I
Causality in Fiction

La similitude relie un terme métaphorique au terme auquel il se substitue. En conséquence, quand le chercheur construit un métalangage pour interpréter les tropes, il possède des moyens plus homogènes pour manier la métaphore, alors que la métonymie, fondée sur un principe différent, défie facilement l'interprétation. C'est pourquoi rien de comparable à la riche littérature écrite sur la métaphore ne peut être cité en ce qui concerne la théorie de la métonymie. Pour la même raison, si on a généralement aperçu les liens étroits qui unissent le romantisme à la métaphore, on a le plus souvent méconnu l'affinité profonde qui lie le réalisme à la métonymie.

(Similarity binds a metaphorical term to the term for which it is substituted. As a result, when the scholar constructs a metalanguage for interpretation of tropes, he has more homogeneous means for dealing with metaphor, whereas metonymy, based on a different principle, readily defies interpretation. That is why nothing comparable to the rich literature on metaphor can be cited with respect to metonymy. For the same reason, if the close bonds linking romanticism to metaphor have been widely perceived, the profound affinity connecting realism to metonymy has most often gone unrecognized.)

—Roman Jakobson

Modern references to the structural role of causality in fiction commence with E. M. Forster, who pointed out in the 1920s that, if a “story” is a narrative of events in temporal sequence, to build a “plot,” one must emphasize causality. “The king died and then the queen died,” he told us, is a story; “The king died and then the queen died of grief” is a plot. But the concept of “plot” becomes increasingly undefinable the more closely one looks at the multilayered way in which causal
relationships develop in readers' minds. Forster's simplistic example suggests that a story can gain a plot through the mere addition of words, a notion on which he himself would scarcely have staked his reputation. Indeed, he indicates in the same context that it is the reader's question "why?" (for a plot), rather than "and then?" (for a story), which characterizes the distinction. For "why?" is always a matter of inference, even in the presence of explicit explanations: are they to be believed or not? Still, given the vagueness of the term, on the rare occasions when I speak of "plot" here, it will be rather as a synonym for the more recent concept of histoire.

We all recall how Roland Barthes situated causal relationships in the empirical "proaïretic code" he uncovered in *S/Z* (Aristotelian "proaïresis" being the "faculty of deliberating upon the outcome of a course of conduct," p. 25). He correctly saw them as branching, interconnecting relationships, forming the strongest armature of the readerly text and the basis for a kind of structural analysis. He also stresses in *S/Z* the importance of readers' past experience, for Humean comparison, in inferring the causal connections: the proaïretic is the "déjà-écrit," "déjà- lu," "déjà-vu," "déjà-fait" ("already-written, -read, -seen, -done"). But the Aristotelian stricture, limiting the code to psychological causes (of physical and/or psychological effects), tends to screen out physical causes; yet, as we shall see, from infectious diseases, to a broken drive rod, to a blazing sun on the beach, these can be prime determinants of the way events turn.

As the structuralist approach developed, following the principle of objective description we have noted, it sought to derive functional relationships rather than "causes." This critical stance has produced sound general theories about the connecting devices that hold narratives together. Starting from his famous linguistic, semantic model, A.-J. Greimas derives an impressive set of formulae for the interaction of characters. His "modèles actantiels" ("actantial models"), devised to describe types of connections, tend to define characters ("actants," "patients," etc.) as functions of the narrative energy, mechanisms for the production or experience of actions. Perhaps constructed to avoid limiting the definition of characters to their deeds, Gerald Prince's grammar of stories is founded on the principle of connections between "events." He develops the case for logical or definitive necessity, positing that stories are the caused reversal of an initial stative event, with the stated implication that narrative may take other forms, but that, without the caused reversal, the term "story" is inappli-
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cable. (One person's story is, I suppose, as Forster might say, another's plot.) Prince's theory describes causation as a connective between narrative units, as a conjunctive feature reducible by transformation to the formulation: "as a result." But in his *Grammaire du Décaméron*, Tzvetan Todorov had already evoked a kind of pragmatic necessity for expressed causality, since, with the exception of narrative units which are related by repetition ("emphasis" or "inversion"), he finds all relations between units in these stories to be, in one way or another, causal. Whereas for Prince the expression of cause is conjunctive in nature and thus optional (even though the negative option may not yield stories), for Todorov it is fundamentally related to the transitivity of narrative, to the ongoing modification which is the story, and hence to the function of verbs. The relationship of this critical position to Anscombe's philosophical argument is self-evident: it underlies much of what follows in this study.

