Les séquences proaïrétiques vont bientôt toutes se fermer, le récit mourra. Que savons-nous d'elles?
(Soon the proairetic sequences will close; the tale will die. What do we know about them?)

—ROLAND BARTHES

. . . c'est parce que nous savons l'irréversibilité du devenir que nous pouvons reconnaître le mouvement réversible, le changement simple, réductible à une équivalence réversible entre cause et effet.
(. . . it is because we know the irreversibility of becoming that we can recognize reversible movement, simple change, reducible to a reversible equivalency between cause and effect.)

—PRIGOGINE AND STENGERS

Temporal plurality, inherent in the new physics, finds its echo, of course, in our insertion of cause and effect into the levels of narrative. This heuristic device has revealed the fundamental notions of plausibility and connectedness as dependent upon readers' relationship to the text, suggesting the usefulness of describing additional levels.

The distinction among traditional levels should be nowhere more apparent than in the closing pages of the preceding chapter. All fiction is by definition, for the narration, imaginary; imaginary-mode fiction does not begin, however, until the récit undertakes to imitate the process of imagining. It does so by multiplying implausibilities. Now, as our readings of texts indicate, the implausible does not reside in the names of entities:
speech is not implausible, nor are white rabbits. But when Alice's white rabbit begins to produce speech, a serious implausibility arises; it is not the entities but the relationships among them that may be implausible. Even then, one would be hard put to prove that any relationship is inherently implausible; relationships become implausible only in comparison to some standard, which is usually life experience (although, in science fiction, it might be an imaginary system, such as the peculiar physics of the planet Xyron). Relationships among entities, if they occur across time, invariably presuppose a causal element or its absence; passing through a mirror (SOU- 

denis du triangle d'or) or recovering completely from a four-story fall (L'ASSO-

moin) seems to presuppose the obliteration of the constraints of physics as they apply to human anatomy. And the standard of plausibility, as a component of the condition of inference, therefore also functions causally.

We may conclude, then, that the causal assumption is critical to the perception of plausibility/implausibility in texts. We may also conclude that the causal hypothesis is the mode of insertion of the verisimilar into the temporality of narrative. Even though readers may recognize as familiar the entities of a text, unless causal predictability or explicable definition the relationship among entities, the story will appear to deviate from the realistic.

In addition to "incorrect" causality (the implausible), our device also uncovers disconnectedness among temporally related fictional phenomena. It is only apparent when we assume that causal relationships are to be expected; once again, comparison with life or literary experience is operative. There is potential misunderstanding involved in pointing out (as in the last chapter) gaps and disconnectedness in imaginary-mode texts, through comparison to standards of narrative that are inapplicable to them; the aim there, of course, was not understanding but demonstration of difference. But in texts that do not mimic imagination, that include, even minimally, elements of the cognitive or hypothetical modes, comparison with a standard is invited, for these modes presuppose the existence of a fictional "reality." When the récit imitates these modes (remembering, perceiving, projecting, hypothesizing), the fundamental existence of the "real" is implied, and thus "real" temporal relationships: causation. It was obvious, for example, that the narrator of La Jalousie could not be remembering certain scenes and must therefore be imagining them; despite the emphasis on imagination in that work, enough cognitive data surface to make causal assumptions possible in interpretation. Like plausibility/
implausibility, perception of connectedness/disconnectedness in temporal narratives is dependent upon readerly causal hypotheses.

Reading for causality thus also clearly demonstrates the creative importance of readers to texts. The choice of the standards of connectedness and plausibility against which narratives are measured is entirely the reader's. Readerly inference, based on individual life experience, gauges the implausible and fills the gaps. Texts do not create their readers, nor readers texts: making a story is a cooperative enterprise. It is time to agree, as the physical scientists have done, that we are, in studying texts, both actors and observers in the production of meaning, partially creators of the texts we describe.²

