Tense and Narrativity

From Medieval Performance to Modern Fiction

By Suzanne Fleischman

Routledge London

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Pour Y.M.
malgré lui

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Abbreviations

COND	conditional	PFV	perfective
E	event (per Reichenbach's tense model)	PLP	pluperfect
		PR	present
FUT	future	PRET	preterit
FUT-OF-P	future-of-the-past	PROG	progressive
HP	historical present	PS	simple past
IMPER	imperative	PTC	participle
INDIC	indicative	R	reference point/period (per Reichenbach's model)
IPFV	imperfective		
NARR	narrative (morphology)	S	moment of speech (per Reichenbach's model)
NP	narrative present		
P	past	SUBJ	subjunctive
PA	past anterior (French)	Subscripts:	
PC	compound past	$[\text{tense}]_a$	action
PERF	(present) perfect	$[\text{tense}]_v$	visualizing

Coding Markers:

#	used in translations from Old French to mark the place of the particle *si*

(See appendix 1 for typographic conventions used in coding texts.)

Preface

The genesis of this book goes back some five years, when I first set out to "revisit" a long-standing conundrum of Romance philology: the seemingly idiosyncratic use of tenses found in much of the vernacular narrative literature of the Middle Ages. At that time I could not have foreseen how far beyond the boundaries of the original focus of inquiry my research would take me.

Interest in early vernacular tense usage has traditionally been confined to text editors, historical grammarians, literary scholars attentive to the linguistic questions raised by their texts, and of course students, wondering why medieval writers "couldn't get their tenses straight." Accordingly, the investigative tools and methodologies that have been brought to bear on this question have been for the most part those of traditional philology. One of my objectives in reexamining the question of medieval tense usage has been to expand the investigative framework, in hopes of arriving at a more satisfying interpretation of the phenomenon than those that have been proposed. In particular I have sought to introduce into my analysis some of the theory and methodology of contemporary text-linguistic and sociolinguistic research on the linguistic structure of "natural" narrative. The findings of this research can, I feel, enhance our understanding of apparent peculiarities of "narrative grammar" in other types of narrative as well. As Richard Bauman (1986) observes in a recent monograph on oral story performance, which in many ways complements this book, new perspectives do not necessarily demand the abandonment of old interests, but rather should lead to a reinvigoration of traditional concerns.

In the course of my research, the issues raised by the medieval texts have provided a springboard for exploring a number of broader theoretical questions that this book proposes to address: about differences between spoken and written textuality, about the linguistic correlates of orality and literacy, about the relationship of pragmatics to grammar, about narrative typology, and ultimately about the status of "narrative" as a category of linguistic performance whose protocols differ in certain respects from those of ordinary language.

As one of our most basic hermeneutic constructs, narrative marks a space of convergence for the concerns of a number of disciplines: literary criticism and literary theory; functional linguistics, with its emphasis on pragmatics and trans-sentential phenomena of discourse; sociolinguistics, specifically where it joins hands with cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence in an attempt to provide descriptive models of story structure and to offer insights into the linguistic strategies used by storytellers to perform narrative tasks; linguistic and literary anthropology (ethnomethodology), in their focus on "performance literature" as a text category with its own distinctive conventions; and historiography and philosophy of history, especially where they intersect with literary theory in probing the *differentia specifica* of "narrative" as a construct for organizing and making sense of the data of reality. This list could no doubt be expanded.

In the course of my research it has become apparent to me that investigators in these various fields grapple with many of the same fundamental issues, coming at them with the different (or not so different) concepts, terminologies, and sets of assumptions operative in their respective bailiwicks. Historians and literary theorists, for example, traverse much the same terrain in their discussions of "continuity" and "causality" as properties informing narrative, while linguists' controversies over "foregrounding" in discourse bear a striking resemblance to the debates among philosophers of history over "importance" in historical thinking. I have also observed that "narratologists" in these various fields—if I may use this term, coined by literary theorists, in a connotatively neutral sense—rarely exchange thoughts on these issues with one another, but tend rather to remain enclosed within locally established problematics.

Although I do not presume to have exhausted the critical literature on narrative in any one (let alone all) of these fields, one of my objectives in this book is to bring together insights from across disciplinary lines, insights that have contributed to shaping my own views about the linguistic structure of narrative and the strategies deployed by storytellers to accomplish certain uniquely narrative tasks. In one of the most penetrating studies I have consulted (*Time and Narrative*), the philosopher Paul Ricoeur calls upon historiography and literary criticism to join together in forming "a grand narratology" in which equal place would be given to historical and fictional discourse. The present investigation proposes to further that enterprise by soliciting the participation of a third major discipline in the grand narratology: linguistics. Through its explorations of the workings of narrative in the most primary of contexts—the conversational exchanges of daily life—linguistics lays an essential foundation on which all other disciplines concerned with narrative can build. "All the arts of narration," Ricoeur acknowledges, "and foremost among them those belonging to writing, are imitations of narrative as it is already practiced in the transactions of ordinary discourse." Whence the centrality of natural narrative and the principles governing its structure and organization to the global enterprise of narratology and to the conception of this book.

