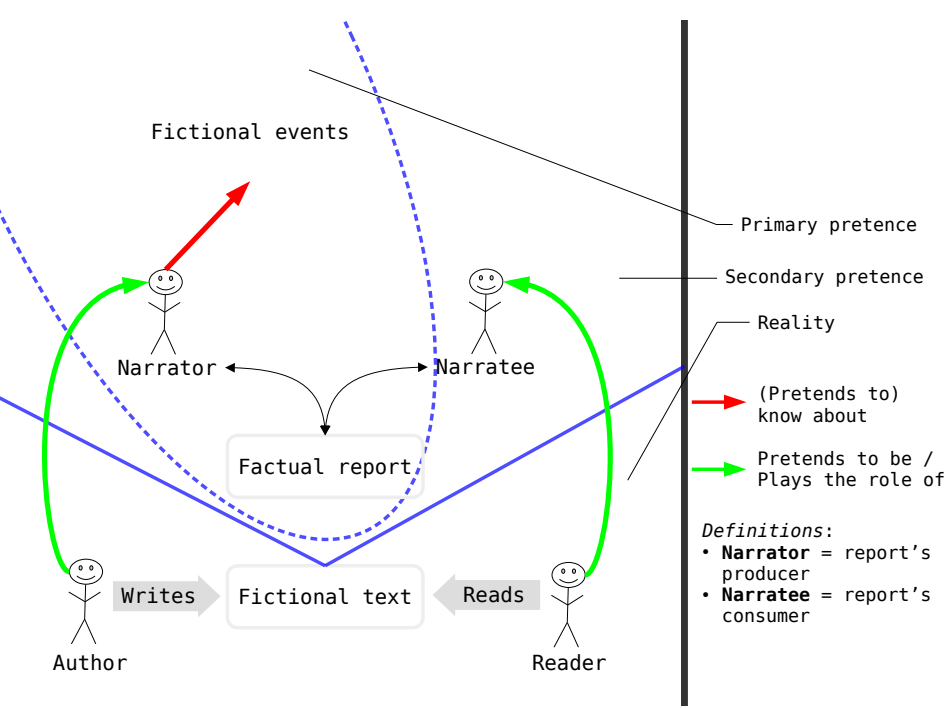
- ▶ On peut maintenant ré-interpréter la distinction homo/hétéro-diégétique de Gérard Genette (1972):
  - ▶ *Homodiégétique* := participant de la fiction primaire;
  - ▶ *hétérodiégétique* := participant de la fiction secondaire.
- ▶ Par définition:
  - ▶ les personnages de fiction sont homodiégétiques;
  - ▶ et le ou la narrataire est hétérodiégétique.
- ▶ **Rq:** ce faisant, si on autorise l'application de la distinction homo/hétéro-diégétique au narrataire, on obtient la distinction entre fiction *contemplative* et *interactive* (i.e. avec avatar explicite).

