Chapter 3

Relevant Logics, Counterfactual Worlds, and the Understanding of Narrative

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to explore what insights relevant logics may provide for the understanding of literary fictional narrative.[1] To date, hardly anyone has reflected on the intersection of relevant logics and narratology, and some could think that there is good reason for it. On the one hand, relevance has been a prominent issue in pragmatics, in the tradition of Grice, and Sperber and Wilson; thus framed, relevance is highly context-sensitive, so it seems unsuitable for formal analysis.[2] On the other hand, the very idea of a logic of narrative has been criticized, arguing that logic brings to a stasis the temporality of human action (Ricœur 1984–1988, 2: 29–60), or that its emphasis on rules misses the creative, unpredictable character of literature (De Man 1982).[3]

However, a distinction may be drawn between the relevance *of* a narrative, sometimes called its tellability or "point" (Pratt 1977, 132–51; Prince 1983), and relevance *in* or *for* a narrative, that is, the property that some elements have of being relevant or significant for the constitution of the narrative qua narrative. This latter kind of narrative relevance, as we will see, is often spelt out as connectedness on grounds of causal links. And the notion of causality leads us to the fields of logic and the philosophy of science. Here, causal relations may be elucidated by means of conditional statements, especially counterfactual conditionals, the theory of which brings us back—via the ceteris paribus clause—to context-sensitivity, which in this area is more amenable to formal argument than in pragmatics.

As I said at the start, I will be dealing here not just with any narrative but with literary fictional narrative. Now, in literary communication, relevance

is hyperprotected by social conventions, so that any apparent violations of the cooperative principle should not be taken at face value, but prompt the audience to a search for meaning that may restore it (Pratt 1977, 214–21). Besides, scholars are professionally committed, so to say, to find everything worth interpreting in a literary text (Barthes 1966, 71). A limiting case is the "reality effect," where the futility and lack of meaning turn the sign into a mark of the real (Barthes 1989, 141–48). Still, even in a fictional narrative it must be possible to discriminate between what is significant in different respects. As Feagin suggests, "the particular details of events and actions can be cognitively rich in a number of ways: for their symbolism, irony, allusiveness and metaphorical potential as well as for their contributions to the narrative" (Feagin 2007, 24). In this chapter, I focus on the last aspect and will not dwell at length on other kinds of literary relevance.[4]

In search of a working definition of narrative, let us assume that Marie-Laure Ryan was right when she wrote: "One of the least controversial claims of contemporary narratology is that a narrative text is the representation of a number of events in a time sequence" (1991, 109). Theories of narrativity have chosen to focus on different elements of the definition. A stress on the events and their connection privileges the notions of story and plot, in a tradition that goes back to Aristotle's *Poetics*. A stress on text or representation foregrounds the mediacy effected through discursive means (Genette 1972; Stanzel 1984). A synthesis is reached by defining narrativity as the interplay between the time of the represented world and the time of the discourse, from which the effects of suspense, curiosity, and surprise flow (Sternberg 1992, 518–29). Additionally, it has been suggested that the notion of narrativity may be detached from those of event and plot, and defined instead as the representation of the experiential quality of what happens, even if it is disjointed and meaningless for the human agents involved (Fludernik 1996, 20–43). However much can be said in favor of the last two theories, in these pages I will stick to the first one, because it is simpler and, thus, permits me to distinguish easily between narrative and nonnarrative relevance and is more amenable to a logical analysis in terms of causality and conditionality.[5] Moreover, the focus on event connection can make the most of Aristotle's insights into the logic and causality of plot, a foolproof guideline of sorts that is welcome for such a tentative approach as this. Should this initial endeavor yield results of some interest, attention would then be given to the other more recent, more complex, finer-tuned theories of narrativity.

After these preliminaries, I will proceed as follows. First, I will briefly introduce relevant logics, with an eye to showing their interest for narratological concerns rather than to providing a coherent (let alone comprehensive) survey here. Secondly, lest I get drawn into purely abstract discussion, I will analyze several stories in order to give some instances of the kind of topics congenial to the kind of narratology that may be addressed with a relevantist toolkit. Thirdly (and lastly), I will expand in a more theoretical fashion on certain issues raised in the second section and bring them into connection with pragmatic relevance theory.