Now that analysis of unmediated mental representations in recent texts has led (see chapter ten) to their categorization by voice, mode, and tense, I am equipped to return to my initial description of causation in narrative levels and to expand it in terms of the mental representations of readers. For, as the foregoing analyses suggest, a novel, as it is read, comes to exist on at least five levels:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indexic author</th>
<th>Real author</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inferred author</td>
<td>Narration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrator/Reader</td>
<td>Histoire (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real reader</td>
<td>Inferred reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indexic reader</td>
<td>Histoire (2)</td>
</tr>
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In this light, narrator and reader share the récit, united in the encoding-decoding relationship, which already implies for the reader an active, interpreting role. The histoire acquires its true double nature, both as a series of events provided by the inferred author, and as a series of events existing as a mental representation of a reader, with inferred causal connections filling, where possible, any gaps. Histoire (1) precedes (theoretically, but not really, as we shall see) and is a condition of the account given by the narrator, while histoire (2) arises later, as a result of that account. The levels of narration and lecture stand in symmetry, on either side of the communicative act. While readers may ask questions of the narration (for example, "Why am I being told this?"), they obviously need direct none to the lecture. Indeed, readers may well infer that it is rather the author who infers the (prospective) reader and is curious about his or her (future) lecture. We might assume that the author has asked, "Why is this being read?" or "Why is this being read in this way?" Although some answers to these
questions surely lie outside the text, in the needs and propensities of real, individual readers, the inference that authors inform their stories with an eye to predetermining the answers as much as possible by means of the text is an interesting one.

Adoption of a causal bias obviously tends to privilege “authors” as prime movers and first causes. That is not to say, however, that they deserve (or desire) this distinction. The name on the title page can be read to designate the funnel through which pass the multiple ideological, cultural, and psychological codes inherent in language. Diachronic comparisons that point to an increasingly definitive divorce between psyche and the material world can be read quite ideologically. Both middle-class individualism, for example, which propounds each person’s ability to create her or his own destiny, and collectivist theories, which seek to predict the inevitable outcome of the social and economic struggle, share some common causal assumptions; both must now admit of increased uncertainty. Explicability and predictability, as components of ideology on the right and the left, can be fruitfully explored through literary texts seen as artifacts, but the apparently growing impetus to weed out trustworthy causal inferences from novels, despite the procausal bias inherent in language, seems to be a part of a more general development; Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle appears at work not only in physics but in anthropology and elsewhere. If the fictional shift is part of a broadly based cultural phenomenon, then the concept of “author” must be taken to represent the influence of major social and scientific principles.

Still, whether authors really infer reader reaction, or whether cultural codes inherent in fiction merely imitate such inferences, texts work as if authors of traditional novels were correctly inferring that causation in *histoire* (2) would operate in the same direction as that in *histoire* (1), that is to say chronologically, cause before effect. But causation in the *lecture* functions both chronologically, with respect to the text, and antichronologically. Since the *lecture* may induce causation operating in both directions at once, it differs from the *récit*, which may present causes and effects either in one order or the other, but not in both simultaneously. A phrase in the text may impel readers backward, to reexperience or reevaluate a past-cognitive mental representation that arose in response to preceding pages. So it is with Proust’s “Mort à jamais?” or with “Ici Laurent s’arrête,” which, in *Les Gommes*, makes us reconstitute the source and sense of the preceding passage; so it is even with the second term of a metaphor. Lexical data may
likewise lead readers to form, hypothetically, a mental image of what is yet to happen in the *histoire* (the revelations of Jacques Lantier's homicidal mania, for example, or Michel's pronouncement that Marceline was, in his eyes, "damaged goods"). Once readers believe they understand what is afoot in the *narration*, they may impose a general interpretation upon a text as they read, so that it colors both their memories of what has been read and their reading of what is to come. Reference, in *Les Gommes* to a sketch of a Greek temple in a stationer's window may impel readers to bring together their memories of past references to ancient Greece in the text, and, on that basis, having hypothesized an Oedipus connection, to read ahead with the Theban king in mind, foregrounding details useful to the mythic reading and backgrounding the rest. Thus a single reference may plunge readers at once into the past and the future cognitive, the hypothesis having become for them a "sure thing."

When readers' hypotheses about the *narration* become projects, readers are, as we have noted, "closed-minded," and the *récit* undergoes reduction in the *lecture*. This is not of itself an evil, but a process of narrowing inherent in reading. No one remembers a *récit*; many of us recall in detail a few *histoires*; and most can give in a few sentences the general purpose—intent of *narration*—of a great number of novels. Having inferred the tendency toward closedmindedness in readers, authors can structure their texts to use it or to circumvent it. It is natural that, given Lantier's sex-related murderous impulses, readers will expect the engineer to do Séverine in. The text works, for a time, to thwart that expectation, as the lovers spend night after night together in relatively uneventful bliss. A long and satisfying affair is required to reopen readers' eyes to other possibilities, so that the timing of the murder, at least, will produce a degree of essential shock and surprise. In its lexical data, *Les Gommes* encourages a certain closedmindedness about the Oedipus legend as matrix; since the central conflict of the *histoire* reveals, however, the importance of remaining open-minded and flexible in the formulation of hypotheses, it is reasonable to expect that the inducement of a closedminded reading should also serve to unmask the inherent weakness in such a *lecture*. And indeed there is much in the text to discourage an Oedipal *lecture*, from the fact that the murder comes during the investigation and not before, to the extreme "stretching" of evidence necessary to conclude that Dupont is Wallas's father. Play with the closedminded expectations of readers is evident as well in the techniques of causal surprise we have uncovered in Zola and which are common in
traditional fiction: cumulative causation, interference of series, reversals (Virginie and Gervaise; Roubaud jealous, then not jealous). These all presuppose readerly inferences that will be at least partly erroneous. In this game of mirrors, of hypotheses about hypotheses, the critic must be a closedminded reader too, so as to experience the effects of authors' inferred inferences about the inferences of potential readers. In order to construct the five-line diagram of narrative levels (that is to say, in order to exist outside it), the critic must once have dwelt within it, taking cognizance at first hand of each level.