Claude Bremond marks, I think, an important advance in *Logique du récit* by defining causation as a relationship of implication, thus beginning to imply, at the same time, readers and their inferences, their hypotheses. While, like Greimas, he focuses on the relationships of characters to actions, he highlights characters' choices, thus neatly balancing actions as definers of characters against character traits as definers of action. But it was Todorov who came to see the relationship of character to action and the question of which defines the other as a causal problem: do characters produce actions, or vice versa? Grasping what I have called the "radical simultaneity" of the perceived cause-effect relationship, he wonders whether the directionality of the causal connection is not, perhaps deconstructively, bivalent. I shall attempt a "reconstruction" in response to that, but not before the whole analytical apparatus is in place, at the end of this volume.

Underlying the structuralist positions is the question of whether causation is expressed or implied in fiction. Obviously, the causal idea reaches readers in both ways; the distinction is indeed constitutive of the narrative levels we shall consider presently. But one major study, which is not about causation at all, describes an approach to fiction that opens the way to the discovery of causation, not as an objective function to be discovered in the text, but as a readerly hypothesis. This study is Wolfgang Iser's *The Act of Reading*. It describes how readers "constitute" the text, connect narrative units in groups or Gestalten, and fill the gaps, where necessary, in
the narrative logic. The gaps themselves are absences, objectively present in texts, which call forth the reader's participation in the esthetic act. Iser's insights will be seen to have clearly conditioned my concept of reading.

When Nietzsche speaks, as we have seen, of the ability to read off a text as text, without interposing an interpretation, one is inclined to ask what sort of text this could be, and especially what kind of reading. For, if a text remains text, it may perhaps be "read off" (that is, "pronounced," as one can learn to sing a foreign-language song, by imitating a recorded version of it, with no idea of the sense expressed by the lyrics), but it can hardly be said to have been "read." For to read is to combine fragments, an activity necessarily subtended by interpretation.

The notion of the word as a unit of speech has long been taken by writers (quite rightly) for granted, by virtue of words' permutability and substitutability for one another, in divers contexts. Yet readers can scarcely perform their task at the level of the word: reading is, in large measure, an interlexical activity. Traditional grammatical parlance holds that adjectives "modify" the nouns they accompany, and the metaphor needs to be taken seriously, for they can indeed transform or recreate a mental image. As Greimas demonstrates, in blending the lexical data in a given context to form a mental picture, the reader obliterates the spaces between words.9

In *Allegories of Reading*, Paul de Man affirms:

There can be no text without grammar: the logic of grammar generates texts only in the absence of referential meaning, but every text generates a referent that subverts the grammatical principle to which it owed its constitution.10

This distinction, part of a larger set of parallels de Man develops, separates writing neatly from reading. The writer, before the blank page, resides in the pre-text: grammar is the law which will constitute her or his discourse; the reader comes into existence only in the post-text and is, in envisioning the referent, a party to the subversion of grammar. Reading unites, in ways often highly individual to the particular reader, what grammar separates.

The word "green," surrounded by spaces, may evoke images ranging from chartreuse to ultramarine. But invent a banal sentence and limitations intrude: "He had no choice but to send green troops against the armored battalion." "Green" is totally meaningful, and therefore meaningless, until "troops" strikes the eye, determining the mental selection of a branch of
signifieds springing from "unripe": "immature," "inexperienced," "untested." Thus, the space between "green" and "troops" becomes an absent absence on the semantic level. Likewise, the distance separating "He" from its supposed antecedent disappears in context, and the meaning of "He" is further determined by the verbal components of the sentence, of which it is the subject. The "no . . . but" structure is an abstraction, suggesting selection of one unit within a set, all others being rejected: it requires union with "choice . . . to send" in order to evoke an imaginary "sense." The definite article before "armored battalion" indicates that the sense of that term has been partially predetermined in the context, and "send . . . troops against" suggests the possibility, if not the necessity, of further bellicose developments in succeeding sentences. Like most sentences with transitive verbs, this one designates a change and therefore affirms causation.