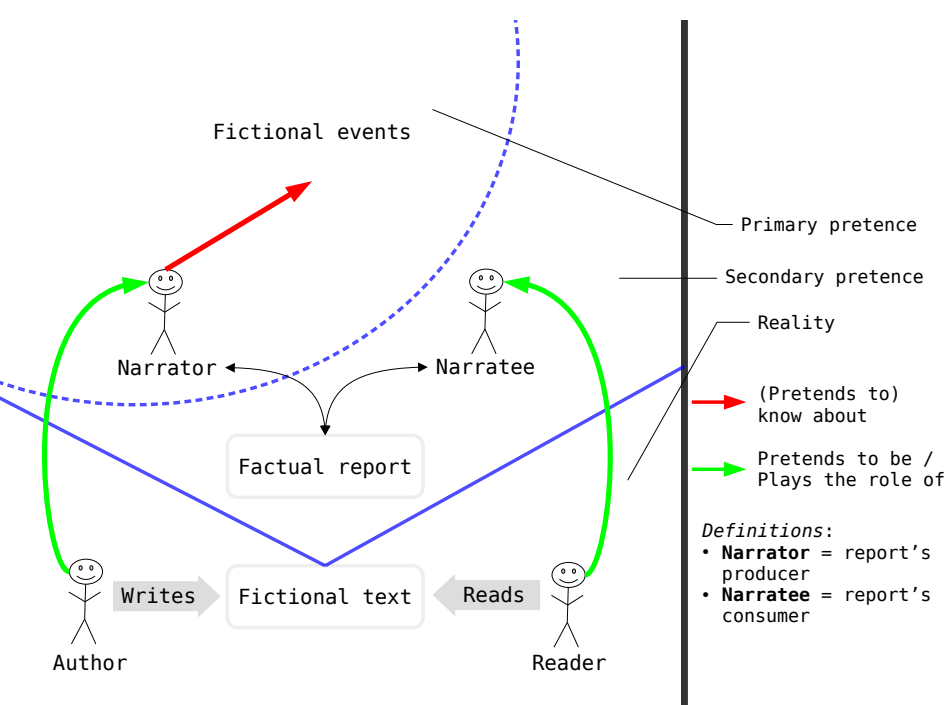
## 4 structures narratives

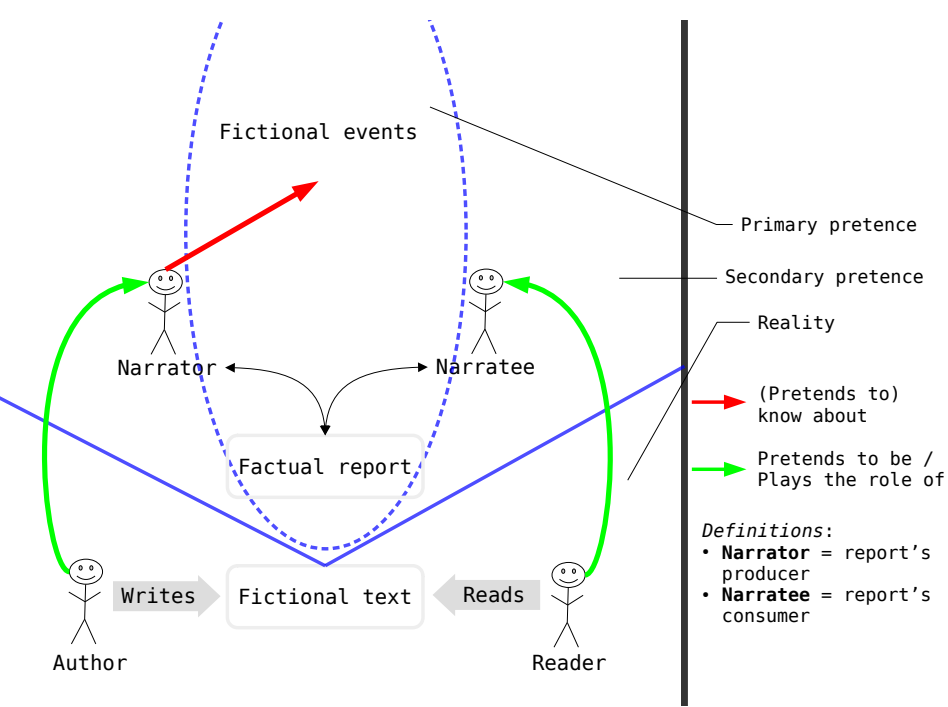
- ▶ En principe, on peut donc appliquer la distinction homo/hétéro-diégétique (i) au texte, (ii) à la narratrice.
  - ▶ **Def:** Je propose d'appeler narration *stricte* le cas où le “rapport” est homodiégétique (*ex: Lolita* ou *Le Berceau du Chat*); et narration *large* sinon.
  - ▶ Je garde donc homo/hétéro-diégétique pour qualifier la narratrice.
- ▶ Il y a 4 cas possibles:
  1. Narration hétérodiégétique large:
    - ▶ Et la narratrice, et le texte participent de la fiction secondaire.
  2. Narration homodiégétique stricte:
    - ▶ Et la narratrice, et le texte participent de la fiction primaire.
  3. Narration homodiégétique large:
    - ▶ La narratrice participe de la fiction primaire, mais pas le texte.
  4. Narration hétérodiégétique stricte:
    - ▶ le texte participe de la fiction primaire, mais pas la narratrice.





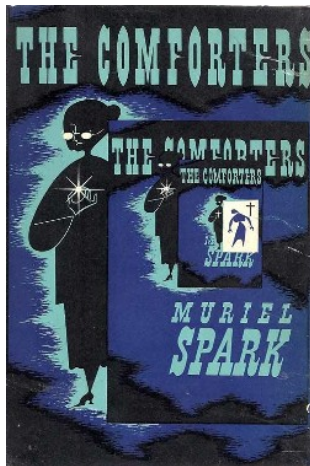






- └ Fonctionnement et dysfonctionnement du dispositif fictionnel
- └ Typologie de fonctionnement

## Spark 1955 *The Comforters*



Exemple de narration hétérodiégétique stricte!

# Plan

## Pourquoi la métafiction?

D'un point de vue philosophique

D'un point de vue littéraire

## Essai de narratologie formelle

Préliminaires: artefacts pour l'imagination

À la recherche du principe de génération littéraire

Zoom sur la fiction secondaire

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## Où en sommes-nous?

- ▶ Je propose de considérer la double structure de feinte comme dispositif fictionnel de base, à *faire dérailler*.
  - ▶ C'est effectivement un dispositif "plus subtile, plus sophistiqué et moins transparent" que la feinte ludique paradigmatique des jeux d'enfant.
- ▶ Donc, à première vue, le fait que l'attention du lecteur ou lectrice soit portée sur la double structure de feinte peut être *une conséquence* du dysfonctionnement intentionnel.
  - ▶ Je soutiens donc que la réflexivité est donc *soit* un moyen, *soit* un effet de l'entreprise métafictionnelle...
  - ▶ ... mais pas un trait caractéristique.
- ▶ Il s'en suit aussi qu'il y a toute une gradation métafictionnelle à explorer systématiquement.
  - ▶ Pour la fin de cet exposé, je vais simplement développer 3 techniques différentes (non-exhaustives et non-exclusives).