On the broadest level, it is my hope that this investigation will serve to reduce the sharp separation many investigators perceive between the literary and the conversational, between poetic and nonpoetic discourses, between linguistics and literature, and to demonstrate that natural-language data and certain analytical frameworks linguists use to describe them can be illuminating for the study of poetic texts. Most linguists who have ventured into the domain of literary/poetic discourse concur that insight into the workings of "artificial" narrative forms must be based on a thorough analysis of the natural narratives that punctuate our everyday verbal interactions. To these voices I hereby add my own.

Some of the ideas for this book have been rehearsed in article form (Fleischman 1985, 1986a, and forthcoming). Not surprisingly, my thinking on certain of the issues raised in these articles has evolved since their publication. I ask the reader's indulgence for any discrepancies that might be noted.

It is impossible to acknowledge individually the many people who contributed in one way or another to the genesis of this book. Special thanks, however, go to Susan Herring for sharing her narratological thoughts with me on various issues raised in the book; to Dina Sherzer and Linda Waugh for their insightful comments on an earlier version of the text and suggestions for its improvement; to Andrew Makuch of the University of Arizona Library for translation assistance; to Connie Dickey, Kathy Lewis, and especially Barbara De Marco for carefully proofreading the text in its various avatars and ferreting out infelicities of exposition; and to Jonathan Beck for listening to my grumblings and providing encouragement in moments of investigative doldrums.

Tense and Narrativity

Introduction

Our ordinary language shows a tiresome bias in its treatment of time. . . . The form it takes—that of requiring that every verb form show a tense—is peculiarly productive of needless complications, since it demands lip service to time even where time is farthest from our thoughts. (QUINE, *WORD AND OBJECT*)

The reason *that throws light . . . consists in a narration. . . . Alongside pure physico-mathematical reason there is . . . a narrative reason. To comprehend anything human . . . one must tell its history. . . . Life only takes on a measure of transparency in the light of [this]* historical reason.
(ORTEGA Y GASSET, *HISTORY AS A SYSTEM*)

0.1. A major project of text-oriented linguistics in recent years has been an inquiry into the linguistic foundations of narrative. The goal of that project is to arrive at an understanding of the linguistic strategies used by storytellers to construct verbal icons of experience, real or invented. This book forms part of that project. Its focus is on the grammatical categories of tense and aspect as used in narrative, and specifically on their NONREFERENTIAL or pragmatic functions. While these functions are less obvious and less well understood than the basic REFERENTIAL or grammatical functions, an understanding of the pragmatics of tense-aspect usage is central to the broader objective that this book proposes: the development of a theory of tense in narrative.[1]

In his commentary on the radical departure from established novelistic protocol marked by Camus's novel *The Stranger,* narrated almost entirely in the PASSÉ COMPOSÉ, Jean-Paul Sartre (1947) suggests that it is in the tense of a text that the secret of its special strangeness lies and that one task of the critic should be the forging of a link between grammar and philosophy. A special strangeness indeed informs the excerpt given below from a thirteenth-century French romance whose tense usage seems to defy grammatical logic, thereby presenting the critic prepared to take up Sartre's challenge with a task all the more formidable:

Dedenz une garderobe *ENTRE*	1 She *ENTERS* [PR] a dressing room
ou une pucelete *ESTOIT*	where [there] *WAS* [IMP] a young damsel
qui aus piez du lit *SE GISOIT*	who *WAS LYING* [IMP] at the foot of the bed,
mes ele *ne la pot veoir.*	but she *could not see her* [PS].

El lit *S'EST lessie cheoir*
la chastelaine mout dolente;
iluec *SE PLAINT* et *SE DEMENTE*,
et *dist:* "Ha! sire Dieus, merci!"