As soon as causality enters the picture, we are in the presence of a hypothesis, and readers will wish to know, as a condition of belief, to whom the text attributes it. The reading is not complete unless the reader knows who, according to the text, is making the inference that "He had no choice but . . . ," and on what grounds. Is it some inferable "author" or narrator, or is it the "He" of the sentence? Such information, of course, further unites the quoted words to their verbal surroundings. If the text hints that its writer (in the tradition of Wayne Booth's "implied author") has reached the conclusion, thus valorizing "His" decision, to what extent do we trust him or her? This query makes of the total text a context, for our judgment will surely depend on our knowledge of everything the text attributes to this "writer," as well as on the reasoning elicited in this instance, if any. On the other hand, if "He" arrived at the conclusion given, we will read the sentence in another manner, as a figure ("free indirect style"), and perhaps wonder whether the absence of options is not mere rationalization. While the antecedent of "He" and its context may have provided us data upon which to base our determination, some readers may react empathetically ("What would I have done in his situation?"), and others ideologically ("How does the military mind work?"). Then the context becomes an extratext of indeterminate but surely enormous proportions, limited only by the experience and psychological propensities of each reader.

Despite certain simplistic uses that have been made of his algorithm for meaning (signifier/signified), Saussure was well aware of the importance of the syntagmatic axis in the production of meaning. For the notion of
“meaning” with respect to a sentence or other syntagm occupies a fundamentally different realm from that of the “meaning” of a word. Words are understood by definitions, lists of denotations and connotations, so that “understanding” a word is a function of synonymity (as “bachelor” equals “unmarried man” in Jakobson’s famous example), which implies the mental substitution of “equivalent” terms. Understanding a syntagm, while it also involves substitution of mental images and concepts for terms, requires extensive combinatory activity, often ranging far afield within the text and into the reader’s individual experience. This association of nonequivalent terms is, of course, metonymic in character: since the labor of combination must, in the final analysis, extend to the entire text (more essentially: to the memory thereof), and to the relevant extratext of experience, the “meaning” of complete texts, the largest of syntagma, derives as well from metonymy. Even metaphors, which function essentially by substitution (comparison), are contingent upon metonymy, as elements of expressed syntagma, for their meaning: Eluard’s oft-analyzed “blue earth” metaphor would not achieve its celebrated effect, of course, if “bleue comme” (“blue like/as”) did not signal a metonymic ellipsis: “comme une orange [est bleue]” (“as an orange [is blue]”).

Now whenever the reader’s combinatory activity is causal in nature, it takes the form of an inference (or hypothesis—with respect to fiction I use the terms interchangeably). And if all causes are hypothetical, all hypotheses are causal, at least in the first degree: “because of A, I infer B.” A, in this paradigm, is an example of those special cases of causation termed “conditions.” The prime cause of my inference is of course my desire to draw it; A is that condition which validates the hypothesis in my eyes. Since without such validation I should refuse, despite desire, to infer, the condition is itself a causal element. If \( \Rightarrow \) means “is a necessary condition of,” and if \( \Rightarrow \) means “reader,” a reader’s hypothesis can be expressed like this: \( A \Rightarrow R(B) \). Most hypotheses of interest for this study are also causal in the second degree, for they concern supposed cause-and-effect relationships in stories. They may be stated, “because of C, I infer that A causes B.” If \( \rightarrow \) means “causes,” one may write: \( C \Rightarrow R(A \rightarrow B) \), or, for inferred conditions, \( C \Rightarrow R(A \Rightarrow B) \). But where shall we go to look for C, that necessary condition that encourages inferences by tending to validate them? Is it to be found in the timeline of the narrative, where A and B reside, or in the timeline of the reader’s own existence? Essentially, C is a point of juncture, situated at once in fiction and in life; as derivativeness, it belongs to the timeline of A and B,
and as perception of derivativeness, based upon comparisons with readers’ previous experience, with fiction and with life, it arises in the timeline of readers’ existence. It is at such intersections of human experience and texts that reading, as such, takes place. Still higher degrees of causal inference are possible, although we shall not have need for them until the end of our analyses, when we face the question of imagined “authors’” inferred hypotheses about readers’ potential causal inferences. If X stands for a hypothetical “author,” one might write, for example, D \rightarrow X[C \Rightarrow R(A \rightarrow B)].