RELEVANT LOGICS AND NARRATOLOGY

The basic idea behind relevant logics is to put some constraints on the notions of logical consequence and proof, such as that validity requires the effective use of the given premises in deriving the conclusion, or that premises and conclusion have some content in common (Read 1989, 119–35; Mares 2004, 6–10). These constraints avoid the so-called paradoxes of material implication ($A \supset B$). For instance, since material implication works truth-functionally ($A \supset B \equiv \neg A \lor B$), it permits one to pick any two propositions and have at least one imply the other, for (($A \supset B$) $\lor$ ($B \supset A$)) is logically valid whatever A and B mean. Relevant logics avoid also the paradoxes of strict implication ($A \rightarrow B$), that is, necessary material implication ($A \rightarrow B \equiv \square (A \supset B)$), which warrants the logical truth of ($A \land \neg A$) $\rightarrow B$ (*ex falso quodlibet*) and of $A \rightarrow$ ($B \lor \neg B$) (a tautology follows from anything). Thus, relevant logics are paraconsistent and non-monotonic (Mares and Meyer 2001, 284–87), for they admit neither *ex falso quodlibet*, being therefore able to deal with contradictions, nor the "weakening" rule, that is, the addition of new, irrelevant premises to an inference—in fact, the added premises could lead to the retraction of a consequence previously warranted.

Moreover, it has been argued that relevant constraints are necessary for logic to discharge itself of the so-called ontological assumption, which "requires that all (proper) subject terms of true statements must have actual reference" (Routley 1980, 23). This argument is aimed against the consequences of Russell's theory of definite descriptions, for the latter leads to evaluate as false every proposition that purports to refer to a nonexistent object, for example, the notorious present king of France. Under the sway of this view, literary theorists have had to find roundabout ways to talk about truth relative to fictions; one of these ways is the theory of possible worlds, of logical ancestry, to which I will return later. Now, the alternative view to Russell's was Alexius Meinong's "theory of objects," which remained discredited for most of the twentieth century, but has been occasionally defended in the last decades (Parsons 1980; Routley 1980; Priest 2005). Whatever one may think about Meinongianism, it is a fact that in the context of the theory of objects, together with paraconsistent, non-monotonic, and relevant logics,

excerpt

CONDITIONALS, NARRATIVE, AND PRAGMATICS

My aim in this section is to expand on two topics I mentioned while introducing relevant logics: the subsumption theory of narrative explanation and the ternary relation of conditionality. I will use the examples analyzed above in order to further elaborate on these ideas and to suggest some connections with mainstream pragmatic relevance theory (I do not have the space here to deal with another salient topic, intensionality).

The subsumption theory or covering law model states that an explanation, whether historical or scientific, consists of relating a set of initial conditions to an event that results from it according to a certain general law or hypothesis. This idea has been formalized with the toolkit of first-order classical logic: the universal quantifier, universal instantiation, material implication, and modus ponens (Hempel and Oppenheim 1948). In brief: $\forall x(Cx \supset Ex)$, $Ca \vDash Ea$. Danto, who adopted this logical apparatus and considered Hempel's views essentially right, nevertheless pointed out a certain shortcoming.[29] The analogy between deductive argument and narrative holds as long as their subject is a minimal story, where one can link the initial and the final states by means of a single cause (Danto 1965, 251), but "it may happen that there are changes that no single cause can serve to explain them," especially if there is "a *sequence* of changes," and consequently, "a sequence of causes must be assigned in order to explain" the whole development; then "there need not be any general law which covers the entire change" (252). As far as logic goes, given the transitivity of the material conditional, one could combine a series of conditional law-like statements into one with the protasis of the first and the apodosis of the last, "but such an elimination cannot obviously be made in every valid narrative" (253). Among other instances of non-transitivity, we have seen that Rodomonte was engaged to Doralice and ended up building a memorial for Isabella; Subienkow fought for the freedom of Poland and died

at the hand of Alaskan natives. However plausible and motivated each step in their life stories is, a general statement linking immediately the initial and the final steps would strike one as outlandish. But, whereas Danto finds that the analogy with logic breaks down, I rather see the need to search for the right kind of logic to deal with narrative. If we give up the material conditional, and use instead the relevant one, which is non-transitive, the causal chain of events does not look utterly different from a chain of conditionals.