Operating from the perspective of poetics, and without considering the inferential mechanisms of a level of lecture, Tzvetan Todorov shrouds a vital insight in what appears to be a false causal paradox. Noting the transitive nature of causality, he remarks that causation can operate in both directions when psychological causes of physical action are involved. Do actions serve to reveal the psychological traits of characters (the view of Henry James in *The Art of Fiction*), or do the traits exist merely to prepare and explain the actions? In the paradigm X kills Y, is the focus on the subject (Jamesian stance) or on the predicate? Todorov begins by admitting both possibilities as distinct, calling the subject-focus mediated causality ("causalité médiatisée"), and the predicate-focus immediate causality ("causalité immédiate"). When the subject is in focus, the action is simply exemplary of a character trait; when the predicate dominates, the character trait arises rather as a modality to allow for or to explain the action. So far, so good. Then Todorov raises the paradox:

Un trait de caractère n'est pas simplement la cause d'une action, ni simplement son effet: il est les deux à la fois, tout comme l'action. X tue sa femme parce qu'il est cruel; mais il est cruel parce qu'il tue sa femme. L'analyse causale du récit ne renvoie pas à une origine, première et immuable, qui serait le sens et la loi des images ultérieures; autrement dit, à l'état pur, il faut pouvoir saisir cette causalité hors du temps linéaire. La cause n'est pas un avant primordial, elle n'est qu'un des éléments du couple "cause-effet" sans que l'un soit par là-même supérieur à l'autre. (Pp. 80–81)

(A character trait is not simply the cause of an action, nor simply its effect: it is both of them at once, just as with action. X kills his wife because he is cruel, but he is cruel because he kills his wife. Causal analysis of stories does not look backward toward some first and
immutable origin, which would be the meaning and the law of all the subsequent images; in other words, ideally, we must be able to lay hold of this causality outside of linear time. A cause is not a primordial before; it is merely one of the elements of the "cause-effect" couple, without one being for this reason superior to the other.)

This analysis reduces virtually to zero the "mediated/immediate" distinction of the earlier argument and thereby opens doors to causal problems we have been trying to solve.

Todorov's conclusion contains an essential insight. On the lecture level, cause and effect come into being at the same instant, because the reader discovers not two things but one: a relationship. For, as I have stressed, neither a cause nor an effect can be perceived as such until a reader has identified the other partner in its "couple." But this simultaneity is not obtained through a special perceptive effort ("we must be able"); it is a sine qua non of causal reading. It holds true for all categories of such relationships: for physical causes of physical effects (e.g., Coupeau is injured, in L'Assommoir, because he falls from a rooftop); for physical causes of psychological effects (Michel's attitude toward life is changed in L'Immoraliste, for example, as a result of a tubercular infection); for psychological causes of physical effects—Todorov's specific instance (in La Bête humaine, Lantier murders Séverine because he is deranged, and Denizet has Cabuche and Roubaud falsely convicted because of arrogance, pride, and a closedminded refusal to accept Roubaud's confession); and for psychological causes of psychological effects (e.g., the narrator's imaginings in La Jalousie make him more jealous, as his increased jealousy reciprocally spurs his imagination). While readers are always aware of the condition or event that will become a cause (or an effect) before they are conscious of the other "half" of the causal couple, it is only at the moment when they infer a connection that cause and effect acquire their identity as such in the lecture.