But since such an “author” is entirely the product of dispositions within the text itself, our knowledge of X and D is limited to the data of A and B, and to the textual components of C.

Because notions of “authorship” are enforced upon us by our heuristic device of causation in texts, it is time for a disclaimer. First, our term in no sense refers to a real social or legal persona. It is the name for those dispositions within a text which provide a sense of purpose or intention; it seems to me no more bizarre to speak of an inferred author’s intentions than to speak of the intentions of the text (I do both). Second, the inferred author, or the narrator (we shall distinguish between them shortly), as a product of readerly inference, can have only inferred intentions. Still, the inference is necessary and implied by texts: as with our example about sending green troops into battle, it is often useful for the readers to know who is speaking, and to infer why, as a condition of grasping the import of certain utterances. Finally, by definition, no hypothesis, including those about intentions and “sources” of utterances, is “true.” Our “inferred authors” and narrators are devices, selected “under erasure,” for describing the ways in which readers and many texts interact. As literature changes and interaction assumes new modalities, the device will “self-destruct.”

At the more basic level of the sentence, it is often syntax that furnishes the conditions for inference. When the narrator affirms, in Camus’s La Peste, “Les bagarres aux portes, pendant lesquelles les gendarmes avaient dû faire usage de leurs armes, créèrent une sourde agitation” (“The riots at the gates, during which the police had had to use their weapons, created an undercurrent of agitation”), he institutes a cause (“riots”); he states, as Anscombe might say, its “efficacy” (“created”); and he names its effect (“undercurrent of agitation”). Standard syntax in both French and English allot, of course, temporal priority to the subject, so that subject stands in temporal relation to predicate as cause does to effect. The Nietzschean reversal is just as applicable: it is only when we reach the verb that we can
think back and redefine the earlier noun as "subject." In simple observation statements like that of the main clause, the only hypothesis springs from our knowledge of life and of the narrator: whether we will infer that the affirmation is correct. For, like all statements of cause, it expresses after all an opinion. In the subordinate clause, the narrator chooses to highlight causation—and therefore the judgmental character of his inference—by the use of the verb "avaient dû" ("had had to"): the linguistic option, "firent usage de leurs armes" ("used their weapons") exists and would require no inference on his part. The narrator is electing to judge that circumstances made violent repression necessary and inviting readers by that choice to judge him: we may or may not believe that other police behavior might have been equally or more appropriate to the desired ends. On the whole, the encouragement to infer that the statement is true appears particularly strong, since the syntax reflects a classic INUS condition. The "riots" were necessary for the creation of the "undercurrent of agitation," but themselves were insufficient to produce it; the subordinate clause adduces the additional information for the larger condition, unnecessary (the riots might not have occurred, or the police might not have fired), but sufficient to produce the effect. Thus one might almost begin to suspect that the syntactic structures that create the metonymic associations were invented as vehicles for the linguistic transmission of causality, as much of the metalanguage of grammar suggests: "object," "subordinate," "conditional," etc.\textsuperscript{16}

So far, the relationship of language to reality appears, with respect to causality, disturbingly unproblematical: syntax requires writers to imply causation and encourages readers to infer it. (It is to be expected that, in an age in which causality itself is viewed as suspect, there will be attempts to subvert its expression, as we shall see.) Metaphor may appear frequently in narrative, but it comes as a gratuitous enlightenment, exterior to the series of events which make up this story. Metonymy, on the other hand, is an integral part of individual syntagma and a constant connection between them. That which is gratuitous, of course, calls attention to itself by its presence; that which is necessary is evoked by its absence. We think (if I may be permitted to exaggerate for the sake of illustration) of tear gas only when it is present in our immediate environment, and of oxygen only when it is absent. Metaphors are striking in narration in that they are present when no need for them exists. Since they appear to be the product of a choice, they imply an intention beyond the initial decision to "tell a tale." The intentions of a story teller are highly valorized: it is through them that
we know her or him. Indeed, it is only with the optional elements of discourse that an author (implied) or a story teller standing before us (real), can communicate with us; for the rest, linguistic conventions are speaking.