Onto the bed the lady of the castle
HAS fallen [PC], grieving deeply;
there she *SIGHS* [PR] and *LAMENTS* [PR],
and *said:* [PS] "Mercy, dear Lord God!"
(*La Chastelaine de Vergi,* vv. 726–733)[2]

What strikes the reader immediately in this example is the seemingly idiosyncratic use of tenses. It is generally agreed that the basic function of tense in ordinary language is to establish the temporal location of situations predicated in a sentence or discourse. Yet the curious mixture of tenses in this example seemingly has little to do with temporal location: the five situations reported as punctual events (encoded by the predicates "enter a dressing room," "fall on the bed," "sigh," "lament," and "say") are all understood to occur in a fictional past and in the order in which they are reported ("sigh" and "lament" overlap). However, three of these situations are reported in the PRESENT (PR) tense, one in the COMPOUND PAST (PC), and one in the SIMPLE PAST (PS), as coded in the example. Inasmuch as time reference is usually established at the outset of a text and tends to be a property of fairly large stretches of discourse, it need not in principle be reiterated in each successive sentence; yet the grammars of many languages require that tense information be encoded (redundantly) on every finite verb—a state of affairs that might be viewed as a singularly uneconomical use of grammatical resources, as the opening quote from Quine suggests.

If these tense-aspect forms are not expressing temporality, neither do they seem to be expressing aspectual notions such as "completion" or "durativity": the predicates "was" (line 2) and "could not see her" (line 4) are both durative, though the first is reported by an IMPERFECTIVE PAST (IMP), the second by a PERFECTIVE PAST (PS). And of the three situations represented as completed, one is in the PR ("she enters a dressing room"), another in the PC ("she has fallen onto the bed"), and yet another in the PS (the introduction-to-speech verb "said").

Clearly, then, the contribution of the tense-aspect forms in this passage is something other than the basic grammatical functions normally associated with these categories. Fortunately, the *laissez-faire* economies of natural languages tend to make more efficient use of available resources than their artificially controlled counterparts in social and political institutions, one result being that in the narrative grammars of most languages tense-aspect morphology is often freed from its primary REFERENTIAL functions

(discussed in chapter 1) and pressed into service for other, notably pragmatic purposes. One of the principal claims this book makes is that in narrative discourse the functions of tense and aspect are frequently pragmatic in nature; chapters 5, 6, and 7 accordingly are devoted to elaborating and illustrating these pragmatic functions.

Pragmatics is understood as referring to all types of meaning dependent on context. Of primary concern here are, on the one hand, *discourse context*—the portion of discourse or text that surrounds a given sentence or sequence of sentences—as well as the nature of the text as a whole (narration, conversation, oratory), and, on the other, *situation context*—the communicative context or setting in which the text as a speech-act occurs. The pragmatics of discourse is concerned in large part with the organization of texts as coherent wholes; this includes strategies for packaging the information in sentences as either topic or focus, signaling the relative saliency of different pieces of information, establishing intersentential cohesion, and other linguistically describable aspects of text structure. Situational pragmatics refers to aspects of the extratextual setting of the discourse, including its relationship to speech-act participants, the relationship of these participants—notably speaker and hearer(s)—to one another, and any other relevant features of the context of communication, linguistic or nonlinguistic.

Also relevant to this inquiry, and within the domain of pragmatics, are meanings and presuppositions that derive from our familiarity as members of a culture or subculture with certain culture-specific "frames"—a term coined by cognitive psychologists to refer to clusters of interrelated expectations associated with prototypical experiences or situation contexts. Though the frame concept was conceived with reference to real-world situations (e.g., a visit to the doctor, a Ph.D. exam), it is easily extended to *textual* worlds, which also fall into recognizable types—genres—to which similar sets of expectations attach. To the extent that all forms of discourse entail "horizons of expectations"—reader-response theorists' umbrella term for the shared knowledge, assumptions, and values that writers/speakers tacitly draw on in constructing texts and that initiated readers/listeners draw on in decoding them—these must also figure into any analysis of narrative language that claims a pragmatic orientation.

0.2. It has often been observed that tense usage in narrative is anomalous with respect to a language's normal use of tenses—that the relationships between time and tense in narrative are not the same as those obtaining in ordinary language. Attempts have been made, notably

by Emile Benveniste (1959) and Harald Weinrich (1973), to explain the tenses of narrative not as anomalous but as regular within a special tense system that operates alongside that of nonnarrative language. Along similar lines, Dahl (1985) has observed that the possibilities for expressing temporal distance may not be the same in narrative and nonnarrative contexts; where the two differ, it is nonnarrative contexts that exhibit the greater number of tense-aspect distinctions (this observation supports Labov's more general claim [1972:377] that narrative shows a less complex linguistic structure than ordinary conversation). It is also the case that certain (non-Indo-European) languages have grammatical morphology, including tense-aspect, that is exclusive to narrative. While the languages here under survey show no uniquely NARRATIVE (NARR) morphology, we can identify particular sentence types (e.g., free indirect discourse), lexicogrammatical collocations (PAST-tense verb + nonpast adverb), and tense usages (HISTORICAL PRESENT and the so-called NARRATIVE IMPERFECT), whose acceptability depends on a narrative context. Finally, it has been observed across languages that the seemingly ungrammatical alternation of tenses illustrated in the Old French example above occurs only in sentences of narration and not in sentences of directly quoted speech, nor in commentary by the narrator.