# Dysfonctionnement de la fiction secondaire

- ▶ Il y a certainement bien des manières de faire dysfonctionner la fiction secondaire:
  - ▶ en la dépeuplant, en la sur-peuplant;
  - ▶ en faisant dysfonctionner la frontière entre fiction primaire et secondaire;
    - ▶ rendre l'interaction possible (passer la barrière métaphysique);
    - ▶ rendre le flux d'information impossible (impermeabilité sémantique).<sup>17</sup>
- ▶ Une autre technique très intéressante consiste à faire de la fiction secondaire le centre de l'attention;
  - ▶ à la limite on voudrait un roman qui n'aurait pas de fiction primaire!
  - ▶ Je crois que c'est le ressort principal du roman d'Italo Calvino *Si par une nuit d'hiver un voyageur...*

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<sup>17</sup>Cela correspond (dans une certaine mesure) à ce que Gerald Prince (1988) appelle la "disnarration".

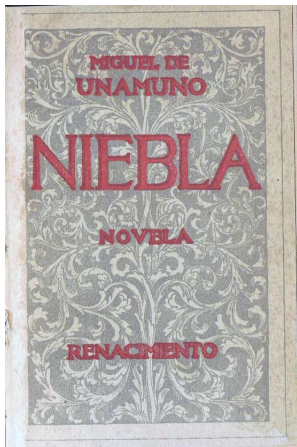


# Dysfonctionnement de la fiction primaire

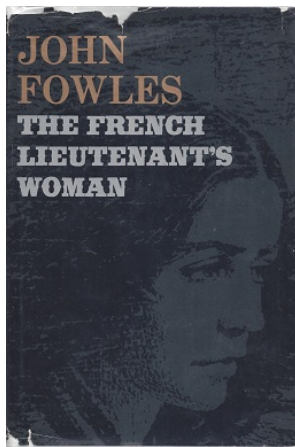
- ▶ Faire s'inviter des éléments de la réalité (auteurice-livre-lecteurice) dans la fiction primaire:
  1. Intrusion du texte dans la fiction primaire: le texte comme objet réel qui vient télescoper les événements fictionnels.
    - ▶ *exemple canonique*: dans *Tristram Shandy* (VI.28), on trouve une page blanche où les lecteurices (réels) doivent dessiner une femme qui évoque la concupiscence; c'est très important pour la suite, et puisque chacun a ses goûts...
  2. Intrusion de l'auteurice dans la fiction primaire: la rencontre métafictionnelle.
    - ▶ *ex*: Miguel de Unamuno 1915 *Niebla*; John Fowles 1969 *The French Lieutenant's Woman*; Kurt Vonnegut 1973 *Breakfast of Champions*; etc.
- ▶ **Rq**: Ce genre de fiction est *impossible*:
  - ▶ Pour traverser la frontière réalité/fiction, il faut d'abord *fictionnaliser* la frontière;
  - ▶ Si on veut stabiliser le dispositif narratif, on obtient typiquement une fiction enchâssée
    - ▶ ce qui peut se faire de plusieurs manières d'ailleurs, cf. Lavocat (2016) §4.4.1 (pp. 500-9).

- └ Fonctionnement et dysfonctionnement du dispositif fictionnel
- └ Vers une typologie de dysfonctionnement

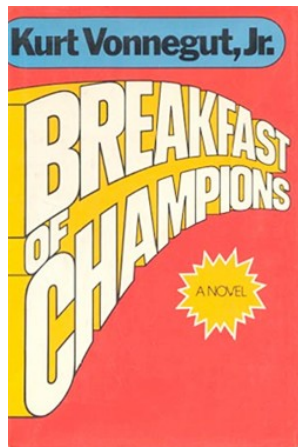
## Rencontres métafictionnelles



Miguel de Unamuno 1915



John Fowles 1969



Kurt Vonnegut 1973

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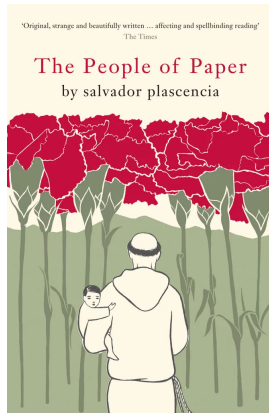
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Mise en pratique

# The People of Paper

- ▶ L'intrigue principale de ce roman est une "guerre contre la narration omnisciente":
  - ▶ menée par les personnages (Federico de la Fe et son "armée")...
  - ▶ ... contre Saturne (l'entité narratrice "en surplomb").
- ▶ Cette "guerre" est représentée spatialement sur une double page.



