Although it is a primary connector in the long, linear "syntagmatic" dimension of stories, causation in fiction has attracted only passing attention from theorists. Despite the illuminating pages on the subject by Genette, Todorov, Prince, and others which enrich this study, no attempt has yet been made to construct a unified theory of the causal concept in narrative. Among the many reasons for the dearth of etiological theories, two, I think, deserve mention at the outset. First, the causal dynamic remained largely invisible to the relatively static visions of literary structuralism, which dominated early theoretical exploration. Second, well-founded contemporary doubts about the real-world truth value of the causal concept raise questions about the validity of causal statements concerning fiction.

The pages that follow are organized partly in response to these problems. A brief introductory summary of philosophical views of "real-life" causation, from Hume and Kant, through Nietzsche, Bergson, and Russell, to Mackie and Anscombe, leads among other things to the observation that causation is indeed not a truth but a hypothesis, not an entity to be found in nature, but rather a useful perceptual grid in the minds of human observers. This finding leads me to postulate that the reader serves as the "human observer" of fiction, and that causation arises most basically in stories from readerly perception. Thus the principles of reader-response criticism open doors that were closed to structuralist poetics. Chapter one then evokes briefly the notions of causal "functions" in narrative as developed by modern narratologists and seeks to show how this approach, eliminating the human observer (reader) from analyses, erroneously seeks "true" logical connections between events. Yet causes are present only in the discourse of a text, in the unavoidable causal implications of language, not in the events of
the story itself. This long-established distinction between "story" and "discourse" leads me to adapt for analytical purposes Genette's three-tier model of narrative, which includes a "narration" level as well, referring to the inferred author's "production" of the text.

Inductive analysis of four relatively traditional French novels serves to demonstrate how causality—or readerly inference thereof—operates on all three levels, each of which assumes a dynamic role. At this early stage of causal research, it seems both prudent and honest to derive elements of causal theory chiefly by induction, through observation of existing fiction, rather than to propose a system apparently *ex nihilo* and to attempt to show subsequently that real texts exemplify it. Near the end of part I, I advance a three-level provisional model of the causal dynamic in "standard" novels and seek to demonstrate that the levels of narrative are actually definable by causal operations.

Part II of this study attempts to apply this matrix, no longer to traditional fiction, but to a series of French modernist narratives. These further inductive analyses suggest that the twentieth-century French novelists in question have become increasingly unsure of the objective existence of real-world causality, or at least of human ability to observe it. They are less likely than traditional writers to seek to imply its existence between events of their stories, but they must nonetheless use language, with all the causal expression that entails. They employ therefore various strategies of blocking and indeterminacy to eliminate from readers' constitution of the "story" level whatever causation may remain operative in the discourse. In the most recent Robbe-Grillet text analyzed, all "real-world" referentiality is effectively eliminated, thus making it impossible for readers to draw causal inferences about the story. On the basis of strengths and limitations now apparent in the provisional three-tier model, my conclusion proposes a more complex and uncertain one as applicable within limits to both traditional and modernist texts.

Thus my response to the first problem—the inability of theory to observe causality in fiction—is an approach founded upon readerly response to texts. To the second problem, I reply that causal statements are not intended to be true: they are hypotheses. But they are inferences of such power that they inform the metonymical dimension of traditional stories and require those modern texts that would prefer to banish causal connections to adopt strategies of particular sophistication.

In an effort to make these pages readily accessible to all readers of
English, I have provided translations for the substantive quotations in other languages. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are, for better or worse, my own.

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