These and other considerations have led a number of investigators to view narrative as a *marked* category of linguistic performance whose grammar differs in certain respects from that of everyday communicative language.

The markedness question has been debated largely by narratologists oriented toward literature, certain of whom take narrative to be synonymous with *written fiction* (e.g., Banfield 1982). By broadening the range of text types to which the label "narrative" applies so as to include both nonwritten and nonfictional texts, I propose to shed new light on this theoretical question of a special, marked grammar for narrative. The early Romance texts that make up the largest part of my data base were virtually all composed for oral recitation before a listening audience—for *performance*. The ramifications for a linguistic theory of narrative of this crucial pragmatic difference between interactive performance texts and texts involving absent-author communication will be discussed at various points in the book.

The claim that narrative constitutes a marked variety of language is not simply a theoretical question to be debated here for its own sake. It is central to the theory I put forth to account for tense usage in narrative, a theory based on the concept of markedness and specifically on the proposition

that in a marked context the normal markedness values of an opposition may be reversed. In the unmarked context of ordinary (nonnarrative) language the PRESENT is generally regarded as the unmarked tense while the PAST is marked. And if we accept the claim that narrative constitutes a marked linguistic context, then according to the markedness-reversal hypothesis we should not be surprised to see an exchange of markedness values within the "special" tense system of narrative. A major thrust of my analysis is to demonstrate the operation of this hypothesis, in particular the proposition that *in a narrative context* the PRESENT—or any tense-aspect category other than the PAST[3]—is marked with respect to one or more of a set of properties that together define the unmarked tense of narration, the PAST. This proposition entails a particular view of PAST: as defined by the markedness framework, the category PAST is no longer a simple unanalyzable piece of grammatical information but a cluster concept involving multiple oppositional properties operative at different levels of the linguistic system—the REFERENTIAL, the TEXTUAL, the EXPRESSIVE, and the METALINGUISTIC.

0.3. The model of language that provides a foundation for the markedness theory as well as for my categorization of tense-aspect functions is a multilevel functional model according to which elements of the linguistic system (lexical items, constructions, categories of grammar) can realize meanings in four interdependent components, here referred to as the REFERENTIAL, the TEXTUAL, the EXPRESSIVE, and the METALINGUISTIC. This model is an adaptation of a trilevel model proposed in Traugott (1982), itself a variation on a similar model put forth in Halliday and Hasan (1976), with the addition of a METALINGUISTIC component.

The REFERENTIAL component is concerned with the propositional content of utterances (referential meanings), with the function language has of being *about* something. At this level are located truth-conditional relations as well as other categories not interpretable solely in truth-conditional terms, including the so-called basic meanings of tense and aspect.

Located in the TEXTUAL component are a language's resources for creating and organizing discourse that is internally coherent ("text") and coheres with its situation context, and for signaling other information relevant to the structure of the discourse itself. Descriptions of this component typically emphasize the devices for creating textual cohesion. But the *textual* component is also the source of devices relating to other facets of the unfolding of a text. Particularly relevant in the present context are the strategies speakers use for controlling the rate of information flow in a dis-

course, for partitioning a discourse into smaller subunits and marking the boundaries between them, and for signaling levels of saliency or information relevance—for creating texture within text. This last operation is commonly referred to as foregrounding and backgrounding, or simply grounding.

Situated in the EXPRESSIVE component are meanings relating to the social, affective, and conative functions of language: its resources for expressing personal attitudes toward what is being talked about, toward the text itself, and toward the participants in the communicative transaction. Among the various linguistic resources located in the EXPRESSIVE component, the most important for our purpose are those serving to communicate evaluations and point of view.

The METALINGUISTIC component houses a language's resources for talking about itself. Language is often called upon to make statements that are essentially statements *about language*. Included under this rubric are the nomenclature of grammar and rhetoric, the vocabulary of stylistics, and, more generally, any meanings or functions that linguistic elements may have to signal a particular style, register, genre, or type of language. For example, the French PASSÉ SIMPLE has, in addition to temporal and aspectual meanings, a METALINGUISTIC function—which some now hold to be primary—of signaling a particular register of formal, normally written language. For languages that have an explicit narrative morphology, at least one function of this morphology is METALINGUISTIC: it identifies a discourse. Among the various resources located in the METALINGUISTIC component, the most important for our purpose is the "antinarrative" function of the PRESENT tense.[4]

In the metalanguage of literary narratology we find similar attempts to distinguish between elements of a text with strictly *narrative* functions—those that relate to the content of the story (paralleling my REFERENTIAL functions)—and those with *extranarrative* functions. The latter domain includes statements serving as "stage directions" (Barthes 1967) for the text (analogous to my TEXTUAL functions) as well as "explanatory, justificatory" statements whose function is "ideological" (Genette 1980; in my terms, EXPRESSIVE). Obviously this homology is only approximative; the EXPRESSIVE component encompasses considerably more than Genette's ideological discourse, for it is also the locus of elements whose functions are "conative" and "phatic," which define certain types of narrative as complex communicative events.