Salvador Plascencia 2005

## SATURN

Froggy was the first recruit to join Federico de la Fe's war, but soon others from EMF followed. On the second day of the campaign against Saturn, the fungus that grew on the stems of carnations spread onto Froggy's shoes. From his soles it spread to the brown carpet in Froggy's living room, and then to the walls and ceiling. And as Froggy tried to beat the white mold from his curtains, the fungus spread onto the broom and down to his hands.

And every day, as more EMF cholos joined Federico de la Fe's army, the fungus spread to more houses until all of El Monte was covered in a layer of white mold.

They scrubbed the fungus from their hands with pumice and kerosene, and when mushrooms sprouted from the crevasses in their bathroom tiles they scraped them with spatulas and poured bleach.

During the two-week plague, twenty-three EMF cholos died. When the coroner split open their chests to drain the blood and stuff them with tissue paper, he found toadstools growing between their ribs.

In the midst of sorrow and funeral processions, Froggy survived and at nineteen became the oldest living member of EMF. After the plague, the chain of command was Froggy, Smiley, Pelon, and then Little Oso. But still it was Federico de la Fe who oversaw the war.

Saturn had won the first battle, but instead of surrendering, Froggy increased their ranks by jumping in more cholos and inviting teenage girls to join EMF and the fight for emancipation.

The first girl to join EMF was named Sandra. There were no other women to jump her in and so the official initiation was waived. But there was no need for a brinca anyway, as she had fled from a father who had beat her so much that she could no longer remember what it was like to properly knit.

Sandra had survived the plague, impeding the growth of fungus by sniffing ammonia. And instead of Sandra being initiated at the hands of Froggy, it was Sandra who used her knitting needle to tattoo "EMF" onto Froggy's neck.

## LITTLE MERCED

I fought the mold with bleach and a wire brush. I pushed it back from the living room floor out to the porch and splashed bleach onto the sidewalk. My father walked around town sniffing kerosene from a mason jar and sipping maté. At night, while I laid in bed, my father sat bent over the dominoes table sketching plans and chewing the leaves of his tea.

Once the fungus receded back into the flower fields, the daily games of dominoes resumed. Froggy made Sandra subcomandante of EMF and as subcomandante, Sandra sat next to Froggy.

But unlike the other EMF cholos, Sandra did not cuff her pants or shave her head. She cut her pant legs below the knee and pulled her hair into a ponytail that she tied with string pulled from fertilizer sacks, losing her hair only when alone with Froggy.

Every Sunday morning, as families walked by holding their soup bowls, new members were jumped into EMF. When Froggy and Sandra returned from the flower fields, my father gave them petroleum and towels to wipe the splatters of blood from their faces.

They entered the house with their collars stained and smelling of arnica cream and petroleum. They would sit and study the charts that my father had drawn.

One of which looked like this:

• ||| •••

The three tallies circled:

⓪

"Here is where we attack," my father said.

And Sandra listened while trying to knit the tail of her shawl, but her knots always unraveled, leaving strands of string strewn wherever she sat.

## SANDRA

My father recognized the stitching from the old tablecloths I had attempted to make. He followed the hems of my knitting through the town of El Monte and into my bed. As he picked up the yarn from the floor and placed it into his swollen pockets, I lay there wrapped around Froggy, until I felt the familiar fists of my father pounding against my back.

And before I could turn, Froggy had lunged out of bed and dropped my father to the floor, putting two slits across his throat with the blade of his carnation knife.

And even though my whole life I wanted to flee from my father, I did not like seeing him wrapped in the shreds of my shawl and buried in the middle of a flower field.

I remained subcomandante of EMF but moved out of Froggy's. I could not sleep in the same room with the man who had killed my father.

I took only the bureau drawers, two rugs, and two pillows from Froggy's, and moved into a stucco at the edge of El Monte. I slept alone, cushioned by rugs and pillows. I was a quiet sleeper and did not thrash about or even snore, but I began to wake with welts on my arms and my ribs sore and bruised. It was not until I looked in the mirror and noticed the black eye on my face that I knew I had been dreaming of my father.

## SATURN

Saturn waited. He watered his grass. When she did not show, he spit the thinning carpenter nails from his lips and onto his yard. Five hours later, still no sign of her, he tossed two fistfuls of chestnuts onto the lawn, their prickly husks anchoring them to the soil. And two days later, when she had yet to arrive, he shattered six bottles and swept the glass shards into the grass. By the end of the week the lawn had become so treacherous that it penetrated the soles of his shoes, cutting his feet and soaking his socks with blood.

## NATALIA &amp; QUINONES

After four decades of winter we sold the hotel and headed home. We sold it to a man who carried a briefcase and planned to replace the bidets and install his-and-hers sinks and towel racks. He said he was going to tear the cold boilers from each restroom and install a centralized water heater controlled by an automatic thermometer. He also planned to make love easier, requiring identification only when guests brought out their checkbooks or approached the front desk to pick up a package.

