

THE NARRATOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE ‘HEROIC BIOGRAPHY’

I. THE ‘HEROIC BIOGRAPHY’, A GENRE OF CRITICISM

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Over and over again one hears a tale describing a hero’s miraculous but humble birth, his early proof of superhuman strength, his rapid rise to prominence or power, his triumphant struggle with the forces of evil, his fallibility to the sin of pride (*hybris*), and his fall through betrayal or a ‘heroic’ sacrifice that ends in his death. (Henderson 1964: 110)

1. Introduction

The project *The Narratological Study of the ‘Heroic Biography’* is part of an extended research into the interface between canonical literature, popular culture, and folklore, and is conceived as somewhat of a companion to my *The Annotated Propp* (Aguirre 2011, 2019a, 2019b). It starts from the hypothesis that the study of folk narrative may be relevant to our understanding of at least certain kinds of modern fiction. Specifically, the project considers various models that have been proposed to account for the significant similarities that obtain among many disparate hero-tales in various traditions, on the assumption that detecting the strengths and weaknesses of these models may lead to useful reformulations, or perhaps to the proposal of a new model altogether.¹

¹A truly comparative model cannot stop at European tales but should encompass world narratives; there is, however, much sense in starting on a relatively ‘local’ basis.

Among other goals, the project seeks to examine one standing problem in the work of earlier researchers—the role which the figure of woman plays (or does not play) in such narratives; this examination will lead us to explore the theme of Sovereignty and its possible pertinence to fiction studies. Known also as the theme of ‘King and Goddess’, or of ‘the Lady and the King’, the Sovereignty theme embodies a complex of notions about the relationship between ruler and territory, and gravitates around the significance of a female figure who bestows upon a chosen hero power over the land (Davidson 1998).

The goals of the present paper are modest ones. It seeks to outline the seven major theories of the heroic myth available to-date. This will lead to a critique of the bias all such theories seem to exhibit, and to a statement on the need for an alternative approach. The overall point is, as my title sufficiently indicates, not to uncover some ‘essence’ of the heroes of tradition but to develop a *narratological model* for the study of all such tales. In developing other aspects of the project, subsequent papers will present some of the most important models offered to-date, so as to provide an idea of the kind of construct we shall be dealing with—the *genre* of hero-tale models; to compare these in a critical manner, in order to extract a set of criteria that must minimally be adhered to in the study of the heroic biography; and to, if possible, develop a more comprehensive model.

2. Folklore

In 1846 antiquary William John Thoms, in a seminal letter to the *Athenaeum*, expressed his dissatisfaction with the current state of a field of study which had been on the rise for close to a century but which, he felt, lacked a definition. Specifically, he complained of the absence of a suitable name for

what we in England designate as Popular Antiquities, or Popular Literature (though by-the-by it is more a Lore than a Literature, and would be most aptly described by a good Saxon compound, Folk-Lore—the *Lore of the People*) [...]. No one who has made the manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs, &c., of the olden time his study, but must have arrived at two conclusions:—the first, how much that is curious and interesting in these matters is now entirely lost—the second, how much may yet be rescued by timely exertion (full text in Dorson 1968, vol I: 52-3).

Thoms’ distinction between literature and lore is of interest, as he meant a far more inclusive concept than merely textual or even linguistic matter. His repeated use of the words ‘popular’, ‘people’ or ‘folk’ warns us that what he had in mind was not art or

antiques but cultural products that were generated collectively and circulated mostly anonymously; his list, albeit brief, reveals he was not thinking of artefacts merely but also of *ways of doing things* ('manners', 'customs', 'observances'). His coinage must have satisfied a real need for it was soon taken up and used enthusiastically both in England and abroad. Folklore is today a rich field of research for a discipline known as *folklore studies* or *folkloristics*. Robert A. Georges and Michael O. Jones provide a useful definition of folklore which covers ways of thinking and acting—production as well as products—and which, in making 'custom', 'tradition', 'precedent', 'model' and 'continuities' pivotal terms, brings out important sociocultural and psychological functions of folklore:

The word 'folklore' denotes expressive forms, processes, and behaviours (1) that we customarily learn, teach and utilize or display during face-to-face interactions, and (2) that we judge to be traditional (a) because they are based on known precedents or models, and (b) because they serve as evidence of continuities and consistencies through time and space in human knowledge, thought, belief, and feeling (Georges & Jones 1995:1).