For the expression of cause and effect, two areas of optionality exist, two zones of “difference” from the norm (from the reader's standpoint), or of “differance” (from the writer's position). One is the area of absence, when causality is valorized by its abnormal disappearance. The causal chain breaks (by indetermination or underdetermination), weakens (through implausibility or relegation to a peripheral role), or is subverted (by means of paradox and contradiction). The other zone of difference is overdetermination. In addition to metonymic association, an impressively large vocabulary exists, in French as in other Western languages, to explain how and why events occur. Use of this vocabulary appears as a matter of choice, and it provides information about causation over and beyond syntactic norms. Examination of this second area of optionality should eventually lead us back to the first.

The specialized vocabulary of causation in French includes a meta-language of causality (cause, causer) and a group of explicitly causal verbs, such as laisser and faire (plus infinitive), and frequently devoir. A number of prepositions, from pour (to express either intent or result) to the unobtrusive use of à (“A l'entendre bavarder, déjà je m'ennuyais”) and of de (“Il la gâtait de mille soins”) can explain purpose, result, or agency. As in English, French participles and adjectives can have causal force (“Ainsi coiffée, elle attirait tous les regards” ["Her hair thus arranged, she attracted all eyes"]). Nouns themselves, as Anscombe points out,17 are often expressive of cause: if we learn that “l'incendie rageait” (“the fire was raging”), and later discover that objects have been burned, we will know why. Causal conjunctions (parce que, car, d'autant plus que, etc.) obviously introduce explanations. And, in addition to such terms, the mere juxtaposition of certain propositions can suggest, by parataxis, that a cause-and-effect relationship exists between them. I shall exemplify the functioning of this vocabulary in greater detail in the next chapter, with respect to specific texts, but basic inferences may be drawn at once from its existence.

As an optional mode of expression, this vocabulary is by nature judgmental. It implies not only a speaker, but one who is providing explanations of events, which, since they are perforce subjective, we may accept or reject. But at the same time it is informing us about the narrator. Such vocabulary reveals how (and if) narrators explain their worlds, and that revelation contains much of what we call “narratorial identity.” It is based
on two postulates, which are a part of the narrative pact we make with the novels we read (at least the traditional ones), the basis of which is the "willing suspension of disbelief."

The first postulate is that the narrator has a world. The exercise of causal judgment implies the experience of the "realities" to be judged. The narrator of a tale, intradiegetic or no, is perceived by the traditional reader, not as the inventor of the story (even if, like Scheherezade, she or he claims to be), but as its encoder and interpreter. Behind the narrative voice lies another entity, which has presented the events to the narrator's consciousness directly and without interpretation. The choice to provide causal explanation suggests a belief that it is needed, and the "need" implies the existence of unexplained data. These data are the narrator's "world," and efforts to explain it point to (1) the notion that the story's events "occurred" prior to their narration, (2) the principle that the events are foreign to the narrator, exterior to the narrator's mind, and difficult, in his or her opinion, to comprehend without explanation, and (3) the presence of an inferable author, inventor, or source of information, who or which provides the raw data to the narrator.

The second postulate is this: if an explanation is given, it is not the only possible one. Its very presence implies an absence. "Le discours mani­feste ne serait en fin de compte," Foucault points out, "que la présence répressive de ce qu'il ne dit pas; et ce non-dit serait un creux qui mine de l'intérieur tout ce qui se dit". Foucault's remark has far wider implications, but it expresses the basis of potential skepticism on the readers part with respect to narrators' causal judgments. The word "potential" needs perhaps some underscoring: readers need not question such judgments, but merely remain aware of their freedom to do so, for that "cavity" marks their basic separateness from the narrative voice.

It is the notions of "narrator" and "inferred author" (since our stance is rigorously with the reader rather than the author, our concern with reading rather than with "poetics," this term appears more apt than Wayne Booth's "implied author") that produce the levels of narrative around which we will group all our arguments. These levels are a standard in textual analysis, although they do not derive from the venerable tradition in which Wayne Booth's work is a landmark. Gérard Genette's definition of them is most interesting:
(I propose . . . to call "histoire" the signified or narrative content [even if this content happens to be, in a given instance, relatively uneventful or lacking in dramatic intensity], to name "récit" properly so called the signifier, utterance, discourse, or narrative text itself, and to term "narration" the productive narrative act, and, by extension, the totality of the real or fictive situation in which it takes its place.)