The romantic age was over, and so we headed south, stopping here to watch a falling planet, to see the ravages of love. Perhaps, Napoleon was right all along—perhaps love causes more damage than good, cracking the sky and ruining the horizon.

## SUBCOMANDANTE SANDRA

The end of Saturn was imminent. His role in the story had diminished. What was once a powerful planet was now shedding its mass, disintegrating into a trail of dust.

"All this time we wasted hiding under lead, shy of our own freedom and voice," I said to Froggy. "We should have fought from the beginning."

"But that was never de la Fe's way," Froggy answered.

Had it been up to de la Fe, we would still be walking around with our lips shut, thinking of ruffled petals, waiting for Saturn to flee from ennui.

But regardless of strategy, it was Federico de la Fe who had first led us against Saturn. Federico de la Fe had showed us that we were not free people, that we were enslaved and serving Saturn. Emancipation has many paths, some with more ruckus than others, but the quiet mediation of monks had failed us. We surrendered silence and opened our mouths, saying whatever we wished under open air.

After all these pages, as Saturn faded, it was our voices that directed the story, our collective might pressing Saturn into a corner.

No master pushed us forward or held us back. We were no longer obliged to serve anybody's expectations but our own. I could sit in my chair and do nothing. Glory or dénouement could come, and I didn't have to move.

## CAMEROON

My Saturn,

There is no haze in the African sky, but the smell of smoke is everywhere. I stopped at the Tangier observatory, I wanted to see you, but the house astronomer said that there is no more Saturn. "Not even the rings are left," he said. Cameroon is still very far away, I will write when I get there.

Yours always,  
Cami

## LETTUCE PICKERS

She always wants the spotlight, forcing herself into stories that are not hers. The sky falling and she starts her dancing routine. She'll toss her cigarette holder in midair and catch it between her lips.

Same routine and she wants an ovation every time.

"Orson bought this for me," she'll say, and untwist her bracelet. But before Hollywood and fat white men it was we who watched her dance. We who laid out the paths of lettuce so she would not stain her sequined dress or scuff the bottom of her shoes.

Once she betrayed us, we stopped tearing the romaine leaves from their stock. Instead we dumped wheelbarrows of rotating salad on the headquarters of her fan club and tossed icebergs over the wall of her Hollywood home.

They splashed down in her pool, and in the morning when she went for her daily dip the butler had to remove the bobbing heads of lettuce. And when her movies premiered smears of green stained the screens.

## SMILEY

They trampled the flower fields and brushed off their aprons, leaving sawdust and trimmings of lard in the furrows, cigarette ashes and lettuce heads on the streets, the gray smoke from incense lamps lingering around the altar boys but leaving the stench of Rome where they stepped.

Their litter—newspapers, wrappers, postcards—all caught in the wind, floating over my skylight.

I stayed inside, watching the flowerpots and watching as Monte was slowly destroyed. Liberated from Saturn, from the order that for years had kept us in line, our narrative organized and mindful of the conventions of story. Now the order had been upset, lost in a melee of voices that for years wanted their freedom.

## JULIETA

I fled the town of El Deramadero, a town named after decay, where everything fell apart. A disease I thought I had left behind. And now in El Monte, sky came down in flakes, and the flower fields were trampled, spreading petals everywhere, sprinklers breaking, water soaking into our shoes.

Even the words of Little Mermaid smelled like rot. And our leader, Federico de la Fe, spent his days kneeling on his lawn, airing the soil with the tip of his carnation knife and rolling eggs across the grass.

But Froggy remained brave and confident. "Don't worry, Julieta. This is how war is won," he said, flakes of sky in his hair, mud on his shoes, smearing of incense.

"And after the war? What is left?" I asked.

"Reconstruction," Froggy said. "We sweep the streets, reseed the fields, and patch our roofs. We rebuild and live how we always wanted, with hammocks swinging from our backyards and cloth curtains hanging from our windows, only thin draperies between us and the world.

## ELOTE MAN

I pushed my cart through the speculators, selling cobs of corn covered in butter and grated cheese. They kept looking up at the sky, anticipating the fall of Saturn.

But in the time I was there, selling corn to Hollywood starlets and millionaires, no Saturn fell. The crush heard in the flower fields was nothing but an old dinner dove tangled in his own wings. And in the late afternoon, with their necks still cocked to the sky, finally a small piece of Saturn fell: a blue flake floating down, resting on the soft lawn of Federico de la Fe.