Folklore is performative as much as 'contentual', and consists of gestural, dynamic behaviour (ceremonial customs, dancing, making an omelette, telling tales) no less than of knowledge, beliefs, ideas, or stories orally conveyed. Verbal folklore includes non-narrative genres (riddle, proverb, curse) and narrative ones; these last can be classified into genres of verse (epic, ballad) and prose (myth, legend, saga, folktale; see Bascom 1965). Some of these and others such as the fable may take verse or prose forms; most of these are, or traditionally were, oral genres. All are porous, overlapping fields: a folktale may be coached as a fable, or may give rise to a myth or derive from one, or may be turned into a ballad; a myth may be dressed up as an epic, or be enshrined in religious belief, or end up as a modest cautionary tale; while the *patterns* (as distinct from the genres themselves) of myth, legend or folktale may be employed for the construction of new narratives that bear an analogical relation to myth, legend and folktale. *Flow*, understood as the intrinsic capacity of all these genres and texts to merge, absorb or transform into other texts and genres, seems to be a distinctive characteristic of folk materials.

Among narrative genres myth occupies a prominent place. Myth is folklore, even if some of it has come to be written down by artists like Homer or Ovid and so has been pulled into the sphere of literature; such texts as the Homeric *Iliad*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* are 'oral-derived' materials, that is, not texts that are 'obviously and verifiably oral' but that 'exhibit oral traditional features

but cannot be proven on other grounds to be primary oral texts' (Foley 1990:38). An important consequence of this is that we cannot speak of either/or distinctions, for there must be *degrees of* folklore in many literary texts and *degrees of* literacy in much folk matter, as well as intermediate or 'grey' areas in between folklore and literature.² The following definition by William Doty provides a comprehensive approach to myth or, rather, to mythologies:

A mythological corpus consists of (1) a usually complex network of myths that are (2) culturally important (3) imaginal (4) stories, conveying by means of (5) metaphoric and symbolic diction, (6) graphic imagery, and (7) emotional conviction and participation, (8) the primal, foundational accounts (9) of aspects of the real, experienced world and (10) humankind's roles and relative statuses within it.

Mythologies may (11) convey the political and moral values of a culture and (12) provide systems of interpreting (13) individual experience within a universal perspective, which may include (14) the intervention of suprahuman entities as well as (15) aspects of the natural and cultural orders. Myths may be enacted or reflected in (16) rituals, ceremonies, and dramas, and (17) they may provide materials for secondary elaboration, the constituent mythemes having become merely images or reference points for a subsequent story, such as a folktale, historical legend, novella, or prophecy. (Doty 1986:11)

This definition avoids the common pitfall of reducing myth to *literary* text; it also dispenses with naïve notions of myth as an unchanging narrative, or as independent from literature, culture, religion, or ideology. Doty's frequent use of 'may' brings out the flow-quality of myth, which appears in many guises and constitutes neither one monolithic narrative nor one single genre of narratives (16), (17). Other points that, for the purposes of the present investigation, merit highlighting in Doty's definition are the following. If myths are *stories* (4), they can be subjected to narratological analysis. If they are not autonomous but come in networks, sequences or corpora (1), then comparative work must be central to their study. 'Network' is a key term not only because a mythology always exists in a variety of narratives but also because each narrative exists only as the sum of all its versions (Lévi-Strauss 1958)—it is a *multiform* (Lord 1995). Vital, too, for our purposes is the recognition of that *universal* perspective which mythologies bring to bear upon individual experience (13): this is often epitomised in the figure of a culture hero introduced as the focal character in a story and made to stand for the community and its values; in what follows I shall make the term 'hero' inclusive of characters in myth, folktale and legend. Part of an investigation into heroic tales must approach the issues of a) whether women count as heroes (or as heroines); b) whether or not Western myth contains narratives of hero-women; c)

² For seminal studies on the relation (or opposition) between the two areas see, e.g., Frenk 1971, Davidson 1975, Chevalier 1978, Ong 1982, Zumthor 1983, Brown and Rosenberg (eds.) 1998, Da Costa 2000, Foley 2012.

whether the heroic quality of female characters is best accounted for in the same terms as that of male characters (and so, whether or not a different model is required); and d) why these are necessary questions. One point which might easily raise objections is (17): the statement that mythemes (basic mythic units) may become 'merely images or reference points for a subsequent story' seems to devalue the significance of mythic matter when transferred to, e.g., other forms of folklore and literature. It rather appears that, while the mythic element may cease to constitute the *core* of the new form, it is apt to retain downright hard significance.