Next, consider how the statement of a causal chain works pragmatically as an explanation. Explaining is more than adequately describing according to a theory; it is to answer a why-question, and the background of theories and facts relative to which the question and the answer are made sense of and evaluated vary from context to context (Van Fraassen 1980, 141–57). Now, suppose we are asked why Rodomonte built a memorial for Isabella, and answer that he admired her fidelity; why Subienkow beguiled the Alaskans into beheading him, and answer that he wanted to escape torture. These answers seem straightforward in the present context, but they would not be satisfying for a questioner whose only pieces of knowledge about the characters were that the one was engaged to Doralice and the other was fighting for Poland. The explanation would have to throw in all the intermediate events. On the other hand, suppose that we, faced with the former why-questions, rejoin: "because he was engaged to Doralice" and "because he had fought for the freedom of Poland." At first sight our replies look like flying in the face of Grice's maxims of quantity and relation: We are not giving enough information and the little we give does not seem very relevant, but in fact, by thus flouting the maxims, we would be implicating that we have a whole story to tell, we claim the attention of the audience, arouse their curiosity, and set out to hold the floor for a while (Pratt 1977, 100–16). Moreover, we could be implicating that these facts, no matter how far-fetched, are relevant and that a causal link leads from them to the actions asked about: even if they certainly cannot be telescoped in a single conditional, they cannot either be severed as independent plots with their own beginnings, middles, and ends. For instance, one might surmise that Rodomonte would not have been so deeply moved by Isabella's fidelity if he had not experienced the sharp contrast with Doralice's previous betrayal; and that Subienkow would not have been able to devise the scheme without his literary education. Such an assemblage of events and states in the causal chain was already envisaged by Danto, who suggested formalizing it as a conjunction of premises (1965, 253–54), and his idea of indexing each premise to a point in time comes close to the apparatus of situation semantics. It must be added that the standard logical conjunction ($A \wedge B$) is not the proper connective to do this job, given its role in weakening ($A \supset C \models A \wedge B \supset C$), which allows for the introduction of irrelevant information.

Relevant logics have developed an intensional conjunction called "fusion" ($A \circ B$), which assembles into a "bunch" only the premises effectively used in an argument (Read 1989, 35–50; Meyer 2004). Fusion does not take part in weakening ($A \rightarrow C \nvDash A \circ B \rightarrow C$). Thus, the story line should be represented by a bunch of fusions, rather than by a string of conjunctions.[30]

As I said in the first section, the relevant conditional is modeled on a ternary relation between points called worlds, situations, or setups, where propositions are evaluated as true/false or—since points are incomplete—fail to be valued. The material conditional does not rely on any such relation; being merely extensional, the value of the conditional at a point depends only on the values of the protasis and apodosis at that very point. The strict conditional, relying on a modal operator for necessity, uses a binary relation: its value at a certain point depends on the values of the protasis and the apodosis at another certain point, usually called a possible world. Since this licenses some paradoxes that relevant logics want to avoid, the relevant conditional appeals to a ternary relation: its value at a certain point or situation depends on the value of the protasis at another situation and of that of the apodosis at some other one (Beall et al. 2012, esp. 598–99). This ternary relation is explained as "relative relative possibility," that is, a situation z is possible relative to y according to the constraints imposed by x. In other words, you may ask if, given x, it follows from y that z.

In order to illustrate this, with the idea that the ternary relation usually associates a pair of points with the third one (Beall et al. 2012, 600–8), let us consider three situations with the following information:

x=if one suffers heartbreak, one tends to seek consolation in a new love (a nail drives out another nail);
y=Rodomonte is betrayed by Doralice;
z=Rodomonte falls in love with Isabella.