# Techniques métafictionnelles

► Cette lutte s'engage sur 3 plans:

1. *Interface primaire/secondaire*: Federico de la Fe comprend que le plomb est opaque au regard de Saturne; les personnages blindent leurs maisons et, lorsqu'ils sortent, ne pensent que des choses inintéressantes.
2. *Plan du livre-objet*: Un personnage, Baby Nostradamus, a un pouvoir formel qu'il transmet à Little Merced (la fille de Federico de la Fe): il peut noircir des bouts de la page.
3. *Rencontre métafictionnelle*: Smiley (un des gars de l'"armée") part à la rencontre de l'auteur, au moment où celui-ci, ravagé de chagrin, abandonne l'écriture du livre.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>C'est une *parodie* de la rencontre métafictionnelle: Salvador Plascencia, en pleine dépression après une rupture amoureuse, ne remarque pas son personnage, puis ne le reconnaît pas, et finit cette rencontre en disant: "Smiley, you can tell Federico de la Fe and the rest [...] that they won. [...] they don't have to worry about me staring down on them anymore."

newsprint permeated the curtains, and the flakes of ash, buoyant even in whirlpools, floated in the toilet for nearly a week.

She rested her burnt and waterlogged arm on the kitchen table and tore the tattered blackened scraps, gathering a neat pile before dumping it in the wastebasket. She called the gas company to request a stoppage of service. They asked if she was moving, but instead of explaining that she had no need for stoves and hot water she said she was going on a long trip.

Merced de Papel was the only known survivor of her people, and as is always the case with those nearing extinction, she chronicled everything. Her manuscript began with an explanation of cunnilingus, noting the pleasures of human lips but also the aftermath of those who touched her, describing blood and the bits of paper pulp they would have to floss from their teeth.

In the last entry, the dangers of fire were cited, followed by a brief tutorial on the use of paper sacks and newsprint to repair what had been burned.

But it was not just burns that demanded repair. The friction from shoes tattered her toes, and simple things like holding a dinner fork wore away at her fingers. And so every weekend she walked down from the second floor of her Hollywood apartment, turned two corners to the newsstand, and returned with the Sunday edition. She sat at the kitchen table peeling away layers of paper, repairing what she had stripped with fresh, tight wraps of newsprint.

Compared to her creator Antonio, her origami was crude, often resorting to glue and tape. The messy folds and crusts of paste were hidden beneath her blouse and skirt. The sloppy tucks and cuts revealed themselves when she undressed and the lips of men tasted paste and jagged creases.

#### SMILEY

Smiley lived with the knowledge of Saturn. He knew his true name, the color of his sheets, and the position of his sleeping sprawls: always face down, his hands gripping the cliffs of the mattress.

But Smiley said nothing. He walked to de la Fe's dominoes game wearing only his pants, his chest and back bare to the sun and to the fluorescent light inside Federico de la Fe's house. It was there, standing above

the dominoes—an absurd game where the greatest value ended in loss, a game that Smiley saw as a direct parody of the mathematical principles his ancestors had pioneered—there over the table, as the ivory pieces were shuffled, Smiley resigned.

"I can't do this anymore," he said. "I don't care if Saturn sees me."

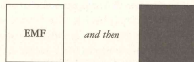
Federico de la Fe simply nodded, but his wrists and hands tightened and arthritis of melancholy inflamed his joints, and he shut his eyes trying to suppress the pain.

Eventually Federico de la Fe and EMF forgave Smiley, understanding that they were involved in a war for volition. They banned Smiley from the dominoes games and military meetings but still extended a kind civility to him, allowing him to retain his dairy privileges and complimentary admission to the monthly cockfights. But Smiley's EMF membership was revoked and the letters that ran across the side of his neck were blotted into black blocks.

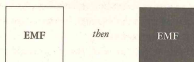
#### BABY NOSTRADAMUS

At first Little Merced's attempts were unsuccessful. Simple exercises involving only fragments of thought and singular words ended in disaster.

The Baby Nostradamus would demonstrate:



And then Little Merced would make an attempt:



Instead of hiding the letters, they became more pronounced. But after three days, as Little Merced practiced under the protection of her lead ceiling she was able to obscure not only basic acronyms but also simple sentences:



My name is Little Merced

After the simple phrase, she hid compound sentences that utilized semicolons and commas, and soon could manage even full paragraphs. Her skill level increased, allowing her to take on complete, sophisticated thoughts. Thoughts that branched and strayed into tangents and then returned, only to split and sprawl again. She became so proficient that she was able to elude even the Baby Nostradamus:

When she succeeded and her thoughts were impenetrable, as a courtesy to her teacher Little Merced whispered the contents into the Baby Nostradamus's ear.

#### MERCED DE PAPEL

The men who came to love Merced de Papel did so with caution. But when they left her apartment their lips and penises glistened, and the tube of Neosporin was left empty and flattened, its twist cap carelessly dropped and disregarded on the restroom floor.

They left cut by her edges, knowing that they would never sit with her again and watch her as she tore off the scraps where their blood and salt had stained. The crumpled paper collecting at the center of the table, men sometimes hoping that she would let some of the stains remain, if only for the afternoon.