Both Traugott (1982) and Halliday and Hasan (1976) situate the contributions of tense and aspect to the linguistic message in the REFERENTIAL component. But this assignment accounts only for the primary or basic meanings of these categories—for tense as a grammaticalized marker of temporal deixis, and aspect as a nondeictic marker of the "internal constituency" (Comrie 1976) of a situation. One of the principal claims this book makes is that the functions of tense-aspect categories *in narrative* are not limited to these basic REFERENTIAL meanings; rather, tense and aspect do as much if not more of their work in the PRAGMATIC (TEXTUAL and EXPRESSIVE) and METALINGUISTIC components; moreover, the functions of tense-aspect that are exclusive to narrative are specifically pragmatic functions.

Given that in a narrative context tense-aspect can operate in all of the functional-semantic components, the question arises as to where it originates and what diachronic path it follows. Formulated in more general terms, the question is: Do grammatical forms start out in the REFERENTIAL component and subsequently go on to do TEXTUAL, EXPRESSIVE, and METALINGUISTIC work? Or, conversely, are the origins of grammatical categories to be sought in the pragmatics of discourse, as certain linguists (Givón, Hopper, Du Bois at various points in their writing) have proposed? It is significant that tense and aspect figure prominently among the grammatical categories around which this debate has centered. Hopper in particular has argued that aspect (notably PFV) markers are likely to originate at the TEXTUAL level as focus particles or markers of the textual foreground (Hopper 1979a, 1979b), while Traugott (1979) has argued for change in the opposite direction: REFERENTIAL → TEXTUAL/EXPRESSIVE. As she observes, "Over and over again in the history of languages, semantico-grammatical change seems to be . . . from non-deictic to deictic functions, from non-speaker-oriented functions to speaker-oriented functions, from non-pragmatic functions to pragmatic functions, from non-cohesive to cohesive functions." Among the theoretical issues on which this investigation purports to shed some light is that of the relationship between grammar and pragmatics.

0.4. The textual data base for this book consists of natural and artificial narratives from a range of genres,[5] primarily from Romance languages. A selection of these narratives (excerpts in the case of lengthy texts) is included in appendix 2.[6] One of the principal claims made here is that the specifically narrative functions of tense and aspect developed as motivated pragmatic responses to the conditions of narrative performance in interactive oral contexts. For this reason I have chosen to concentrate on texts from the later Middle Ages (eleventh–fifteenth cen-

turies), a period whose forms of thought and expression were still fundamentally *oral* and whose textual artifacts, which we now read—*après la lettre*—as literature, still bear traces of their oral ontogenesis, certain of which have survived chirographic transformation. Among the traces that remain are conspicuous tense-aspect alternations whose logic seems to defy conventional grammatical analysis.

Confusion des temps—as the tense-switching phenomenon has been referred to in French—turns out to be extremely widespread in the older Romance literatures, as well as in the narrative production of many other early vernaculars. Over the years the tense-alternation question has spawned a considerable body of critical literature—stylistic, literary, philological—that by its sheer abundance would seem to point to the absence of satisfying interpretations of the phenomenon. In light of this volume of scholarship, one may wonder whether there is anything left to be said on the matter that is not simply old wine in new, more fashionable bottles. I believe there is. However, the approach I take here involves a radical shift in the premises and direction of inquiry, away from exclusive enclosure within the problematics of medieval textuality—or literary textuality in general—to an area of contemporary text linguistics that has of late drawn considerable attention: the analysis of natural narrative.

Recently, the tense-switching phenomenon has begun to be explored in a more rigorous and informed way by pragmatically oriented linguists concerned with understanding how we construct and organize the natural narrations that punctuate our everyday conversations and, concomitantly, with identifying the linguistic strategies that make for effective storytelling. Much of this work has been carried out in the tradition of American sociolinguistics associated with William Labov. In reading the relevant literature I was struck by the similarity between the tense-switching patterns identified for natural narrative and those that occur in the early Romance texts; it was this similarity that motivated me to reexamine the medieval material in the light of findings of current text-linguistic research. Admittedly, the inner-city Philadelphia *raconteurs* interviewed by Labov in the 1960s have little in common with singers of medieval epic and reciters of romances. But the cultural and time gap narrows progressively as we learn more about the linguistic foundation of their shared expertise in *oral story performance*.