3. Comparative mythology

Awareness of similarities among disparate hero-narratives is already found in Thomas Carlyle's lectures *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841) or, further back, in Baltasar Gracián's 1637 *El héroe*;³ but these are moral books, designed not so much to describe specific individuals presented in texts as to extol the qualities which heroes ought to exhibit. The first textual and structural (rather than simply moralistic) generalizations about myth were hazarded in such historical surveys as John Dunlop's *The History of Fiction* (1814) and, more decisively, in the last third of the nineteenth century. One figure who straddles the line between the two approaches is Edward Casaubon, the fictional character in George Eliot's novel *Middlemarch* (1871-72).

Casaubon conceived the ambitious project of writing what was to be titled *A Key to All Mythologies*; though he failed to bring it to fruition, his planned book sought to sum up much of the early nineteenth-century religious impetus in this field of research, but undeniably, too, to contribute to a structural comparison of texts. Neal Ascherson (1994) has commented that 'Casaubon was intending to do something superficially similar to what James Frazer did in *The Golden Bough* sixty years later. He was preparing an encyclopedic account of world myths which emphasised their similarities'.⁴ It is likely that for this aspect of her character's endeavour Eliot took her inspiration from the labours of such German scholars as Carl Otfried Müller, Georg Friedrich Creuzer, or Max Müller.⁵ This last stated at the onset of book I of *Chips from a German Workshop*:

³ This was a Catholic response to Machiavelli's *The Prince* and to the 'mirror for princes' genre; it was early translated into English as *The Heroe of Lorenzo* (see Skeffington 1652).

⁴ The first edition of Frazer's book appeared in 1890; its 3rd edition in twelve volumes, in 1906-15.

⁵ Karl Otfried Müller had published his *Prolegomena zu einer wissenschaftlichen Mythologie* in 1825; when *Middlemarch* began to appear Max Müller had already published *Comparative Mythology* (1856) and the first three volumes of his *Chips from a German Workshop* (1867-1870).

not only have we thus gained access to the most authentic documents from which to study the ancient religion of the Brahmans, the Zoroastrians, and the Buddhists, but by discovering the real origin of Greek, Roman, and likewise of Teutonic, Slavonic, and Celtic mythology, it has become possible to separate the truly religious elements in the sacred traditions of these nations from the mythological crust by which they are surrounded, and thus to gain a clearer insight into the real faith of the ancient Aryan world (Max Müller 1867, vol. 1: xii).⁶

Why would it be important to distil the common outline of heroic myths? Like Müller, Casaubon was in quest of evidence that all mythologies contain the kernel of the human response to the divine, and so that myth is the carrier of religion. Though this is an understandable quest in the mid-nineteenth century, we need not dwell upon it. Twenty-first century mythographers will rather be interested in how comparative work might help settle matters of origin, diffusion, transformation and cultural relevance; while literature students may choose to concentrate on such problems as how common structures, symbols, diction or motifs provide grounds towards the construction of a model for all such narratives.

Models are not easy to devise, and much in them depends on the methodological standpoint adopted by the researcher. One early scholar who thought it needful to analyse the formal similarities among different hero-tales was anthropologist Edward B. Tylor who, in his *Primitive Culture* (1871), was keen to expose the shortcomings of the ‘Historical school’:

Of all things, what mythologic work needs is breadth of knowledge and of handling. Interpretations made to suit a narrow view reveal their weakness when exposed to a wide one. See Herodotus rationalizing the story of the infant Cyrus, exposed and suckled by a bitch; he simply relates that the child was brought up by a herdsman's wife named Spakô (in Greek Kynô), whence arose the fable that a real bitch rescued and fed him. So far so good—for a single case. But does the story of Romulus and Remus likewise record a real event, mystified in the self-same manner by a pun on a nurse's name, which happened to be a she-beast's? Did the Roman twins also really happen to be exposed, and brought up by a foster mother who happened to be called Lupa? [...] [T]hese two stories are but specimens of a wide-spread mythic group, itself only a section of that far larger body of traditions in which exposed infants are saved to become national heroes. For other examples, Slavonic folk-lore tells of the she-wolf and the she-bear that suckled those superhuman twins, Waligora the mountain-roller and Wyrwidab the oak-uprooter; Germany has its legend of Dieterich, called Wolfdieterich from his foster-mother the she-wolf; in India, the episode recurs in the tales of Satavahana and the lioness, and Sing-Baba and the tigress; legend tells of Burta-Chino, the boy who was cast into a lake, and preserved by a she-wolf to become founder of the Turkish kingdom; [...]