But Merced de Papel never allowed history to accumulate, her skin changing with the news of the world. She peeled away the story that

reported the unearthing of a dead Samson; his healthy hair had sprouted from the ground and tangled itself around the shovels and pickaxes. And the following day, she wrapped a headline around her fingers that announced, in a follow-up report, the death of two Philistine archeologists choked by the locks of hair.

She peeled away every mark and scribble her lovers left, rarely saving any of the notes, grocery lists, and small reminders that men had written on her: pick up shirts from cleaners; dentist appointment 9:00 a.m.; milk, bread, cereal. And once she had to strip the whole of her back where someone had written the name Liz a thousand times over in blue ink.

Merced de Papel remained unmarked by her lovers, but men left with split lips and tongues, cuts that scarred, remaining deep into old age. The men walked into the Los Angeles streets, encountering others with the same distinctive paper-thin scars. They introduced themselves, casually licking their lips to reveal the depth and age of their cuts, at times flicking cleft tongues as quick as lizards.

But this was an unspoken fraternity; never were Merced de Papel or the cause of the scars mentioned. Their conversations were about the cities they had lived in and jobs they had worked. With the exception of a gourmet chef whose taste buds had been shredded and now had to rely on memory and precise measurements when stirring his sauces, there were no regrets.

Merced de Papel had many lovers. On any given night, when the wait for a table at Musso & Frank's exceeded half an hour, the chef who poured salt into a teaspoon and minced two cloves of garlic, two waiters (each carrying a plate of Caesar salad and a bowl of unsalted lentil soup), a patron on table eight wearing pleated slacks and a wool sweater and two at table twelve who asked for their steaks medium-rare with a side of chef's marinade, the supplier who personally delivered the French and Napa wines, and the electrician who on an emergency call, forgetting to wear his rubber-insulated steel-toe shoes, had to replace two fuses that blacked out the west side of the restaurant—all of them licked their lips. A gesture that was both a greeting and a sign of solidarity with those who had been cut by paper.

#### SMILEY

Smiley tore down the lead scutes from his walls and opened the roof, transforming his living room into a courtyard. And in his bedroom,

## SATURN

As Federico de la Fe began to recover, Little Merced's power grew progressively stronger, and by the time de la Fe was able to eat bread and pork, she had spread her protective shield beyond her own boundaries, cloaking even the thoughts of others.

The shield spread, unbeknownst to Federico de la Fe and EMF. So while Little Merced sat in her room in deep concentration, occasionally reaching into her burlap sack and pulling out a handful of limes, Federico de la Fe and Froggy sat at the dominoes table planning the next assault.

"We cannot hide from Saturn," Froggy said to Federico de la Fe. "Perhaps it is time that we took control and pushed him out."

Federico de la Fe did not say anything; he emptied the dominoes box and then turned the tiles face down so that the unmarked ivory faced upwards. As Froggy spoke of new battle strategies, Federico de la Fe took three dominoes, arranging them like this:



Froggy grabbed the blocks from Federico de la Fe, turning tiles and then adding to the formation:



And while nothing was said, Froggy and Federico de la Fe had devised a new plan to combat Saturn.

## LITTLE MERCED

I sat on my bed peeling the skins from limes and then eating the meat. Father and Froggy sat around the dominoes table. I closed my eyes and followed the procedures that the Baby Nostradamus had taught me, focusing but making sure not to deny my own thoughts.

I thought back to the bar that had

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## EMF

Froggy called us to the dominoes table. We all gathered around and looked down at the blocks of ivory.

"This is how we stop Saturn," Froggy said, pointing at the dominoes, "but we will need more than just EMF."

"It is their war too," Federico de la Fe said.

Federico de la Fe and Froggy were tending the war, recruiting beyond the men boundaries that surrounded El Monte.

And so the preparations began. We combed our hair and tucked in our shirts and practiced the pleasant smiles of salesmen. We then drove out of El Monte to the cities of Alhambra, San Gabriel, and South Pasadena. We knocked on doors, asking people to join us in the war against Saturn.

Some answered their doors and politely declined.

"You want to destroy the only thing that is holding us together," they said. We apologized and moved on.

We also came upon veteranos who had fought their own wars.

"I fought in Chromos, in Locos, and in Chimera," they said.

And because they had lost every war, they too declined.

After three days and four cities, only two new recruits had agreed to join in the battle against Saturn.

EMF kept recruiting, knocking on doors until the skin on their knuckles was tender and bruised.

Even Little Merced, now proficient in her powers and able to quickly spread the protective shield, went door to door asking for help, at every doorstep dropping lime seeds and peels.