Despite Genette's reference, in speaking of narration, to an "act" with possible relationship to a "real" situation (and despite his evocation of a narrative content which sounds more like a referent than a signified), it is surely unlikely, in light of the context, that he is alluding here to a real and causative authorial presence. The "alliance" I am developing here between the Boothian tradition (with more recent echoes in Seymour Chatman's work) and the principles of textual analysis is thus not a representation of the views of either, but a hypothetical device for uncovering relationships between readers and texts. Here are its basic assumptions.

The récit will be for us the domain of the narrator: the words he or she chooses to tell the story and their ordering on the page. The histoire belongs to the inferred author; it is the raw data, the series of events which he or she provides, as "content" for the narrator's pen. In general, one might say that there are no causal connections in any histoire, since events are not causally related unless someone—a narrator or a reader—perceives them to be. Still, verbatim conversations, interior monologues, characters' explicit thoughts, etc., are "facts" of the histoire, which the narrator can "quote," but not interpret in so doing. In such elements of the histoire, characters may evoke causation or explain their motivations. In this way, causation can enter the histoire, although readers retain, as always, their freedom to accept or reject, for cause, characters' causal explanations. The narration, as the productive act per se, is the realm of the author. Again, the "author" is not a persona but rather those elements of a supposed authorial thought process or intention which can be inferred from the existence and nature of texts themselves. Thus, the "author" is just as inferred as the "inferred author"; in rare instances, if I must mark the different kinds of inference involved, I
shall call the “author” (of the narration) the “indexic author,” for the text is a
semiological index of her or him, just as smoke is of fire. All these inferences
point to the presence of causation; indeed, just as (in my terminology) the
histoire, supposedly preexisting, purports to be one of the conditions of its
récit, so the narration (in my sense) is inferred as a cause of them both: the
author invents the inferred author, creator of the story’s content, and the
narrator, with choice of words and syntax, as well. A few examples should
suffice to clarify the distinctions. 22

Detective fiction perhaps exemplifies the distinction between récit and
histoire most clearly, for its form arises from the interplay of these levels.
When the sleuth as narrator presents at last the explanation of the crime,
perfect accord is supposed to exist between all the known data provided by
the inferred author and the detective’s récit of the reconstructed crime.
Because we have willingly suspended disbelief, we cannot question the
data, but narrative remains potentially suspect, since different verbal chains
can express various causal bonds linking the same “facts.” Thus detective
stories will frequently introduce a confession from the accused, who will
assure us that the investigator has described the causal links correctly. San-
Antonio’s hero-narrator is not averse to the use of violence to unite the causal
strands of the two levels:

—Regarde-moi, insisté-je en lui filant une beigne, c’est pas ça, dis?
—Si, souffle le truand. . .
Je le chope par les revers. Je le tiens plaqué contre moi et, mon
nez touchant le sien, je lui crache:
—Ose dire que ça n’est pas ça?
Il a peur, ses dents font un bruit de noix trimbalées dans un
sac. . .
—Oui, avoue-t-il . . . C’est bien ça . . .
J’ai le trait de génie. 23

(“Look me in the eye,” I insist, swatting him across the chops.
“That’s the way it was, right?”
“Yeah,” whispers the crook. . . .
I grab him by the lapels; holding him smack up against me, nose
to nose, I spit out the words:
“I dare you to tell me that’s not how it was!”

22

23
He's scared; his teeth are making noises like unshelled walnuts bouncing around in a bag.

"Yeah," he admits, "that's how it was all right . . .

I'm a natural genius.)

The reported conversation is a part of the *histoire*, fictive "fact" from the inferred author, which the narrator, if he is to uphold in traditional fashion his part of the narrative pact, cannot change. But it serves to confirm ("that's how it was all right") the causal explanation of the hero-sleuth-narrator: "Tu as cramponné le magot et tu t'es apprêté à filer, ne voulant pas te mouiller . . . Et puis tu as pris peur . . . Alors, sans penser plus loin, tu l'as balancé par la fenêtre," etc. ("You copped the wad and were all set to beat it, since you didn't want to get in any deeper . . . And then you got scared. . . . So, without another thought, you tossed it out the window," etc.) This explanation, given as part of the conversation, belongs in that sense to the *histoire* as well. But as a verbal reconstruction of earlier events, it constitutes a kind of *récit* itself, embedded in the longer *récit* which is the text of the novel. Indeed, it enters that *récit* in the expression "trait de génie," which summarizes it. Yet the narrator's comic arrogance and propensity for violence (would the "crook" dare contradict him, even if he were wrong?) leave him ironically suspect. These elements constitute a condition for reader inference that the confession is perhaps a lie, caused by fear. (The story contains conditions for inferring that the confession is true, too; the question can be resolved only on the level of the *narration*, after a more detailed analysis.) Thus the reader's inference about causal relationships in the *histoire*—Violence $\Rightarrow$ R (Violence $\rightarrow$ Confession)—can contradict the narrator's version in the *récit*: Confession $\Rightarrow$ Narrator (Explanation $\Rightarrow$ Truth).