Yet despite the inevitable unity of the causal couple on this level, the notion of anteriority tends to persist in histoires (1) and (2). The unitary relationship of the lecture is usually by nature one of temporal priority and directional movement: A produces (is a condition of, contributes to the production of) B. Ability to lead readers to infer the direction of transitivity is a major communicative tool on the author's workbench—or among the potentialities of texts. Leaving aside the logical nonessentials of Todorov's paradox (one can be cruel without killing one's spouse, or kill one's spouse
without being cruel—accident, euthanasia, etc.), it can be of fundamental importance to a text that readers infer correctly (from the author's point of view) whether a murder produces or exemplifies a character trait. The very "point" of L'Etranger hinges on it. Imagine a reader who, after perusing the account of the funeral and the following day's swim and date with Marie, determines that Meursault is inherently cruel (or "pathologically insensitive" or "lacking in regard for human life"). The murder of the Arab will, for that reader, appear to be caused by an inherent trait: it provides only one more example of the character's preexisting cruelty. But such a reader, if he or she existed, would have adopted the prosecutor's view before the text revealed it, thus destroying the ironic problematics inherent in the clash of opposing versions of events. For the text to reveal its irony, one must perceive, not that Meursault kills because he is cruel, but that he becomes cruel, in the eyes of the prosecutor and the jurors, because he kills. The text requires that this be, in part I, an example of causalité immédiate: temporal priority and direction of derivativeness are crucial. So it is with Proust's Marcel: if his involuntary memories are viewed primarily as results of an inherent character trait, then individual readers may presume that they lack it, and that they cannot know themselves the joys of such epiphanies. The text would thus lose its expansiveness, which arises from causal directionality. Marcel becomes a rememberer because he remembers, because he happens upon the keys to remembrance; in this direction, discovery is open to us all.

Perception of mediated causality (the opposite direction), where it exists, is equally essential. The "testing events" we observed in L'Immoraliste and La Porte étroite serve to reflect the degree of change, if any, in the traits of characters. The traits exist first, having accomplished their relative changes, and they determine events, which exemplify them. Likewise, Michel "kills" Marceline because he is (has become) cruel. The death crowns the list of Michel's heedless and egocentric actions; it puts the spotlight on him, not on her, and prompts a moral revaluation of his "liberation." Only when we learn of her demise can we perceive the causal couple, but when we do so, the derivativeness is inherent in it: cruelty \(\rightarrow\) death. Mediated causality is the essence of Le Paysan de Paris and of Nadja as well, where each "event" is the result of a preexisting trait in the narrator: "Breton's" unconscious creates Les Détraquées in Nadja, just as "Aragon's" creates the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont. To infer the opposite would be to attribute magic properties to places and events, which is delightful, but also to leave the
narratorial voices neutral and uninteresting, which is to miss the point. When causality is mediated, as in these examples, it provides a measure of what I have been calling predictability; when causation is immediate, it yields rather explicability.

This is not to say that causal direction is never ambivalent in the histoire. But it only becomes so as a result of tactics of the narration embodied in the récit. Whether memory feeds imagination, or imagination memory, is a moot point in La Jalousie. Do the qualities of otherness in the pebble impart the sensation of nausea to Roquentin's hand, or does the feeling of nausea create the perception of otherness in the pebble? These are examples of interaction, with derivativeness flowing both ways. A text can choose such ambivalence, but it is not a condition of causal expression, even when the psychological and the physical interact. The ambivalence, when it is perceived, is not "outside of linear time": it is grasped as a simultaneous interaction occurring at a point, or over a period, on the timeline of the histoire. And when it is grasped, the comprehension takes place in the lecture, a developing interpretation of the novel, which has a timeline and a causality of its own. The narration, "inferring" reader reaction, selects ambivalence or unidirectionality in order to cause (so we may infer) a specific lecture.

The preceding analysis is based on inferred authorial hypothesis: A \( \rightarrow \) Critic \( \rightarrow \) Author \( \rightarrow \) Reader \( \rightarrow \) Y). C is a necessary condition—causal vocabulary, an easily bridgeable gap in the histoire, etc.—for the reader's inference of the derivation of Y from X. B is the necessary condition—an element of the author's experience—for authorial inference of the reader's hypothesis, if the reader perceives C. But, if there is to be a critic, she or he must function as a reader, with a reader's tools; thus A is identical with C, but it leads to a different inference. The difference depends on the fact that the "reader" is here transforming histoire (1) into histoire (2), working across the single level of the récit, while the "critic" is at a further remove, constituting a hypothetical narration from the level of lecture. This summarizes the argument for the derivation of the levels. The interplay of mirrors appears when we realize that C (and therefore A) derive(s) from B, which includes an understanding of readers and their hypothetical mode. Thus, if causation most often functions unidirectionally along the horizontal timeline of the histoire, it acquires reflexive characteristics when it operates vertically, across the levels of narrativity. This is so even for the "reader" in our algorithm, for the inference that X \( \rightarrow \) Y is derived from
C, and C is derived from inferred authorial desire to create the inference $X \rightarrow Y$.