Examination of a substantial corpus of early Romance texts reveals that tense switching is virtually always a mark of orally performed narratives of the type Nessa Wolfson (1978, 1979) has labeled performed stories, on the basis of certain features that such texts share with theatrical presentations.

These features include direct speech, asides, repetition, expressive sounds and sound effects, and motions and gestures. Not all but at least some of them must be in evidence for a narrative to constitute a performed story and not merely an oral report of past events. The performed story should thus be understood as a prototype concept whose distinctive features are present to different degrees, and some not at all, in individual actualizations. The more fully a story is performed, Wolfson asserts, the more likely it is to exhibit tense switching.

Wolfson's research deals with natural narratives in contemporary American English. In her data, tense switching occurs only in those narrations in which the speaker "breaks through" into performance (cf. Hymes 1974). From what we know about conditions of text production and reception in the neo-Latin Middle Ages, we can be reasonably certain that the varieties of storytelling involved in medieval epics, romances, ballads, and so forth, qualified as performance (as defined by Wolfson), even when a written text was involved.[7]

In the extensive literature on tense usage in early Romance, insufficient account has been taken of the performance factor—not that medievalists have ignored the performative dimension of their texts, but their awareness of it often fails to carry forward into critical analysis. Medieval narratives are often read and analyzed as one would modern fiction, which is composed, transmitted, and received under quite different conditions. Current research into oral vs. written strategies in narrative suggests that in literate traditions "the meaning is in the text," while in oral situations "the meaning is in the context" and in the implications of communicative acts (Goody and Watt 1968; Olson 1977; Bauman 1986); listeners attend more to what is *meant* and readers to what is *written* (the actual words in the text). We are only now coming to recognize the linguistic implications of oral text performance and to articulate significant linguistic differences between narratives composed by literate writers for a literate readership and narratives composed for performance by professional storytellers in cultures still predominantly oral. Note, however, that orality is not being invoked here for its own sake. My purpose, like that articulated by Paul Zumthor in his provocative essay "The Text and the Voice" (1984b:68), is "not so much . . . to insist on the importance of orality in the transmission and indeed the creation of medieval poetry, but rather to appreciate and gauge what this orality implies; not so much to evaluate the size of the 'oral part' in the corpus of extant texts as to integrate into my perception and my reading the properties thus explained." What I wish to emphasize here is the crucial role I believe oral performance played in shaping the

grammar and linguistic structure of vernacular narratives from the Middle Ages. Many of the disconcerting properties of medieval textuality, including its extraordinary parataxis, conspicuous anaphora and repetition, and striking alternations of tense, can, I submit, find more satisfying explanations through appeal to the incontrovertible orality of medieval culture.

0.5. If the ontogenesis of tense switching is located in the pragmatic structure of oral story performance, as I believe it is, this does not mean that pragmatic uses of tense-aspect morphology are restricted to orally performed texts. Indeed, in planned written narratives produced by highly literate authors we find tense-aspect morphology similarly pressed into service for TEXTUAL and EXPRESSIVE purposes, as shown in the discussion of tense-aspect in modern and postmodern fiction that occupies much of chapters 7 and 8. How, if at all, are the medieval and modern uses related? What I would like to suggest is that certain stylistic phenomena now regarded as hallmarks of narrative *écriture*—for example, the HISTORICAL PRESENT (HP), the NARRATIVE IMPERFECT, and the tense usage characteristic of interior monologue—may have been adapted from popular narrative genres of earlier periods, and ultimately from the naturally occurring narratives of everyday speech at the time. Readers with a strong belletristic bias may find this claim disquieting; however, it appears to be well founded.

If written narrative of the postmedieval age has adopted—and adapted—the pragmatic uses of tense-aspect established by its orally performed precursors, it has not confined itself to these uses. The institution of writing and the different pragmatic structure of "absent-author communication" open up new possibilities for pragmatic exploitation of the apparatus of grammar, in particular of tense-aspect categories. For this reason I devote the last two chapters of the book to fiction, mainly French, of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, showing how Flaubert and Proust exploit the possibilities of the IMPERFECT and Camus those of the PASSÉ COMPOSÉ, while Virginia Woolf pioneers in destabilizing narration through her uses of the PRESENT. As predicated by the markedness framework that underpins the theory of tense proposed here, these tenses are all *marked* in a narrative context. In choosing them as vehicles for the reporting of events, writers depart in various ways from the activity of narrating in favor of other modes of representing experience and/or the contents of constructed worlds. Among fiction writers surveyed here, those associated with the French *nouveau roman* (new novel) have conceivably gone the

furthest in exploiting the options made available through the PRESENT tense. All genres that choose the PR as the basic tense for reporting information work in some way against the narrative norm; they are consciously or unconsciously antinarrative. As marked varieties of narrative, they accordingly privilege a tense that is itself marked in a narrative context. What we observe, in other words, is a second-order reversal of markedness values in a second-order marked context (the unmarking of PAST in narrative constitutes the first-order reversal).