⁶ See also Max Müller's essay ‘Comparative Mythology’ in Dorson (ed.) 1968, I, 67-119.

Scientific myth-interpretation, on the contrary, is actually strengthened by such comparison of similar cases. [...] The treatment of similar myths from different regions, by arranging them in large compared groups, makes it possible to trace in mythology the operation of imaginative processes recurring with the evident regularity of mental law. (Tylor 1871, vol. I: 254-56)

The difficulty of defining and proving ‘mental law’ does not detract from the aptness of the concept.⁷ Are there such regular mechanisms at work in cultural creations? Before dismissing the notion outright we must consider (and Tylor had this very much in mind when he wrote) that *laws* of human sound had already been firmly established and have since provided one solid basis for the science of language;⁸ that similarity, recurrence, regularity and consistency have since been found to constitute the essence of the language of epic, myth, ballad, folktale and other folk genres;⁹ or that, as Moretti (1983) points out, *convention* is a decisive force in the shaping of genre. If there are ‘laws’ governing the construction of mythic and other kinds of narratives, we need to know what they are, how they operate, how best they are to be formulated—we need a ‘grammar’ of the heroic tale.

Tylor’s anthropology was guided by an evolutionist belief in history as a matter of development, progress, and ‘improvement’. Some forty years later another scholar, Otto Rank, made the same observation of a ‘family likeness’ which many heroic tales would bear to each other, but it led him to a very different interpretation in terms of psychoanalysis:

The history of the birth and of the early life of these personalities [the national heroes of antiquity] came to be especially invested with fantastic features, which in different nations—even though widely separated by space and entirely independent of each other—present a baffling similarity or, in part, a literal correspondence. Many investigators have long been impressed with this fact, and one of the chief problems of mythological research still consists in the elucidation of the reason for the extensive analogies in the fundamental outlines of mythical tales, which are rendered still more puzzling by the unanimity in certain details and their reappearance in the most of the mythical groupings (Otto Rank 1909/1990: 3).¹⁰

⁷ For a similar statement (though less psychological than textual) concerning the ‘structural laws’ of folktale plots see Jakobson 1945, p. 640.

⁸ Beginning with Grimm’s Law in 1822. See Crystal 1987 (2002), p. 330.

⁹ For an extremely short selection see Gummere 1907, Olrik 1921, Propp 1928, Jakobson 1945, Campbell 1949, Lord 1960, Leeming 1973.

¹⁰ *Besonders haben [alle bedeutenden Kulturvölker] die Geburts- and Jugendgeschichte dieser Personen mit phantastischen Zügen ausgestattet, deren verblüffende Ähnlichkeit, ja teilweise wörtliche Übereinstimmung bei verschiedenen, mitunter weit getrennten und völlig unabhängigen Völkern längst bekannt und vielen Forschern aufgefallen ist. Die Frage nach dem Grunde dieser weitgehenden Analogien in den wesentlichen Grundzügen der mythischen Erzählungen, die durch die Übereinstimmung gewisser Details und durch deren Auftreten in fast allen Mythengruppen noch rätselhafter erscheinen, ist ein Hauptproblem der Mythenforschung geworden und auch noch bis heute Problem geblieben* (Rank 1909: 1). For the translation see Segal (ed.) 1990.

The correspondences, parallelisms, analogies, partial identities among these 'life histories' require an explanation, and the comparative work of Rank and others has been directed towards providing the basis for it. From their work a conviction has emerged that it should be possible to outline the basic structure which all such narratives have in common. The attempt is no less valuable than has been the search for universals in language even if, in both instances, the search has so far yielded only partial results.

It is thus fair to surmise that the establishment of Comparative Mythology and Comparative Literature were among the first stepping-stones towards what is nowadays known as 'Narratology'. This term, coined by Tzvetan Todorov in 1969, identifies a discipline which builds on the necessary assumption that story-tellers follow codes and strategies when creating fictions, and that therefore such aspects of fiction as narrative voice and addressee, story, plot, formal devices, structural elements and their combinations can all be codified into some sort of 'grammar' of narrative.¹¹ But the search for this 'grammar' seems to be of a different, and perhaps more realistic, order than the one for universals of language or culture, for it only assumes that we need not speak of either laws of evolution guiding cultural progress or of subconscious urges finding expression in myth, but only of codes embedded in texts.