Yet C has a double derivation. Our conditions for inferences about the stories we read are derived from our individual life experience, as well as from strategies embodied in the texts. Readerly experience—including reading, as a subset of it—provides the standards for plausibility and connectedness, for verisimilitude and credibility. Cultural codes are not the exclusive property of the coded text; they enter into the decoding as well, for textual strategies are not the sole determiners of the inferences readers will make. The reader, armed with prior knowledge and acquired assumptions, conscious or unconscious, breaks the cycle of the inferential game of mirrors, giving them something to reflect. The experiential component of each condition for inference is thus remarkably "important," in the special sense this study has been giving to the term.

If I have foregrounded the reader's hypothetical mode, it is because it is our means for apprehending causal relationships in novels. But the imaginary mode is by far the most useful and creative tool readers have for appreciating stories; theories of reading wisely focus on its operation. Left to its own devices, imagination is free. Narrative fiction both inspires and restricts it, tightening the tension between liberty and constraint. Along with precise and detailed descriptions, causation provides a primary constraint to the imagination, usually unidirectional in character, helping to channel our imaginations along a specific path.

Yet unlike precise description (indirect voice, cognitive mode), causal relationships involve at least a degree of imaginative freedom, because we perceive them in the hypothetical mode, a step closer to the imaginary. Should a narrator tell us the heroine's blouse was rose-beige, readers would be obliged to believe and never suggest that it was, in fact, aqua. But if the narrator adds that she wore it to please her mother, readers may decide to accept or reject this interpretation, thus forming hypotheses about the insight and reliability of the narrator. Even the heroine's own causal statements are open to readerly doubt. While readers' hypotheses are restricted by the text, they are nonetheless a step removed from the cognitive, which is heavily constrained by the incontrovertible Ding-an-Sichheit of fictional reality. Hypotheses are by definition unproved and therefore supplantable in the light of further information, which may come from the text or arise in our imagination.

My few, brief statistical forays into the realm of causal vocabulary
suggest that it is unreliable as a measure of the text's domination over the unifying activity of readerly inference. Part I of L'Etranger abounds in obvious causal terms, yet critics find almost unanimously that causal connections are lacking in the series of events it depicts. The fact is that, since causality is a function of readerly inference, horizontal (story line) causality achieves definitive "existence" only in histoire (2). Causality in the récit, as an expression of the narrator's inferences (or lies, or misconceptions) is a measure of narratorial reliability rather than of functioning causation. Since causality is an interpretive mental grid, characteristic of the hypothetical and counterfactual modes, no causal statement is inherently true; readers must judge the conditions for inference and weigh that judgment against the import of the causal vocabulary. Despite the fact that Michel is only slightly more explicit about causation than Jérôme, La Porte étroite supports far more diverse causal readings than does L'Immoraliste: the complex textual components of the conditions of readerly inference are at the basis of the difference. While readers may indeed be influenced by (their interpretation of) what characters or narrators say about causes and effects, they retain a curiosity about the "real" causes lurking behind the words—as Foucault so skillfully puts it in another context:

... par delà les énoncés eux-mêmes l'intention du sujet parlant, son activité consciente, ce qu'il a voulu dire, ou encore le jeu inconscient qui s'est fait jour malgré lui dans ce qu'il a dit ou dans la presque imperceptible cassure de ses paroles manifestes. . . .

(. . . behind the utterances themselves, the intention of the speaking subject, his conscious activity, what he meant to say, or also the subconscious interplay that came to light in spite of him in what he said or in the almost imperceptible crack in his actual words. . . .)

What then occurs in the transformation of histoire (1) to histoire (2)? Answers obviously vary from one real reader to the next. It appears likely, however, that each reader imagines events in his or her own way, perhaps "hearing" voice timbre and intonations in conversations, "seeing" facial expressions, clothing, gestures, actions performed, fleshing out the linguistic bones of the récit. Then, to constitute the text, readers conjoin these images, by "substitution" (mental assembling of images in which the same characters, actions, or settings participate), by comparison (mental uniting of lexically and thematically related elements), and by causal inference. In
traditional stories, such inferences are drawn virtually by instinct, as we reach for a familiar light switch, out of assumption of need for an explicable world, in which our predictions have a better than average chance of success. Indeed, we are normally conscious of hypothesizing, of imposing a causal grid upon fictional events, only when two conditions apply: (1) our involvement with the characters' predicaments is such that we feel a need to predict, and (2) we are hesitant about our hypotheses. In part I of *L'Étranger*, for example, the second condition applies (it is hard to know what is coming next), but the first does not: foresight and understanding never seem required to "save" our hero, who appears at no real risk at all until his final meeting with the Arab beneath the relentless sun. In more traditional texts, such as most Zola novels, the first condition often obtains, while the second does not. Readily explainable events in verisimilar settings leave readers confident of their immediate inferences. And realistic fiction, following the "rule of prepared consequentiality," normally avoids contradicting these inferences.