The genres selected for discussion here that rely on the PR as the basic (unmarked) tense for reporting information might be viewed by some as strange bedfellows: medieval Romance epics, Hispanic ballads of the *romancero* tradition, modern fiction in the HP, and the postmodern *nouveaux romans*. Of these genres, two are products of orality (composition and performance), two of consummate literacy. The ideologies underlying them and the horizons of expectation they draw on could hardly be more diverse. Nonetheless, these genres all privilege a mode of representation that is not that of conventional narrators, whose PAST-tense reports of events are necessarily informed by a retrospective intelligibility, but that of eyewitness observers verbalizing in the PRESENT tense the (unconfigured) particulars of the visualized spectacles ostensibly passing before their eyes. While the historical and cultural distance separating vernacular epics and *nouveaux romans* could hardly be greater, striking similarities are observed in the linguistic strategies they deploy in the construction and articulation of a text (salient repetition, detemporalization of events, priority of the "descriptive" over the "eventive," a privileging of speech), similarities that might not suggest themselves were it not for their shared use of the PR tense. Verbal artifacts of postmodernism, the *nouveaux romans* pose conceivably the most powerful challenge to the tenets of realist fiction, and of normative narration in general, in their particular exploitation of a tense that, in its basic meaning, makes no commitment to temporality.[8]

0.6. One of the working hypotheses of this book that should by now be apparent is that certain linguistic protocols used in narration are, if not universal, at least widely attested across languages. This is not to ignore cross-language differences. It would be erroneous to assume that the pragmatic uses of tense-aspect in narrative are the same across genres and across languages. The grammars of different languages are obviously different, as are grammars of an individual language at different stages of its history. We might also wish to consider the proposition that

no grammar is ever a stable system—rather, grammars are always in the process of being renegotiated by speakers in contexts of actual communication (Hopper's 1987 view of grammar as "emergent"). This is presumably how phenomena such as tense switching came into being in the first place. In any event, the tense-aspect oppositions available in a given grammar necessarily condition and constrain the pragmatic extensions this morphology can undergo. For example, in languages with PFV and IPFV aspects, this opposition commonly serves to mark the discourse contrast between events and description, whereas in languages in which perfectivity is not expressed morphologically this discourse contrast cannot be marked unambiguously, at least not in the same way. Similar options are conditioned by the PROG(RESSIVE) aspect.

It is also the case that for historical or stylistic reasons languages will either promote or avoid particular linguistic devices. Thus it has been observed that the HP has traditionally been less cultivated in fiction in English than in the narrative fiction of other languages, including French (Pascal 1962). Also different are the formal and stylistic conventions associated with storytelling practice in different cultures. These differences notwithstanding, there appear to be uses of tense-aspect in the linguistic structure of narrative that generalize across languages and across genres, and it is these I hope to capture, without, however, elevating them to the status of exceptionless universals. My goal is to strike a balance between the general and the particular, to posit cross-language tendencies where such can be reasonably supported by the data, while at the same time acknowledging differences within or departures from the broader patterns.

My conviction that certain pragmatic and metalinguistic uses of tense-aspect in narrative constitute potential universals motivates the spectrum of languages and diversity of genres included in this book. The major emphasis is on texts from French, notably from Old French. The medieval corpus also includes texts from Occitan, Spanish, and Italian. At appropriate points in the discussion data are also introduced from modern Romance languages and from English; in addition, reference is made to other languages in which "ungrammatical" tense usage has been observed but which, for reasons of space and lack of familiarity, I have chosen not to treat. It is my hope that readers with similar interests in the linguistic structure of narrative and with expertise in languages not included here might be inspired to test the claims put forth in this book against their own data. This would put us in an even stronger position empirically to assess the potential universality of certain pragmatic uses of tense and aspect—and of other components of the apparatus of grammar—in narrative language.