Authors have long been conscious of the distinction between *récit* and *histoire*, and numerous kinds of encouragement are to be found in texts for readers to perceive the separation. The narrator in Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*, for example, often distinguishes himself from the story he is telling by commenting upon it. He may express the opinion that "Julien avait raison de s'applaudir de son courage" ("Julien was right to congratulate himself on his courage"); he may even compare Julien's provincial reactions in the *histoire* to those of an imaginary young Parisian, imagined by the narrator in the *récit* as a sort of "potential" hero in an alternative novel, that could be—but was not—written (p. 78). He selects epigraphs for many chapters that
comment on the action of the *histoire*. Perhaps the most famous of these epigraphs comments on the *narration* itself (and the *narration* upon it): “Un roman: c’est un miroir qu’on promène le long d’un chemin,” (p. 82); “A novel: it’s a mirror trundled along a road.”

Sometimes, narrators even criticize inferred authors (the *récit* may attack the *histoire*); Gide’s narrators are not averse to marking such distinctions, although generally on esthetic rather than causal grounds.\(^{26}\) In the famous central chapter of *Les Faux-monnayeurs* however (part II, chapter 7), the inferred author supplants the narrator, to admit the fictionality of his enterprise (“S’il m’arrive jamais d’inventer encore une histoire, . . .” [p. 284]; “If it ever happens to me to invent another story . . .”), and to call its causal basis into question. He suggests that, at this point, the future events of his *histoire* are as indeterminate for him as for the reader, but he seems to foresee that little Boris is doomed. Indeed, he pretends that he, as inventor of events, is limited by a conception of causality:

> Je crains qu’en confiant le petit Boris aux Azaïs, Edouard ne commette une imprudence. Comment l’en empêcher? Chaque être agit selon sa loi, et celle d’Edouard le porte à expérimenter sans cesse. (P. 280)

(I fear that Edouard, in entrusting little Boris to the Azaïses, is acting imprudently. How to prevent him? Each being behaves according to its law, and Edouard’s law impels him to ceaseless experimentation.)

Thus, the inferred author abandons his “inferred” status. His inventiveness remains unfettered, yet he seems to accept the constraints of a supposed causal verisimilitude which subtend the proposition that each being acts in accordance with its own law. This proposition, which affirms the causal predictability of characters, is however immediately subverted by the observation that Edouard’s “law” is to experiment continually with something new: he is predictably unpredictable. But the purpose of experimentation is the discovery of causal laws and thus the revalorization of causal determinism: Boris’s fate. By taking center stage, the (formerly) inferred author points up the inability of his narrator or narrators to reveal how the novel is balancing between determinism and absurdity: he accuses the weakness of the *récit*.

While freedom to judge the narrator’s assessments is inherent in the novel reader’s stance, passing judgment on the *histoire* is only occasionally permissible within the traditional narrative pact. To cast doubt on the veracity of the inferred author is to refuse to suspend disbelief, to challenge
fictional "reality" itself. Still, an uncaused event in fiction may lead us to stand aside from its inventor, not merely by interpreting the data, but by adopting a skeptical position toward them. Uncaused events are those for which not only does the narrator provide no definitive and convincing explanation, but for which our life experience provides none either. They fall within the other area of optionality: the weakness or break in the causal chain.