Indeed, it is far more difficult for a text to prevent the application of causal connectives to a series of fictional events, if the text is grounded in the cognitive or hypothetical modes. To this end, a series of causally unrelated happenings must be devised, or at least, if they are all causally related to an underlying condition, they must not cause each other. This is what we have observed in *A rebours* and *La Nausée*, where blockers mark the end of each development, followed by a shift to a different situation. Causal constraints (such as the credible, explicit denial of any causal connection between events, as in *Nadja*) may deter the reader's penchant to infer causality. The farther we roam from the familiar (*A rebours*, perhaps) or toward the imaginary mode (*Souvenirs du triangle d'or*), the less likely readers will probably be to impose automatic causal assumptions. Texts often manage, by clever manipulation of readers' desire for causal comprehension, to create curiosity and suspense, anticipation and fear (which are, after all, functions of predictability) in readers, to create a "reasonable" or an "absurd" world, and to determine which events will be perceived as more or less important. Or, by making causal comprehension impossible (*Souvenirs*), an inferred author may eliminate such traditional attributes from a text. Successful manipulation of inferred readers' hypothetical mode on the level of the *histoire* is a prime determinant of what we call "novel structure," and of the esthetic effects texts produce.
Creating the textual conditions for inference, by leaving more or less easily filled gaps between events, is the principal means of “expressing” causation in the _histoire_. But whether or not texts undertake to “express” causation on the level of _narration_ is a different matter. The manipulation of which I have just spoken, for example, forms a part of the _narration_: do texts expect us to be aware of it? Fictional conventions seem to presuppose such awareness. Certain texts, through the depiction of a gloomy, rainy day, create foreboding, based in part upon the conventional understanding (understanding, therefore, of the intent of _narration_) that dire events happen, in fiction, in such weather. Often, however, for creation of curiosity, irony, or surprise, the _narration_ needs to conceal its manipulations, as _L’Assommoir_ screens Virginie’s evil purposes (and thus the _narration’s_ aesthetic ones) until the ironic reversal springs shut like a trap upon the unwary reader. As with the creation of an _histoire_, the development of a _lecture_ is accomplished by inference; indeed, a _lecture_ is the inference of _finalité_, of a causal principle, inherent in a _narration_. Here again, the reader’s penchant is to hypothesize, and the motivation is the desire to comprehend the reason for telling a tale, for telling it in a particular manner, or for inventing specific events in its _histoire_. Creation of implausible or unexplainable events, as we have seen, is a dependable means of encouraging _narration_-level inference by the reader. Proust, by creating for readers a role parallel to that “lived” by his author-narrator, by taking advantage of the intervocalic shift (as does Simon later on), actually manages to reproduce in us the experience of the intent of _narration_. In mythic texts, the myth is itself a prime factor in the purpose of _narration_, and “authors” of such works must desire that a specific _lecture_ be achieved. A degree of causal implausibility or improbability at the level of the _histoire_ ( _La Faute de l’abbé Mouret_ or _Regain_, for example) can encourage readers to develop, in the _lecture_, the allegorical elements “concealed” in the _narration_. Devices inspiring readers to generalize from specific instances (such as providing partial generalizations in characters’ statements—old Gisors’s philosophical conclusions in _La Condition humaine_, the insightful conversations between Tarrou and Rieux in _La Peste_) serve to stimulate exploration of the _narration_ for creation of a mythic _lecture_. In general, reader discovery of the “secrets” of the _narration_ appears essential both for mythic texts and for texts of philosophical pretensions. The intent of _L’Étranger_ includes a proper _lecture_; so does that of _La Nausée_, even though such a _lecture_ uncovers the paradox...
which invalidates the ending of the histoire. Of course, La Paysan de Paris and Nadja are virtually meaningless in their histoires alone; only on the lecture level can possible links be forged to point to underlying meaning.