Thus, we may focus on the association of the first two points as related to the third (R<xy>z), that is, we take the conditional and the antecedent together as constraints that lead to the consequent (modus ponens); or we may focus on the latter two as related to the first (Rx<yz>), that is, we have the antecedent and the consequent and search for the apt conditional to link them; we may as well focus on the first and the last together (Rx>y<z): once we have the conditional and the apodosis, we look for the protasis. Of course, the general statement can be expressed in a more natural fashion than a conditional; for example, for the motif analyzed in the previous section, a maxim of sorts would be in place: "virginity must be guarded," "love reaches beyond death," "extreme pain is to be avoided by all means," but they may be rephrased as conditionals if necessary.

The ternary relation permits us to deal with the pragmatic dimension of the relevance of fiction as well. Sperber and Wilson explain that an input need not be true in order to be relevant; it is enough that it yields a cognitive gain if it is processed in a given context (1995, 265).[31] We have thus a ternary relation: input, context, cognitive gain. Let us consider as input a fictional narrative, that is, a hypothetical situation assuming informational links that lead from a set of facts of a certain kind to another set. Then, if the context includes a real situation that contains facts of the antecedent kind, the fiction suggests the inference of real facts in the consequent set. This helps solve more satisfactorily an old paradox of possible world semantics for literature. Since literary works contradict each other, we either could conjoin them, thus being able to draw any conclusion whatever (*ex falso quodlibet*), or should lock each one in its own "autonomous world" (Pavel 1976, 172). With situation semantics, we can handle them in a more nuanced way. Every work is a hypothetical situation or a set of them, and the conditions could be specified under which we relate them with each other, perhaps admitting one of them as a thought experiment that yields an example confirming or a counterexample infirming or invalidating general claims presupposed in other fictions. More generally, by locating the context in a real situation and both the input and the cognitive gain in fiction, the ternary relation helps us formalize narrative comprehension and interpretation.[32] In this respect, I surmise that the principle of minimal departure could be disposed of, since the ternary relation does all that is required without that principle's trade-off of an overloaded ontology.

CONCLUSION

The argument in this chapter has been too tentative to end with a proper conclusion. Instead, I would like to spell out some reasons for envisaging the project of a relevant logic of narrativity, which might seem old-fashioned at first sight. Certainly, the idea of building the humanities on a logical-mathematical plan has given way to a paradigm modeled on the Life Sciences. Narrative and fiction tend to be explained as being the results of behaviors of human minds as these emerge from evolutionary history. Stress on the mind leads to cognitive studies, and stress on evolution leads to biopoetics.

However, the program I am advocating can be fruitfully combined with such approaches. Cognitive and biopoetical studies point to a paradox: fiction does not seem adaptive, since it detaches an organism from its environment, but nevertheless it is so general and species-typical that it must be biologically entrenched. The answer to this problem is that fiction allows for the production of patterns optimized for the risk-free exercise of powers of mind that

are indeed adaptive when applied to real life (see, for example, Leslie 1987; Tooby and Cosmides 2001). A similar view results from systems theory: fiction yields a surplus of meaning and possibilities and provides a standpoint from which one can observe and appraise the factuality of the "merely" real (Luhmann 2008, 276–91). One strength of the relevantist ternary relation is its double scope: it helps capture both the intratextual pattern of the plot and its contextual significance, since real and fictional input can be handled as situations that relate to each other in specific ways, yielding cognitive gain.

The logical approach to narrative can converge on the Life Sciences paradigm in its own basic assumptions also. Timothy Williamson has recently provided a parallel argument for Philosophy. It has been argued that logic does not belong to the natural toolkit of the human mind: the latter has an unconscious, associative, holistic, context-sensitive way of reasoning, whereas the former is conscious, analytic, and insensitive to context (Williamson 2007, 103–4). Since an "ordinary cognitive capacity to handle counterfactual conditionals" seems to belong to the natural set, counterfactuals can be taken as a primitive notion in order to develop logical and philosophical notions of modality, epistemology, and metaphysics (134–37); in a similar vein, counterfactuals provide a natural basis for the development of a logical model of how we understand literary fictional narratives—they are even more to the point, since both remain in the area of natural behavior. The logical model will approximately represent our unconscious processing of information when we try to make sense of a narrative and learn from it, even if it is clear that it does not describe the psychological process involved, since we do not follow deductive rules for that. What is the model good for, then? It allows us to arrive at more precise definitions, statements, and hypotheses, which can be more easily probed and corrected (288–89). Thus, the a priori method of logic could be met with a posteriori empirical tests. Such would be the relevance of logic for narrative research.