Bernard, in Les Faux-monnayeurs, meets an angel in the Luxembourg Gardens, accompanies him to a political rally, talks to him, wrestles with him (pp. 438–44). Except for the fact other characters see Bernard but fail to see his angelic companion, the "angel" is no less a reality in the histoire than "Bernard." No hint of a credible explanation, founded in life experience, is provided (so much for the inferred author's causal fetters!), no suggestion that Bernard is, for example, hallucinating, or fantasizing about a lover. Although the metaphorical sense of the episode is readily apparent in context—the allusion to Jacob's struggle with the angel in Genesis is obvious—the appearance of a real angel in a novel otherwise devoid of the supernatural fits into no causal chain either in the récit or in the histoire. Since the narrative voice has no hesitation in commenting on the plausibility of events, it is difficult to believe in simple narrative reticence, in mere omission of some verb such as s'imaginer (to imagine) in the statement: "il vit s'approcher de lui . . . un ange" ("he saw approaching him . . . an angel"). With a causal void on the level of the récit, we can now move to the level of the histoire, but there no contextual event can have given rise to an angel. We are thus pushed back to our third level, that of narration, for an answer to the question: why? And our question is, "Why did the author include this episode in the novel?" Textual analysts would doubtless prefer to ask, "How do I read the angel in this text?" but our question implies more—the notion of textual elements indicative of intention or purpose which can guide our reading. We might ask: "What signs of intentionality are present in the text to inhibit or encourage specific readings of the angel?"; our "author" question is shorthand for that. Having thus advanced to the level of narration because of what is absent on the other levels, we are now aware of metacausality, the perception of which can transform the reading process into a questioning of our relationship to fiction in general.

It should now be apparent that a connection exists between the two types of causal expression we have observed (metonymic linking and overdetermination through special causal vocabulary) on the one hand and the
two most basic levels of narrative (*histoire* and *rückt*) on the other. All
narrative discourse belongs to the narrator. But an observation statement
narrating an event, in which the subject causes the predicate (as in the main
clause of our example from Camus), places the reader somewhat closer to the
inferred author, to the raw data of the *histoire*. The use of special causal
vocabulary, by valorizing the judgmental role of the narrator, situates us
clearly in the *rückt*. From this arises a peculiar temporal ambiguity in the
reader's position with respect to narrative. The fictional events appear to be
occurring as we read them, in a kind of sequential present, regardless of
verb tenses. Yet the narrator can normally assess the causes only of events
which have already occurred, so that events thus assessed seem "past." In
this sense, reading an *histoire* is creating it "now"; reading a *rückt* is learning
why and how it happened in the past. We read by uniting fragments, by
obliterating spaces, on both levels at once, thus seeking, at times unsuc­
cessfully, to obliterate another gap: between past and present, between
completed and incomplete.

When any of the gaps to which we have referred remains unbridge-
able, when the spaces obstinately intrude between the words or events,
narrativity becomes problematical, and therefore interesting. Analysis of
causation in fiction provides a relatively precise way of discovering the gaps,
for, as I have indicated, it is the breaks in the causal chain, rather than the
chain itself, which attract attention. Subsequent chapters will seek to
uncover such points of rupture in specific texts and to trace the evolution of
their function in modern narrative.
Notes

11. Philip Hobsbaum, in A Theory of Communication (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 209, points out the "misconception" that the word is the unit of language. (The same work, identical in content, pagination, and format except for the recto and verso of the title page, has appeared under the title Theory of Criticism [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970].)
16. For the relationship between syntax and Greimas's actantial models, see his Sémantique structurale, pp. 129–34, 172–91.
21. Seymour Chatman, Story and Discourse (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); see for example the diagram of narrative structure on p. 267.
22. It is obviously the hypothesis that causality exists which impels me to uncover a "responsible" source for each level, though Genette posits no such sources. Still, his observations that the récit as discourse must be proffered "by someone" (Figures III, p. 74) and that
narration is an “act” hint at a causal bias in his text; story content might, it seems to me, be just as necessarily invented “by someone.”


24. In a letter to Louise Colet (1852), Flaubert points out, for example, that in his first Education sentimentale he presents crucial causes and effects, while failing to trace in words the connections between them. Thus his histoire would be complete, but his récit would be deficient in causal explanation. Gustave Flaubert, Correspondance (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1980), 2, 30.


26. In Les Caves du Vatican (Paris: Gallimard, 1922), p. 68, the narrator objects to the sensationalism of a character’s action, calling it a “fait divers” ("news item"); in Les Faux-monnayeurs (Paris: Gallimard, 1925), p. 166, the narrator criticizes the author for inserting a “grotesque” event in the histoire, etc. Future references to Les Faux-monnayeurs in the text are to this edition.