Narrative meanings need not be conclusive; Les Gommes appears to mean, for example, that its status as a mythic text must remain problematical; La Porte étroite and L'Etranger, along with many other modern French texts, encourage plural readings, a multivalent lecture. But in any case lectures expand novels from the world in which their characters live into our world. Certain texts encourage this expansion; others do not (although our hypothesizing minds usually expand them anyway, despite all). Causal inference is the basic means of the expansion: even when we read them as récits spéciaux, when our lecture makes spatial comparisons along elements of the text on the principle of the matrix, we sense an intent to conceal/reveal the comparability of the elements, on the part of some narratival authority, who wages intellectual battle with us, from whose narration we wrest our lecture.

The existence of narrative levels creates the conditions for causal ironies between levels. We have seen them at work in mythic stories, where the eternal and immutable causation of mythic destiny (narration) makes sport of the petty, specific pseudocauses of characters' reality (histoire). The unreliable narrator is also a source of causal irony (e.g., La Porte étroite), where the explanations given (récit) are at odds with a likely histoire. Causality can be a theme as well as a structuring device; we have focused on this duality in La Bête humaine and L'Etranger, but it is almost a constant in traditional fiction. It can create ironic distance between causality as concept in the histoire and expressed cause and effect in the récit. Ironic distinctions can arise as well between the récit and the narration, as we have noted in La Nausée (Roquentin's "possession" of the Absurd, born of his ability to name it, contradicts the inferred author's representation of absurdity), and in Souvenirs du triangle d'or, when the discourse calls for the elimination of "useless detail" in its own "summary" (récit fails to understand—and therefore must understand—the intent of narration). Irony exists between histoire (1) and histoire (2) only when a character, not the narrator, says or thinks something the reader does not believe. Each of these ironies is recovered in a lecture. But the lecture itself seldom appears to stand in ironic relationship to other levels, since few readers stand apart from their lecture (therefore on still another level: métalecure?) sufficiently to see it as
ironic difference. Yet this irony too exists in potential. The construction/deconstruction of the Oedipal reading in *Les Gommes* can place Oedipal closedmindedness (*lecture*) in ironic disjunction with the *narration*, as this latter reveals the weakness of the reading it fosters. Definition of such interlevel irony should be a feature of causal analysis.

It would create an amusing symmetry if I could argue that my five-line diagram of levels depicted a real temporal and causal sequence. In the beginning, then, would be the *narration*, an idea-intent, which would give rise to an *histoire*, which would engender the *récit* to tell it; the *récit* would generate an *histoire* (2) in the mind of a reader, which would lead in turn to a *lecture*. But that is an obvious counterfactual. Novels can without question begin as *histoires* and generate their *narrations* concurrently with their *récits*. It is quite feasible also to start with the *récit*, as Nadja does: “Two, two what? Two women. What do they look like?” etc., allowing the *récit* to bring the *histoire* to light, in which the author may discover at last a *narration* in his or her own *lecture*. In one sense, the *récit* precedes and causes *histoire* (2). But, from another viewpoint, the *récit* as read is concurrent with the generation of imagined events and their interpretation in readers’ minds. In mid-novel, already a sizable portion of the *histoire* exists for readers, while a large segment of the *récit* is still “inexistent,” unknown to them. The *histoire* which exists for us at the midpoint of a novel is, of course, still fluid, subject to revision as we alter our hypotheses on the basis of later data. But all our efforts will be bent toward making it congeal, and to that end we will be building a *lecture*, also fluid, hypothetical, aimed at grasping the purposes behind the *histoire*. The *lecture* is thus expanding concurrently with the generation of *histoire* (2) and interacting with it. To be sure, the *lecture* needs the data from *histoire* (2) to exist, but it does not require all the data and may begin growing from a few early events. As it begins to solidify, making the reader “closed-minded,” it influences the mental elaboration of the *histoire*. So it is that, as readers recognize the Gervaise-Virginie reversal in *L’Assommoir* as an element of esthetic intent, they may foreground in their *histoire* (2) aspects of symmetry in the two events, losing sight of the great quantities of unsymmetrical detail. While a *lecture* is necessarily indexic of an *histoire* (2), and not *vice versa*, a specific *histoire* (2) may be informed by a connate *lecture*.

So, despite our assumption for purposes of inference that each of the levels has causal priority over those below it in the diagram, such priority is
not necessarily temporal in practice. This again points to the radical simultaneity of the causal relationship, perceived as a unit, with directional derivativeness inherent in it. Thus, even if we "know" by external means that a given récit preceded its narration in its author's mind, the causal assumption impels us to presume the narration's preexistence, somewhere in the authorial subconscious. Such presumption may be unwarranted, and the causal assumption therefore unjustified in the vertical dimension. But just as the imposition of the causal grid is indeed warranted in the horizontal dimension in those texts that provide receptors for it, it seems to me that those texts that mimic convincingly an authorial presence (through a relatively obvious intent of narration, and through selection of causal options in récit and histoire) incite readerly collaboration in creation of the author, as well.