NOTES

2. Relevant logics are thus not mentioned in *Relevance* by Sperber and Wilson (either in the original text, 1986, or in the 1995 postface); see also Wilson and Sperber 2012. For a project that combines pragmatics and logics, see Gabbay and Woods (2003).

3. Besides, it has been said that some purported logics of narrative are not logical in the strict sense (see Scheerer and Winkler 1976), and their formalizations are mere abbreviations unreliable for logical calculus (Gülich and Raible 1977, 312). This, however, if true, affects only particular attempts at a narrative logic and not the project in general.

4. The distinction between narrative, fiction, and literature is not easily maintained: "In the thinking of literary theorists, the concepts of narrative and of fiction are magnetically attracted to each other" (Ryan 1991, 1; see also Genette 1991, 41–42; Ronen 1994, 12). Lamarque (2004) maintains that narrative is overrated, because we tend to generalize the properties and values of a subset of narratives, the literary fictional ones.

5. This is obviously a very partial sketch for the sake of the argument. For more comprehensive and up-to-date surveys, see, for example, Chihaia (2012) and Sommer (2012 and 2013).

6. It strikes one as parochial to find an analytical philosopher stating: "Deductive inference is an integral component of a linguistic practice, more prominent in some contexts than in others, but never out of order. It is not an isolable subpractice, like fictional narrative" (Dummett 1993, 193). He seems to have had the facts upside down.

7. I am adapting an example by Mares (2004, 12).

8. Causality must not necessarily be explicit: *post hoc ergo propter hoc* is a logical fallacy but may be a useful heuristics for reading narrative (see Pier 2008; Currie and Jureidini 2003). However, tampering with logic has bad consequences for narratology, as Prince's odd definition shows: "narrative is the representation of at least two real or fictive events in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other" (1982, 4); a later addition, namely "the logically consistent representation" (19), does not yield much, if logical consistency is meant in its strict sense of absence of contradiction. For it licenses as narratives such paragons of non-narrativity as: "Naram-Sin built the Sun Temple at Sippar; then Philipp III exiled the Moriscos; then Urguiza defeated the forces of Buenos Aires at Cepada; then Arthur Danto awoke on the stroke of seven, 20 October 1961" (Danto 1965, 117), and: "The Eastern Roman Empire falls in 1453; The American Constitution is accepted in 1789; Russia is defeated in 1905" (Carroll 2001, 24). On the other hand, it denies narrativity to plots of affront and vengeance, interdiction and transgression, crime and punishment; for certainly in each pair the second element presupposes the first (see Bremond 1973, 116).

9. The idea and term of "*inus* condition" comes from Mackie (1965, 1974).

10. This recovers the Aristotelian remark relative to "thought and character" as causes of action (1995, 1450a2–3). I think that Else's objection to this passage is excessive (Else 1957, 240–41); see the notes by Dupont-Roc and Lallot to their edition of the *Poetics* (1980, 195–98).

11. This is again in accord with Aristotle, since "necessity or probability" is a *leitmotiv* in the *Poetics*.

12. See, for example, Theognis I, l. 425–28; Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, l. 1225–27; Cicero, *Tusculan disputations* 98.117.

13. Such a set of sentences is sometimes given the picturesque but misleading name of "novel" (Woods 1974, 104) or "book" (Plantinga 2003, 108).

14. Another way is Ryan's "principle of minimal departure," according to which sentences undecided in the fiction should be evaluated as they are in the real world; see also Herman (2009).

15. There are other features that cannot be given full treatment here; for instance, in possible worlds, properties and relations are defined set-theoretically, whereas in situation semantics they are taken as primitive (Barwise 1989, 79–92).

16. See also Mares (2009); Beall et al. (2012); Jago (2013). The idea of relative relative possibility, under the form of a three-place relation, appears (see Barwise [1989, 1993]).