4. Theories of the heroic myth

In order to account for the striking similarities which mythic tales exhibit within particular cultures (when not all over the world), scholars have postulated various theories of origin. As illustrated by the examples of Tylor and Rank, one's approach to myth, and the conclusions one may reach, will to a great extent depend on the kind of overall interpretation one seeks. Here follows a succinct rundown of the main schools:

1. Historical: a given hero's life-story corresponds to the more or less distorted or magnified events in the life of some historical character; this was the view espoused by 4th-century BCE mythographer Euhemerus, whose name gave rise to the term *euhemerism*, the rationalising interpretation of myth. Few are now prepared to entertain this naive hypothesis, although in the eighteen-seventies some such conviction did lead Heinrich Schliemann, an avid reader of the *Iliad*, to his discovery of the ruins of mythic Troy.

¹¹ For details see Todorov 1969, Abrams & Harpham 2009 (s.v. 'Narrative and Narratology'), Bal (2009), Aguirre 2011.

2. 'Astral': the hero's life-story is actually a fanciful account of natural phenomena. This is also known as the Nature-Myth School, with Max Müller as its paramount defender. Müller interpreted myth as an allegorical, analogical or metaphorical effusion of primitive peoples whereby natural objects were given anthropomorphic features and natural events were transformed into heroic narratives. In the Egyptian myth of Osiris—slain by Seth, thrown down into the Nile, resurrected by Isis—Osiris would be a sun-god or a vegetation god, cyclically 'dying' and 'returning'. All myths, according to this view, are solar myths (or lunar, or chthonic, or storm myths, depending on the particular version of the theory). Criticism has generally abandoned this position, although a most thoughtful version of the Nature Myth still informs Northrop Frye's (1955) much respected 'archetypal' approach to literary criticism.
3. 'Myth-and-Ritual': the hero's life-story is a fictionalisation of a ritual or series of rituals performed by a traditional community. For example, a rite of passage will be turned into the narrative of a specific hero's adventure. Myth, in this light, is 'the spoken correlative of the acted rite' (Harrison 1927:328). When a woman marries a god in myth, this is a symbolic representation of the ceremony whereby she marries the king disguised as a god (Raglan 1936, De Vries 1959). For a survey and criticism see Sebeok (ed.) 1955, Segal (ed.) 1998.
4. 'Ritual-Astral' (a combination of 2. and 3.): the hero's life-story fictionalizes a ritual which is in turn a cultic expression of natural phenomena. 'Sleeping-Beauty' is held to be a narrativised version of a ritual which allegorises the coming of Spring (Saintyves 1923).
5. Psychoanalytical: the hero's life-story is a disguised account of psychic (mostly psychosexual) experience (Rank 1909, Bettelheim 1976, Dundes 1977, Dundes 1987). The adopted or step-son motif is a manifestation of the child's universal experience of neglect by his father, and of his subsequent wish to distance himself from him. Fairytales are projections of the child's maturation process. 'The eating of the witch's gingerbread house is an act of oral aggression against the body of the evil mother' (Dundes 1977: 125). Being born of a virgin mother signifies a denial of the father. Jesus' crucifixion becomes a symbolic expression of the jealous father's castration threat (for some criticism see Segal (ed.) 1998).
6. Spiritualist: in a Jungian vein, the tale of the hero exemplifies the universal quest and conveys the steps of psychological and social transformation,

maturation and transcendence (Campbell 1949, Henderson 1964, Torrance 1994).

7. Theological: at least in the Indo-European domain, many literary texts are to be traced back to myths which in turn are held to arise from religious and theological outlooks. This view claims to explain similarities between disparate texts from very different cultures as conveying remnants of the three basic Indo-European Functions. These were 1) sovereignty and management of the sacred, 2) defence and warlike force, and 3) fertility and nourishment, and they were associated with corresponding deities in the different cultures. Heroes simply enact roles symbolic of these functions (Dumézil 1968-73).