Rarely are lectures complete at the end of a first reading; they may continue to harden, like the arteries of the venerable, through several readings of a text. But when final solidification sets in on a reader's lecture level, the text is dead for that reader.

Admittedly, a text is considerably stiffened when its structure has been satisfactorily described. But as structures themselves are a product of posthypothetical closedmindedness, hope remains for new readers and new hypotheses: generalized rigor mortis among all readers of a well-drawn text is fortunately rare. For the impulsion toward causal hypothesizing is a dynamic, the essential constituent of narrative continuity.

Causal dynamics provide, however, but one view of narrative structure, one whose peculiar traits are movement, directionality, inferential incompleteness, and linearity. But lines can espouse many forms. My examples have uncovered the following principal types, which can exist, of course, in combination.

1. Rectilinear causation: the long, easily inferable causal chains of traditional fiction.
2. Explicitly branching structures: dead-end sidetracks leading off from a causal "main line," as in Huysmans.\(^7\)
3. Implicitly branching structures: the "main line" effaced, with the branches alone remaining, as indicators of absence (Aragon, Breton).
4. Curviform causation: Proust's self-referential "Möbius strip," which is also partly brachiate.
5. Parallel causal structures: the ironic parallel of narration and récit typical of mythic narrative read as allegory, including portrayal of allegory as problematical (Les Gommes).

6. Fragmented structure: Sartre, Camus, and the "broken line"; Sarrute; Robbe-Grillet's La Jalousie.

7. Nonlinear structure: absence of causation in the essentially nonnarrative fiction of total immersion in the imaginary mode (Robbe-Grillet's Souvenirs du triangle d'or).

Types two through six, associated with "modernist" fiction, tend to undermine readerly assurance about the validity of causal concatenations in narrative. They find ways to use language for the subversion of causation inherent in language. The more frequent selection of intradiegetic narrators leaves causal hypotheses in their récits increasingly more problematical, until, with the appearance of type seven, a perhaps postmodernist strategy, readers are limited to the sole noncausal mode of narratorial mental representation.

If other types of causal structure can exist, they surely will, and probably do already. But causality remains a system, involving minimal rules of perceived relationship and directionality: the freedom of my seventh type is a "causal structure" only in its decision to exist in the absence of causal strictures. The interest of this "canon" of standard structures will be, I hope, its potential for comparison, which can reveal deviant and/or combinatory structures in other texts. We have observed combination in Proust and in L'Etranger; La Route des Flandres reveals elements of the brachiate track-and-sidetrack structure, in Proustian parallel, although the sidetracks are themselves segmented and redistributed, according to the principles of association, along the wandering timeline of mental representations in conditioned sequence.

If there is anything seminal in this volume—that is to say, anything that might cause others to think in causal terms in their reading and research—it should therefore lie in what turns out to be absent, or perhaps implausible, in these pages. The essential is always in the gaps, generative in criticism and in theory as in fiction and in life of fertile hypotheses. Each inference requires as its cause a Lacanian "desire," a conatus to know, which surfaces in the intervals between segments of the metonymic chain, and a condition or conditions for belief. As the condition approaches proof, hypothesis becomes project, then solidified knowledge. The delight in
literature, as in other aspects of living, resides in the penchant for solidity, a desire that can survive only in the presence of generative doubt. The line of \textit{lecture} and of life continues only so long as there are gaps in the \textit{histoire} or in the \textit{narration}, cracks to be bridged, only so long as one cannot yet cry, with Balzac's moribund Balthazar: "EUREKA!"

\textbf{Notes}


2. For the distinctions between "the reader" and the textual construct called "the narratee," see Gerald Prince, "Introduction à l'étude du narrataire," \textit{Poétique}, 14 (1973), 178–96. On the scientist as "actor" in the observation of material phenomena, see Prigogine and Stengers, pp. 222–33, 278.

3. The problem is perhaps more readily addressed from the opposite standpoint: belief in "chance"; on this question, see Erich Köhler, \textit{Der literarische Zufall, das Mögliche und die Notwendigkeit} (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1973).


6. The notion of inferred textual purpose is often apparent in Ross Chambers's specular approaches to fiction; see his \textit{Story and Situation} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 64–70 and \textit{passim}.

7. Authors' names in this list are shorthand references to texts analyzed in preceding chapters; obviously, all texts of a given author need not adopt the same causal structure.