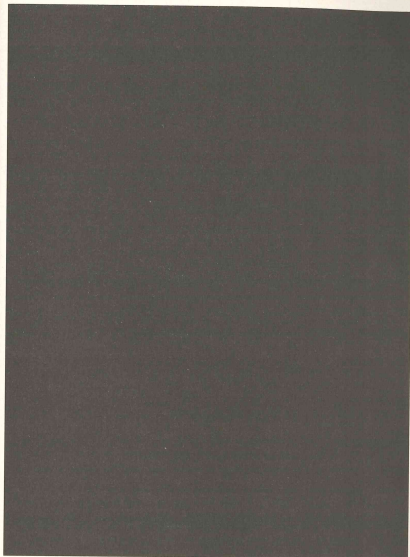
Federico de la Fe's initial strategy had called for patience, a war of waiting and hiding, hoping that Saturn would eventually tire and withdraw. It was not direct combat but a slow defense eventually undermined by the toxicity of lead. De la Fe realized that it was time for full engagement. Time for an all-out war.

Saturn was prepared for whatever assault Federico de la Fe launched. In trying to displace her from his mind, she whose name he now refused to say, he pulled several tomes from the library's military wing. He read about every naval, land, air, and epistolary battle in the history of the Americas. He supplemented his knowledge by familiarizing himself with the autobiography of Napoleon Bonaparte, which the Little Corporal had written while in exile. The main body of the work was a rumination on offensive philosophies, with a short chapter on defensive considerations. The epilogue consisted of recipes for rotisserie chicken and a health regimen.

The regimen consisted of six basic rules that Napoleon followed religiously, except in his last two campaigns, when he was defeated by the Fifth Coalition in the War of Liberation and by Marie Louise in a battle that was never named.

From the two hundred twenty-third page of the biography, Saturn carefully tore out the six basic rules a commander must follow:








- 1) Breakfast: 2 eggs, 1 oz. of lard, and a glass of milk.
- 2) Before lunch: one hundred pushups, two hundred sit-ups, and one Hail Mary.
- 3) Abstain from writing love letters.
- 4) Do not think of her (even on her Saint's Day).
- 5) If you think of her, do not do it again.
- 6) At night use sleeping goggles.









# Éléments d'interprétation thématique

- ▶ Contrairement à aux clichés (post-modernes), cette œuvre n'a pas d'effet comique caractéristique, bien au contraire:
- ▶ Plascencia pose à plusieurs endroits la question du droit à l'intimité pour les personnages.
  - ▶ Sur fond d'immense tristesse;
  - ▶ sur fond de la légitimité de l'appropriation des histoires (de migrants mexicains) par l'auteur.
- ▶ Un thème fondamental est en fait le voyeurisme du ou de la narrataire (qui est le pendant de l'omniscience de la narration).
  - ▶ Et donc met en perspective cette envie des lectureuses (réelles) de s'identifier à ce personnage de voyeuseuse...







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## *The French Lieutenant Woman* (ch.55) I

Now could I use you?

Now what could I do with you?

It is precisely, it has always seemed to me, the look of an omnipotent god – if there were such an absurd thing – should be shown to have. Not at all what we think of as a divine look; but one of distinctly mean and dubious (as the theoreticians of the *nouveau roman* have pointed out) moral quality. I see this with particular clarity on the face, only too familiar to me, of the bearded man who stares at Charles. And I will keep up the pretence no longer .

Now the question I am asking, as I stare at Charles, is not quite the same as the two above. But rather, what the devil am I to do with you? I have already thought of ending Charles's career here and now; of leaving him for eternity on his way to London. But the conventions of Victorian fiction allow, allowed no place for the open, the inconclusive ending; and I preached earlier of the freedom characters must be given. My problem is simple – what Charles want

## *The French Lieutenant Woman* (ch.55) II

is clear? It is indeed. But what the protagonist wants is not so clear; and I am not at all sure where she is at the moment. Of course, if these two were two fragments of real life, instead of two figments of my imagination, the issue to the dilemma is obvious: the one want combats the other want, and fails or succeeds, as the actuality may be. Fiction usually pretends to conform to the reality: the writer puts the conflicting wants in the ring and then describes the fight – but in fact fixes the fights (in other words, in persuading us that they were not fixed) and by the kind of fighter they fix in favour of: the good one, the tragic one, the evil one, the funny one, and so on.

But the chief argument for fight-fixing is to show one's readers what one thinks of the world around one – whether one is a pessimist, an optimist, what you will. I have pretended to slip back into 1867; but of course that year is in reality a century past. It is futile to show optimism or pessimism, or anything else about it, because we know what has happened since.

## *The French Lieutenant Woman* (ch.55) III

So I continue to stare at Charles and see no reason this time for fixing the fight upon which he is about to engage. That leaves me with two alternatives. I let the fight proceed and take no more than a recording part in it; or I take both sides in it. I stare at the vaguely effete but not completely futile face. And as we near London, I think I see a solution; that is, I see the dilemma is false. The only way I can take no part in the fight is to show two versions of it. That leaves me with only one problem: I cannot give both versions at once, yet whichever is the second will seem, so strong is the tyranny of the last chapter, the final, the “real” version.

I take my purse from the pocket of my frock-coat, I extract a florin, I rest it on my right thumbnail, I flick it, spinning, two feet into the air and catch it in my left hand.