5. Orientation

The first four theories are now largely out of favour; none of the seven, it is important to note, are uncontroversial, though all of them are likely to be useful to a point when dealing with myth material. But in spite of their diversity, they all share a fundamental premise: they orientate the text towards the real—whether this be the historical, natural, social, religious, spiritual or psychological reality—and purport to derive the sense and significance of the text from some aspect of the real. In one way or other, all of them question the validity of fiction. Writing of a certain type of interpretive method, Paul Ricoeur identified a *hermeneutics of suspicion* which, as practised by Freud, Marx and Nietzsche, urges the interpreter to mistrust the surface of the text and to delve into its depths for significance.¹² Some version of this strategy does seem to guide the above-mentioned schools insofar as they insist on going beyond the narrative plane and adamantly seek a meaning not *in the text* but outside it.¹³

One or other of these theories has guided the construction of the various models hypothesised to-date. In a reality-oriented model, structure is justified primarily by appeal to the nature of the reality it ‘copies’, or to the nature of the operations (translating, adapting, hiding) it performs on the real. Reality-oriented approaches, in

¹² See Ricoeur (1965, 1969).

¹³ Doty (1986: 133, 166) writes in this context of a ‘hermeneutics of deceit’ according to which the text never means what it seems to say but ‘something else’—a ‘something else’ that conditions interpretation from the start. His term seems to be a somewhat confused (and unacknowledged) adaptation of Ricoeur’s *herméneutique du soupçon*; whereas Ricoeur meant simply a discipline which assumes that the text does not declare its own meaning (and so meaning must be coaxed through interpretation), Doty’s infelicitous term suggests that the strategy itself of interpretation attempts to deceive the reader.

other words, give pride of place to the referential function of language and relegate the poetic function to an ancillary position. In terms of Gestalt theory, these approaches view the text as mere background on which aspects of reality are seen to gather shape.

The proposal submitted in these and coming pages is then of the nature of a Gestalt shift. I suggest that a different perspective is both necessary and possible, and that all that is required is a shift in our *figure-ground segmentation*—‘the process by which the visual system organizes a visual scene into figures and their backgrounds’ (Kimchi & Peterson 2007:660)—a shift towards recognising the textual form emerging from the ‘reality’ background: that is what a narratological approach can do.

If the conventional models of interpretation are oriented towards the reality behind the text, it follows that, from a narratological perspective, explanation should be oriented towards the text. This, however, would seemingly lead us to the proposition that no outside source need be appealed to for justification, as the logic of structure would appear to be found within the text itself as an autonomous object. Now this would be tantamount to advocating a simplistic return to the narrowness of *close reading*; and decades of different approaches—Marxist, feminist and postcolonial criticism, cultural studies and New Historicism, reception and reader-response theories—have surely taught us how sterile pure textual analysis can be without the living context within which text is necessarily produced.

Having said this, context is (at least to a very large extent) enshrined in the very codes the text adheres to. The kind of approach I propose to the ‘heroic biography’ is thus not one oriented towards the text so much as towards *textuality*, towards the system itself of the *conventions* which govern text. What is needed, then, is an account of the rules, laws or principles of hero-narratives, of their diction, rhetoric, formulaicity, the very conventionality of their language and structure—in a word, a *grammar* of the heroic tale.

This position, one has to make clear, is itself not exempt from criticism, for, as formulated here, it still assumes that text and genre have their own internal, context-independent logic, and therefore runs the risk of ignoring the cultural environment—the ‘ground’ of the textual ‘figure’. If text and genre follow laws—the critic will rightly counter—these must surely arise from the broader context, from the culture within which they originate. But the argument, of course, runs both ways: having gained acceptance, genres and texts may in turn contribute to consolidating cognitive

frameworks which audiences and cultures will adhere to.¹⁴ Granted that the claim above is excessive, my main justification for advancing it at this time is that a corrective is needed to the proliferation of reality-oriented theories. There is much practical value in making the real ancillary to text—in assigning to it a paratextual function—while giving textual evidence pride of place; and this will make *determinate meaning* particularly relevant to us. Determinate meaning is that which necessarily emerges from the words on the page, from the language and linguistic arrangements it offers, regardless of the theoretical or ideological standpoint writer or reader may bring to bear upon it (Dowling 1999). A model aimed not at uncovering hidden or allegorical meanings but at unfolding the structures of a genre of fiction is necessary and should provide a complement (and, on occasion, a corrective) to earlier views. The next paper will outline a number of representative models and discuss some of their major shortcomings.

¹⁴ Much this point is made by proponents of ‘distant reading’; see Moretti 1983.

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