17. Needless to say, I will try neither to give a comprehensive view of the theme nor to establish intertextual relationships. For particulars regarding sources, see Rajna (1900, 459–63); Bonner (1942–1943); Ruiz de Elvira (1973, 43–44).

18. It has 93 words in the original Greek; see Lydus 178, § 163.

19. "Alphesiboea" may be a mistake for "Philonome," the name of king Cycnus's second wife, who pursued her stepson Tennes.

20. The logical analysis of this plot deserves more attention than can be given in this frame. Distinctions should be drawn between sufficient and necessary conditions, and between necessity and possibility. An analysis in first-order logic would be rewarding as well.

21. Barbaro (1513) locates the events in Dyrrachium (Durazzo). Since there is no conspicuous tradition that associates the place with magic, his remark might be an ad hoc explanation. (Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the editors.)

22. "Ariosto adds only one truly new circumstance: Rodomonte's drunkenness. . . . The intention to thus make the event more likely is evident. To me this detail seems an unnecessary reinforcement. The episode does not fail because of its improbability; in a chivalric poem one would have no qualms about narrating much less credible things" ("Circostanze veramente nuove, l'Ariosto ne aggiunge una sola: l'ubbriachezza di Rodomonte. . . . L'intenzione di rendere con ciò più verosimile il fatto, appare manifesta. A me questa giunta sembra un inutile rincalzo. L'episodio non pecca per inverosimiglianza; in un poema cavalleresco si potevano narrare senza scrupolo cose assai meno credibili") (Rajna [1900, 463]).

23. To drive a nail out with another nail is a piece of advice given to disappointed lovers, as recorded at least since Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* (4.75).

24. I surmise that the order "misogyny, new love" makes more sense, or a different sense, than does the converse order; thus, it may be useful for narrative logic to have a conjunction that does not commute (see Restall [2000, 12]; Mares and Meyer [2001, 304], that is, "A and (then) B" ≢ "B and (then) A." I will return later to the topic of narrative conjunction.

25. See Murray (1998–2000, esp. 2: 104–13) on the relation between martyrdom, virginity, and suicide.

26. Chastity without love is not highly prized in the *Furioso*; see 4.63–64.

27. Whereas Else assumes that the feeling of τὸ φιλάνθρωπον is directed towards the wicked character, who shares mere humanity with the audience, Dupont-Roc and

Lallot consider that the audience approve of the fact that such a character is deservedly punished. I find this reading more convincing; besides, it accords with Aristotle's remark in the *Rhetoric* 2.9 (1386b) about the joy that an honest man experiences when a criminal is punished. See also Bouchard (2012, 195–96); Galván (2017c).

28. This combination is lacking in the *Poetics*, but, according to Dupont-Roc and Lallot's commentary (Aristotle 1980, 243), such a plot would arouse φιλανθρωπία. See as well the above-cited locus in the *Rhetoric*, which continues by mentioning the joy of the honest man whenever anyone is deservedly successful.

29. I cannot dwell here on the many criticisms the subsumption theory has received; however, I would like to mention that a good deal of them misconstrue Hempel's position. For instance, Von Wright says that a narrative connects events not by "a set of general laws, but a set of singular statements which constitute the premises of practical inferences" (1977, 142); however, Hempel admitted that general laws could be left unstated in historical explanation in case they would be truism—in this vein, Danto differentiates between the explanation itself, which may omit general statements, and the grounds for the explanation, which have to include at least one of them (Danto [1965, 212]). Ricœur (1984–1988, 1: 115) deals with explanation and narration as disjoint sets, whereas narration should be treated as a specific kind (a subset) of explanation (see Danto [1965, 237]; Van Fraassen [1980]).

30. For the concept of "story line" in a logical context, see Plantinga (2003, 99), who uses extensional conjunction, however; see also Galván (2015).

31. See besides their analysis of tropes, metaphor, and irony in Wilson and Sperber (2012).

32. Barwise (1989, 59–77) gives a situation semantics account of literary hermeneutics. See also Galván (2017a and 2017b) for other approaches from logical semantics.

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