Narrative Causalities

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This glossary is designed to complement, and to collect in one place, information that is distributed throughout these chapters. Included in this list are two categories of terms: (1) those specific to function analysis, for which I supply definitions that summarize or repeat those provided in the chapters in which the terms are introduced; and (2) familiar terms in narrative studies that will be found in this volume. For the latter, for many of which several definitions exist, the definitions I give reflect my usage, and in some cases differ from other theorists’ usage. For standard definitions, and for information about the many important terms that narratieve theory offers that are not included here, a succinct and always reliable source is *A Dictionary of Narratology* by Gerald Prince.

**A-experiencer.** The character or characters who are affected by a function-A or function-a event.

**Bracketed function.** An interpretation of an event that the interpreter infers as having occurred but that is not scenically represented, whether the event is revealed only by its consequences (e.g., a function-C decision, revealed by action that it motivates), or the event precedes or follows (in the chronology of fabula) the duration dramatized in the representation (from the initial scene to the concluding scene).

**C-actant.** A character, or group of characters, who decides to act to try to alleviate a function-A (or function-a) situation. For the duration of any one sequence, the role of the C-actant is filled by a single character (or a single group of characters acting together). In narratives containing more than one sequence, the role of the C-actant in one sequence may be filled by a different character from the one playing the C-actant role in a second sequence.

**Character narrator.** A narrator who is an inhabitant of the same narrative world as the characters whose activities she or he recounts.
donor functions. See functions D, E, F.
ekpkrasis. The re-representation in words of a visual representation.
empty function. An interpretation of an unspecified event. An empty function interprets an event in the narrative world that is suppressed in the representation except for its consequences—e.g., *they lived happily ever after*. At the end of a film, a fadeout accompanied by triumphal music, a scenic view in pleasant weather (sunlight on a body of water, snow-covered mountains, a sunset), or the image of a scene previously identified as “home,” similarly conveys an interpretation without specifying the events interpreted. An empty function stands in contrast to an uninterpreted event.
EQ. The equilibrium that is disrupted by a function-A (or function-a) event, or reestablished—whether by a C-actant’s action or some other means (e.g., there is nothing further that can be done that will alleviate the function-A situation; the function-A situation disappears with the passage of time). An achieved equilibrium is the consequence of a function-I event and is finite in duration (it begins when the function-I event occurs). See situation.
fabula. A chronologically ordered abstraction of the events, and the identity of the agents that perform them, that a representation either explicitly represents as having occurred, or provides information that permits a given reader (listener, viewer) to deduce as having occurred. A fabula is a concept, without material form and not manifest in any medium. As I use the term, a fabula is made by a perceiver (reader, listener, viewer). A fabula is made from information found in a representation—or, by extension (in my usage), from information perceived in our world. See representation.
focalizer. A character whose perceptions and conceptions readers (listeners, viewers) of narratives are given. The older term perspective does not distinguish between, on the one hand, whose sensory perceptions and thoughts (often in response to those perceptions) are reported (the focalizer), and, on the other hand, whose words report that information (the voice). The distinction was introduced by Gérard Genette (*Narrative Discourse*, primarily chapters 4 and 5). See voice.
function. A position (site, stage) in a causal sequence. Functions represent events that change a prevailing situation and initiate a new situation. See situation.
function A. A destabilizing event.
function a. A reevaluation of a situation that reveals an instability not previously perceived.
function-A (or function-a) situation. A situation caused by a function-A (or function-a) event.
function B. A call for help; specifically, a request that someone alleviate a situation that the requester interprets as a function-A (or function-a) situation.
function C. A decision to act to try to alleviate a function-A (or function-a) situation. By performing function C, a character becomes a C-actant.
function C' (pronounced “C prime”) The initial action that a C-actant takes, after performing function C, to attempt to alleviate a function-A (or function-a) situation.
functions D, E, F (donor functions). Events that provide experiences that, if successful, may allow a C-actant to develop or acquire empowerment (qualifications, attributes, information, possessions) necessary to accomplish a function-H endeavor. Function D represents a testing of the C-actant by a potential donor; function E represents the C-actant’s behavior in response to the test; function F represents the C-actant’s acquisition of some form of power that will help her or him carry out the function-H event successfully. Although logically function D leads to function E, which leads to function F, it is not unusual in narratives to find only one or two of these three functions expressed.
function G. The arrival of the C-actant at the place or time (or both) where function H will take place.
function H. The C-actant’s primary action to alleviate a function-A (or function-a) situation.
function I (or function I_neg). The success (or failure) of a function-H action.
functional polyvalence. The principle that explains that the function of an event—its causes and consequences—changes according to the configuration of events in which it is perceived and the chronological position of the event in that configuration. Because events are functionally polyvalent, an event can—and often does—express one function in one narrative and another function in another narrative. Moreover, interpreters may disagree about the function of an event, and may change their interpretation of the function of an event in response to new information.
**hinge situation or event.** A situation or event that folds back on itself, like a hinge, creating a bidirectional temporal sequence in which the causal relations among events and the function of events depends on the sequence in which the events are read.

**interpretive site.** One of the ten positions or stages I identify in a narrative sequence that begins at the onset of a problem and leads to its resolution.

**narratee.** The one (or more than one) whom the narrator addresses, overtly or otherwise, conceived as in the text and at the ontological level of the narrator (see Gerald Prince, “Introduction to the Study of the Narratee”).

**narrative.** A sequential representation of a sequence of events. According to this definition, a narrative is a representation in any medium (words, film, ballet, sequential photographs) that shows (drama) or recounts (stories) fictional or nonfictional events.

**narrative ambiguity.** A structural pattern in which one representation reveals two mutually exclusive fabulas (see Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *The Concept of Ambiguity*).

**narrative sequence.** The movement from an equilibrium (EQ), through a period of imbalance (a function-A or function-a situation), to another equilibrium (EQ). In a complete narrative sequence, in response to a function-A or function-a situation, a C-actant decides to take action (function C) that begins (function C'), continues (function H), and concludes (function I or function I_{neg}).

**narrative world.** The represented world: the world where characters act and interact.

**narrativize.** To animate a fixed scene by creating a narrative that includes the scene.

**negative function.** A function that represents a specified event that does not occur.

**primacy effect.** Our tendency to accept as valid the information we are initially given, even when that information is contradicted later in the same message.

**protagonist.** The main character in a narrative—often the C-actant or, if there are several, one of the C-actants; sometimes an A-experiencer (also see Tamar Yacobi, “Hero or Heroine?”).

**representation.** A manifestation of sequential events in any medium (in words, for example, or film or dance); compara-
ble to “discourse” (in the paired trajectories story/discourse in Seymour Chatman’s terminology) and to “sju et” (in fabula/sju et, the Russian Formalist terminology). As I use the term, a representation includes, in addition to the components of the medium, the shaping of the reported events (the sequence, duration, and frequency of the events in the manifestation and the focalization, which may conceal or reveal motivation, as well as other aspects of the narrative world). See fabula.

situation. Either (1) an ongoing equilibrium (a situation that one interprets as an equilibrium without considering whether it was caused by an event or, if so, by what event) or (2) the consequence of a function: for example, a function-A situation (a situation that is the consequence of a function-A event) or an achieved equilibrium. See EQ.

uninterpreted event. A specified event to which no function has been assigned. An uninterpreted event stands in contrast to an empty function.

voice. The source of the words in which a focalizer’s perceptions and conceptions are reported in a narrative. See focalizer.