0.7. The organizational blueprint of this book is as follows. Chapter 1 surveys concepts and categories of grammar essential to the development of the theory of tense in narrative that is elaborated in chapter 2. Chapter 3 offers a critical overview of the literature on "ungrammatical" tense usage in narrative, focused on but not limited to the intrusion of PR tense into past narration. Chapter 4 then explores a number of typological questions about narrative as one of our primary hermeneutic constructs for converting the data of experience into language. Chapter 5 focuses on the linguistic structure of narrative—temporal structure and text structure, the latter based on the model proposed by Labov for natural narration. Because it figures so prominently in Labov's model, I also discuss in this chapter one of the principal EXPRESSIVE functions of tense-aspect in narrative: evaluation. Chapter 6 is devoted to TEXTUAL functions, while the remaining EXPRESSIVE functions are taken up in chapter 7. Finally, in its consideration of genres that challenge the conventions of normative narration by attempting to cast storytelling in the PR tense, chapter 8 explores a METALINGUISTIC function central to my theory of tense and narrativity.

Proceeding through the chapters of this book, the reader may perceive a curious resemblance between my own text-organizational strategy and a strategy of text structure characteristic of traditional oral storytelling. In oral cultures, the unfolding of narratives is not so much linear as circular: oral narrators frequently return to events previously narrated and re-present them such that new meanings emerge cumulatively through repetition. If the argumentation of this book is likewise less than strictly linear, returning periodically to questions raised earlier and reexamining them in different contexts, this should not be interpreted as the fallacy of imitative form, but simply as the structuring of the textual to accommodate the referential.

It will also be observed that the analytic terminology used in descriptions of narrative structure is often drawn metaphorically from grammar, in particular from grammatical categories associated with the *verb*. Among the more systematic descriptions offered by literary theorists, Todorov (1966, etc.) analyzes narrative structure in terms of "time," "aspect," and "mode," Genette (1980) in terms of "time," "mode," and "voice." It is not coincidental that the grammar of natural languages provides the conceptual and terminological metaphors for "grammars of narrative." The cen-

trality of tense, aspect, and other verb-based categories to the accomplishment of certain specifically narrative tasks has no doubt motivated the choice of the verb as a prime metaphor for the description of narrative structure.

The cross-disciplinary nature of this book complicates the matter of an expository idiom. The two disciplines most prominently represented here, linguistics and literary theory, articulate their respective subject matter using different styles and different critical vocabularies. Preferring compromise over schizophrenia, I have endeavored to adopt a consistent, rigorous, but I hope not recondite usage, and to define all terminology invoked in a specialized sense by any of the disciplines represented here (italicized at first usage). I ask the indulgence of readers for whom this terminology is already household currency. I have also supplied translations for texts and examples and have translated citations into English. Given the tendency of translators to modify tense usage in the interest of smoothness or idiomaticity, I have chosen to use my own translations (unless otherwise indicated) even where published translations are available. Finally, to avoid ambiguity between tense-aspect categories and divisions of the time continuum, the names of which are often the same, I have adopted the convention of using lowercase for semantic/conceptual categories (e.g., past events, the speaker's present) and UPPERCASE for categories of grammar and their abbreviations (e.g., the PRESENT tense, the HP).

I Working Definitions and Operational Preliminaries

Dans ces "présents" nous semblons . . . capter le temps, qui à l'intérieur même des présents, des scènes, continue à s'écouler sous les formes d'un avenir qui devient passé.
(B. GROETHUYSEN, "DE QUELQUES ASPECTS DU TEMPS")

Behind the preterite there always lurks a demiurge, a God or a reciter. The world is not unexplained since it is told like a story; each one of its accidents is but a circumstance, and the preterite is precisely this operative sign whereby the narrator reduces this exploded reality to a slim and pure logos . . .
(BARTHES, *WRITING DEGREE ZERO*)

In this chapter I propose to outline the concepts and categories of grammar relevant to my analysis and to the theory of tense-aspect in narrative developed in chapter 2. The first three sections of the chapter are devoted to the grammatical macro-categories *tense, aspect,* and *situation type*. Section 1.4 discusses the locus of tense-aspect between "grammar" and "discourse." Sections 1.5–1.7 survey the tense-aspect categories of primary concern here, those of the past and present systems, with 1.7 focusing on the particularities of these categories in early Romance.

1.1. Tense

For the purposes of this investigation, "tense" is defined as *the grammaticalization of location in time*. More particularly, tense involves the location of situations predicated in a sentence or discourse relative to a reference time.[9] This reference time is normally the moment of speech but may be a surrogate temporal anchor indirectly linked to the moment of speech or conventionally established by the discourse. In contrast to other grammatical categories associated with the verb (aspect, voice, mood, evidentiality) tense is *relational* in that it involves at least two moments in time (which may coincide wholly or in part).

1.1.1. The definition of tense given above is based on a model proposed in Reichenbach (1947), in which tense relationships are described in terms of three orientation points along a hypothetical time line that moves from left to right. These are: