

ON MEANINGS AND DESCRIPTIONS

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1. Definition and Delimitation: A Taxonomic Impasse.

Bob Assingham was distinguished altogether by a leanness of person, a leanness quite distinct from physical laxity, which might have been determined, on the part of superior powers, by views of transport and accommodation, and which in fact verged on the abnormal.

Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*.¹

The above excerpt presents no problems of classification. It is clearly a description. Problems arise, however, as soon as one attempts to define exactly what a description is.

The best survey of what can and cannot be considered descriptive is Genette's article,² in which the author discusses current definitions of description, all of which are problematic either because the school of thought from which they evolved has been rejected, or because they are not specific enough; in addition, all the definitions are based on the distinction between descriptive and 'pure' narrative text segments. Before the emergence of structuralism, this distinction had been based on the *ontological status* of the object described. Actions and events belonged to narrative texts; things, places, and characters to descriptive texts. A similar distinction was based on the object's mode of existence: objects in descriptive texts existed in space; those in narrative texts existed in time.

The above descriptive passage by James can be classified with the help of these two criteria. The following fragment, however, satisfies only the first of two criteria:

Presently he told her the motion of the boat upon the stream was lulling him to rest. How green the banks were now, how bright the flowers growing on them, and how tall the rushes! Now the boat was out at sea, but gliding smoothly on. And now there was a shore before him.

Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*.³

Although this fragment primarily describes objects and people, it also involves a certain stretch of time. Intuitively speaking, this passage is a description. The first criterion, therefore, is more adequate than the second.

However, both criteria present certain theoretical problems. The most important objection is that the criteria are based on a classification of the objects of the texts and not on the texts themselves. Consequently, the criteria are not specific enough for (literary) texts since they do not lead to a definition of a specific type of discourse.

The structuralists of the 1960's worked from a functional point of view. Genette referred to description as the *ancilla narrationis*, a subordinate aid to narrative text segments. The paradox in this position, as Genette himself points out, is that although descriptions are secondary, they are nevertheless essential. It is, in fact, possible to imagine a descriptive text which contains no narrative elements. The autonomy of description is inversely proportional to its functional importance.

One can imagine description existing independently of narration, although one never actually encounters description in such a state of freedom; narration, on the other hand, cannot exist without description, but this dependence does not prevent narration from always playing the primary role.⁴

In the terms used by Barthes in his pioneering article published in 1966, description in a narrative structure can only be *indice* (a thematic indication) or *catalyse* (filler), but never *noyau* (kernel).⁵

Barthes's attitude toward description is not surprising since the model he uses is action-oriented. His criteria for determining the *noyaux*, the kernels of the fabula, are formulated in terms of actions. When one proceeds from this premise, the rejection as *noyau* of those text segments which contain something other than action can be criticized as being somewhat circular.

It is possible to relativize Genette's paradox further. Genette

speaks of the autonomy of description, but he oversteps the boundaries of that area with which his article is concerned: the narrative text. Clearly, it is possible to imagine descriptive texts not only in poetry but also in tourist brochures and in the travel section of the Sunday newspaper. When, on the contrary, Genette attempts to demonstrate that the verb in the sentence «il saisit un couteau» is of a descriptive nature, his concept of «descriptive» suddenly shifts from a text (segment) to an aspect of every word.

The fifth definition of the concept «descriptive,» and the last to be discussed in Genette's article, corresponds to yet another development. It is a *semiotic* notion in which the distinction between the two sorts of text can be made on the basis of whether or not the expression roughly coincides with the content, these being the two primary sub-codes.⁶ In narrative text segments, the expression roughly coincides with the content which also unfolds in time. This does not imply an isochrony, an identical rhythm, between expression and content, but rather a basic and general similarity. Descriptions do not display this similarity. The expression in a descriptive text segment involves a lapse of time, while the content unfolds in space.

This notion closely approaches the second criterion, and it too gives rise to similar problems when one attempts a delimitation. The contradiction found in the excerpt taken from *Dombey and Son* is not resolved. From a theoretical point of view it is easier to defend the semiotic approach since the relationship between expression and content is accounted for. Working from this notion, it is possible to explain the embarrassment, shown by authors as well as by theorists, with regard to description. I shall return to this topic later.

A sixth approach to description comes from the *linguistically-oriented* structuralist school, the word 'linguistic' being used in a non-metaphoric sense here. The early structuralists frequently employed linguistic terms without always precisely specifying their correspondences.⁷ In the 1970's, various models were constructed in which attempts were made to isolate the narrative structure of the fabula as mechanically as possible. This objective—isolation of plot—indicates a relationship with the early structuralists. Proprieties continued to predominate.

The influence of linguistics is apparent in the attempts at mechanization. These models can often be found in such journals as *Semiotics* and especially in *Poetics*. One representative example is an article by Hendricks who tries to isolate the plot structure by

following a series of steps intended to *normalize* the text.⁸ The last step of this series results in a number of similar propositions. One of the first steps is the elimination of *description assertions*. The indicators which are used for this purpose are linguistic. Hendricks characterizes description as sentences in which the verb has a subject complement: generally speaking, the linking verbs. Difficulties arise when Hendricks's indicators are put into practice. For example, Hendricks himself considers the following passage from Faulkner's «A Rose for Emily» to be descriptive:

When the Negro opened the blinds of one window, they could see that the leather was cracked.

These Thirteen Colonies, Chatto and Windus, 1958, pp. 9-20.

In the above sentence, there is at least one verb which cannot be regarded as a linking verb ('to open'). 'To see' also presents problems, but these can be settled with some effort. Intuitively, one would say that the sentence is partially descriptive, but it also contains a narrative segment. Unfortunately, Hendricks's method is unable to solve this sort of problem. It is quite easy to point to examples in Hendricks's own analysis which could intuitively be considered descriptive even though Hendricks does not regard them as such; the same is also true the other way around.

Apart from the problems connected with the practical application of this 'mechanical' procedure, at least one theoretical problem must be solved. The correspondence between linguistic (linking verbs) and logical (propositions, two-place predicates) concepts demands to be more clearly elaborated upon.

In a critical analysis and testing of Hendricks's model, Van der Ven concludes that many elements which intuitively do not pertain to the plot cannot be eliminated with Hendricks's restricted criterion.⁹ Although Van der Ven shares the same objective as Hendricks—mechanical plot isolation—he chooses to resolve the problem of description by employing a *narratological* criterion. This necessitates his creating one large category from all of the pre-diegetic or non-diegetic elements, these being all those fragments that interrupt the continuing line of the fabula. This category includes all anachronisms with external time reference as well as all conversational fragments. Actually, Van der Ven's approach is a return to Barthes, whose *indices* and *catalyses* include many other elements in addition to descriptions. I consider this return step significant. As long as the objective remains action-oriented, it is

impossible to resolve the problem of description satisfactorily.

Among the limited number of articles devoted to description itself, Hamon's remains the most important.¹⁰ Hamon offers neither a precise criterion for delimitation nor a definition of description, which is not essential to his main corpus (the works of Zola). He does, however, present an interesting characteristic of description. According to Hamon, description obeys the laws of *lexical predictability*, whereas narrative text segments are characterized by logical predictability. The term 'logical' is to be understood here in terms of the (much disputed) logic of action *à la* Bremond. By lexical predictability, Hamon means that description consists of an enumeration of the components of the object described. In principle, this enumeration is exhaustive, and it is complete when the lexicon is exhausted. For example, the description of a character would be finished after all of the parts of the human body had been enumerated. Of course, one seldom encounters such an enumeration in reality. This characteristic of description is applicable in reverse, however. The description of a character, to use the same example, could never include components of other objects (such as a thatched roof or a garden gate), unless these components were used in a metaphoric comparison. One consequence of Hamon's approach is that description interrupts the fabula not only in practice but also in principle. The fabula obeys other laws.

The most consistent, though not yet much elaborated, view of the nature and function of description was given by Klaus.¹¹ He defines description in terms of the logic of predicates, stating that description occurs whenever predicates are attached to a subject. Although this definition is more precise than Genette's paradox, it leads to the same skepticism with respect to the possibility of delimitation. Klaus, in fact, refuses to consider description in opposition to narrative; in his opinion, description is a function of the whole text rather than a segment of the text.

This same conclusion must be reached by anyone who thinks through the problem of description consistently, whatever his point of view. Even in the most action-oriented approaches, the fabula of a narrative text is defined as a series of events which are caused or experienced by actors.¹² It is both theoretically and practically impossible to consider events apart from the actors who cause them, from the places where they occur, or from the things or individuals who experience the consequences. Taxonomic efforts of the sort discussed here (schematically presented in Table 1) must, therefore,

lead to an impasse.

Despite all of these difficulties, descriptions do exist. We recognize them intuitively. Moreover, precisely these text segments are cited by the literary critic as representative illustrations of an author's style or manner of writing. Descriptions, therefore, must be placed and studied within a narratological model; otherwise, the discipline might become so unintuitive that we will no longer be able to work with it adequately. At present, the only solution seems to be relative. Therefore, we will consider as descriptive a text segment in which the descriptive function is dominant.¹³ Such a relative criterion as this can only be employed to characterize fragments; it is useless for delimiting ambiguous fragments.

2. Motivation: The Unavoidable Realism.

Why do we make such a fuss about the question of what descriptions are? There is one explanation for our concern. Within the realistic tradition, description has always been regarded as problematic. Genette has shown that in the *Republic* Plato tried to rewrite fragments of Homer so that they would be «truly» narrative.¹⁴ The first elements to be discarded were the descriptions. Even Homer himself attempted to avoid, or at least to disguise, descriptions by making them narrative. Achilles' shield is described as it is in the process of being made; Agamemnon's armor as he puts it on. In the nineteenth-century realistic novel descriptions, if not made narrative, were at least motivated. And despite its efforts to avoid imitation, the *Nouveau Roman* has continued to follow this tradition.

Working from the premise that descriptions interrupt the line of the fabula, Hamon has constructed a typology of the ways in which descriptions are inserted. Insertion necessitates *motivation*. The postulate of objectivity which Zola championed necessitates naturalization, the making acceptable of those interruptions known as descriptions. This so-called objectivity is in fact a form of subjectivity when the characters are given the function of *authenticating* the narrative contents.¹⁵ If «truth,» and even probability, is no longer a meaningful criterion, then motivation alone, according to whatever logic you please, can suggest probability, thus making the contents believable.¹⁶

Table 1

BASIS	ONTOLOGY		STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM	
criterion	nature of object described	mode of existence	autonomy of the sequence	importance and function
descriptive	objects people	in space	essential	secondary decoration or explanation (indice catalyse)
narrative	actions events	in time	optional	of primary importance (noyau)
source	Genette 1960:56	Genette 1969:57	Genette 1969:57	Barthes 1977:24

SEMIOTICS	LINGUISTICS	NARRATOLOGY	LOGIC	
coinciding or non- coinciding of sub-codes	verb complements	sequence in fabula	predict- ability	stability
non-coinciding (wording suc- cessive con- tents simul- taneous)	verbs with subject complements (linking verbs)	non- diegetic or pro- diegetic elements	lexical predict- ability	predicates do not change
coincidence (both successive)	verbs with no subject complements	line of fabula not in- terrupted	logical predict- ability	predicates change
Genette 1969:60	Hendricks 1973: 169-174	Van der Ven 1978: 12-22	Hamon 1972:6	Klaus 1981

Hamon proceeds from the assumption that most descriptions are motivated. This assumption could arise from the fact that descriptions are felt to be «unnatural» because they lack the semiotic coincidence between expression and content. One explanation for the irrefutable fact of this motivation (amply demonstrated by twenty centuries of Western literature) could perhaps be the need for iconism.¹⁷ Narrative fragments are iconic. Roughly speaking, they resemble their contents since both contain a lapse of time. Descriptions do not display such an analogy, however, since descriptions are *arbitrary*. The motivation for descriptions consists, then, in their being integrated into the time lapse so that they will be naturalized with respect to the narrative text.

Hamon distinguishes three types of motivation. Motivation is brought about by looking, speaking, or acting. The sequence in which he discusses these three types coincides with the frequency with which they appear. The most effective, the most frequent, and the least noticeable form is motivation via looking. A character sees an object. The description is the reproduction of what he sees. Looking at something demands time, and, in this fashion, the description is incorporated into the time lapse. But an act of looking must also have its motivation. There must be enough light so that the character is able to observe the object. There is a window, an open door, a corner which also have to be described and therefore motivated. Further, the character must have both the time to look and a reason to look at an object. Hence the curious characters, the men of leisure, the unemployed, and the Sunday wanderers.

Given the fundamental arbitrariness of the elements of the fictional world, there is, equally fundamentally, no end to the need for motivation. The less obvious this motivation is, the easier it can be terminated. In the following fragment, for example, the motivation is easily integrated into the description itself (*italics mine*):

When they had washed they lay and *waited* again.
 There were fifteen beds in the tall, narrow room.
 The walls were painted grey. The windows were long
 but high up, *so that you could see only* the topmost
 branches of the trees in the grounds outside. Through
the glass the sky had no colour.

Jean Rhys, «Outside the Machine»¹⁸

The sentence immediately preceding the description («they lay

and waited again») gives sufficient motivation for the art of looking. Hospital patients, particularly after their morning wash, have an ocean of time before them. Not only is the looking itself motivated, but also the contents of what the women see. And this is indicated by «so that you could see,» by the boundaries of the area visible. The window motivates the fact that the women are not able to see anything at all of what is happening outside the hospital. Also, the restricted quality of the field of vision is emphasized: «Through the glass the sky had no colour.» This lack of colour has its own thematic meaning so that even in this aspect, the description is fully integrated into the text.

Hamon refers to this type of motivation as a «*thématique vide*.» A diagram of the same is by definition incomplete; every motivating factor demands another motivation. We could sketch the following approximation:

Character—→notation of pause in action——verb of perception—→notation of field of vision——object——motivation for looking——light.

When a character not only looks but also describes what it sees, a certain shift in motivation occurs, although in principle all of the above-mentioned motivation demands remain valid. The act of speaking necessitates a listener. The speaker must possess knowledge which the listener does not have but would like to have. The listener can, for example, be blind, or young, or amateurish.

Hamon discusses yet a third form of motivation which resembles Homeric description. The character carries out an action with an object. The description is then made fully narrative. An example of this is the scene in Zola's *La Bête humaine* in which Jacques polishes (strokes) every individual component of his beloved locomotive.

These three forms of motivation can be combined. Hamon does not take into consideration their different status with respect to action. However, they can readily be placed within the narratological model of layered meaning formation.¹⁹ Motivation occurs at the level of *text* when the character itself describes an object; at the level of *story* when the glance or vision of the character supplies the motivation; and at the level of *fabula* when the character carries out an action with an object. One clear illustration of *fabula* which also demonstrates that a distinction between descriptive and narrative is no longer possible within this form, is the following

'description' of a dead man:

They they went into José Arcadio Buendía's room, shook him with all their might, screamed in his ear, and held a little mirror in front of his nose, but they weren't able to wake him. Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.²⁰

Examples of the second type, motivation via focalization, are numerous. An illustration of the first type is the description of the Linton family as given by young Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*. He is forced to give this description because Nelly Dean has made him responsible for his escapades with Cathy and for the fact that he has returned alone.

Motivation is the relationship between elements made explicit. Precisely because these relationships are not self-evident in fictional texts, the motivation is never sufficient. And, for this reason, motivation is, in the final analysis, arbitrary.

3. The Internal Structure: Contiguity

In spite of the theoretical impossibility of selecting descriptive text-fragments in an unambiguous way, it is possible to account for the internal structure of fragments intuitively characterized as descriptive. A model of the internal structure of description must be internally consistent, universally applicable, and yet only valid for the analysis of those text-fragments that are generally acknowledged as descriptive. It must also provide relevant information about the structure and meaning of the fragments. The best known model that seems to meet these criteria is Hamon's.

According to Hamon, descriptions consist of a *theme* (i.e., «house») which is the object described, and a series of sub-themes (i.e., «door,» «roof,» «room») which are the components of the object. Taken together, the sub-themes constitute the *nomenclature*. They may or may not be accompanied by *predicates* (i.e., «pretty,» «green,» «large»). These predicates are *qualifying* when they indicate a characteristic of the object («pretty»); they are *functional* when they indicate a function, action or possible use («habitable for the six people»). Metaphors and comparisons are included among the predicates. In reality, it is seldom possible to distinguish between qualifying and functional predicates.

The model is constructed on the principle of *contiguity*. The relation between theme and sub-themes is *inclusive*. Predicates are

represented only at the subordinated level of the sub-themes. But it is self-evident that the theme itself can be accompanied by one or more predicates. The model is hierarchic. A sub-theme can again be subdivided into smaller units, a fact which Hamon does not take in to account. If we momentarily set these complications aside, we are left with a simple and clearly organized structure (Table 2). This structure can then be adjusted to account for the above-mentioned complications (Table 3).

Table 2

THEME	
sub-theme 1	(predicate)
sub-theme 2	(predicate)
sub-theme 3	(predicate)
sub-theme 4	(predicate)

Table 3

THEME	(predicate)
sub-theme 1	(predicate)
sub-theme 1a	(predicate)
sub-theme 1b	(predicate)
sub-theme 2	(predicate)
sub-theme 2a	(predicate)
sub-theme 2b	(predicate)
sub-theme 3	(predicate)
sub-theme 3a	(predicate)
sub-theme 3b	(predicate)

At first glance, this model would seem to present few problems. In practice, however, it must be slightly adjusted even for very simple descriptions. I shall give two examples. The first example is the description of the garden taken from Longus's Greek pastoral novel *Daphnis and Chloë*. The excerpt is constructed very conventionally according to the rules of *locus amoenus*.²¹ The second fragment is the more frequently analyzed unconventional description of young Charles Bovary's cap. The garden:

And that garden indeed was a most beautiful and goodly thing and such as might become a prince. For it lay extended in length a whole furlong. It was situated on a high ground, and had to its breadth four acres. To a spacious field one would easily have likened it. Trees it had of all kinds, the apple, the pear, the myrtle, the pomegranate, the fig, and the olive; and to these on the one side there grew a rare and taller sort of vines, that bended over and reclined their ripening bunches of grapes among the apples and pomegranates, as if they would vie and contend for beauty and worth of fruits with them. So many kinds there were of satives, or of such as are planted, grafted, or set. To these were not wanting the cypress, the laurel, the platan, and the pine. And towards them, instead of the vine, the ivy leaned, and with the errantry of her boughs and her scattered blackberries did imitate the vines and shadowed beauty of the ripening grapes.

Within were kept, as in a garrison, trees of lower growth that bore fruit. Without stood the barren trees, enfolding all, much like a fort or some strong wall that had been built by the hand of art; and these were encompassed with a spruce, thin hedge. By alleys and glades there was everywhere a just determination of things from things, an orderly discretion of tree from tree; but on the tops the boughs met to interweave their limbs and leaves with one another's, and a man would have thought that all this had not been, as indeed it was, the wild of nature, but rather the work of curious art. Nor were there wanting to these, borders and banks of various flowers, some the earth's own volunteers, some the structure of the artist's hand. The roses, hyacinths, and lilies were set and planted by the hand; the violet, the daffodil, and anagall the earth gave up of her own good will. In the summer there was shade, in the spring the beauty and fragrancy of flowers, in the autumn

the pleasantness of the fruits; and at every season amusement and delight. Trans. George Thornley (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1955), pp. 189-91.

Even without embarking on a detailed analysis of this fragment, we are able to ascertain several problems. Should we, for example, consider the dimensions (length, breadth, height) as sub-themes or as predicates of the theme? More importantly, which hierarchy dominates this description? First, there is a mention of trees, and then of flowers. But cutting across this division is the division between cultivated and wild plants. If we choose to regard this last division as the dominant one, then the former becomes a subdivision of the latter. As a result, the analysis does not account for the linear character of the description. Furthermore, there is yet a third division, that between center and periphery, which is difficult to place in relation to the other two divisions. The seasons, mentioned at the end of the excerpt, also create problems comparable to those presented by the dimensions.

Contrary to what we might expect, Hamon's model is more difficult to apply to this strictly conventional text than to the unorthodox description of the cap. One explanation for this may perhaps be found in the premise of lexical predictability. The convention of the *locus amoenus* is non-realistic, whereas the convention of the enumeration of the components of the described object is realistic. The garden is described according to textual, rhetorical conventions which are not at all related to the construction of the object described but rather to the euphoric expectations of the idyll. In a realistic sense, some of these elements can in fact be contradictory. In this case, a symmetry is first presented (between cultivated and wild trees, each accorded a rank); this is then further constructed concentrically (center and periphery), a concentricity which is difficult to harmonize with the symmetry first evoked. The difficulty is not apparent when one reads the description, but it does become so when one tries to draw the garden. It is a *textual garden* which is composed of words, words which are neatly arranged. Text and object are incommensurable in such a case. Therefore, Hamon's model must be adjusted to accommodate this description. The adjustment involves an expansion. The various divisions (wild-cultivated, center-periphery) can serve as predicates to all of the sub-themes in these divisions. The remaining division (trees, flowers) can be maintained, keeping with the order of the

text. These two large sub-themes are then subdivided, first into cultivated-wild, and then into the sorts of plants mentioned. Dimensions and seasons can be regarded as predicates of the main theme.

The cap:

(la prière était finie que le *nouveau* tenait encore sa casquette sur ses deux genoux.) C'était une de ces coiffures d'ordre composite, où l'on retrouve les éléments du bonnet à poil, du chapska, du chapeau rond, de la casquette de loutre et du bonnet de coton, une de ces pauvres choses, enfin, dont la laideur muette a des profondeurs d'expression comme le visage d'un imbécile. Ovoïde et renflé de baleines, elle commençait par trois boudins circulaires; puis s'alternaient, séparés par une bande rouge, des losanges de velours et de poil de lapin; venait ensuite une façon de sac qui se terminait par un polygone cartonné, couvert d'une broderie en soutache compliquée, et d'où pendait, au bout d'un long cordon trop mince, un petit croisillon de fils d'or, en manière de gland. Elle était neuve; la visière brillait.

Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*²²

(For he was still holding his cap on his knees when prayers were over). His was one of those composite pieces of headgear in which you may trace features of bearskin, lancer-cap and bowler, night cap and otterskin: one of those pathetic objects that are deeply expressive in their dumb ugliness, like an idiot's face. An oval splayed out with whale-bone, it started off with three pompons; these were followed by lozenges of velvet and rabbit's fur alternately, separated by a red band, and after that came a kind of bag ending in a polygon of cardboard with intricate braiding on it; and from this there hung down like a tassel, at the end of a long, too slender cord, a little sheaf of gold threads. It was a new cap, with a shiny peak.

Trans. Alan Russell (Baltimore: Penguin, 1950), p. 16.

The description can be divided into two sections. The first sentence is a general characterization and evaluation. The second

sentence describes the cap in detail. This analysis is shown in Table 4.

Two problems confront us. It is not possible to assimilate the difference between the first and the second sentence into the *construction* of the schema. However, the difference between a generally characterizing and a detailed description can be accommodated by *filling in* the schema. The second problem is more serious. It is impossible, using this model, to demonstrate the connections between the elements. Roughly speaking, the connections consist of a series of verb forms, some of which are accompanied by an adverb:

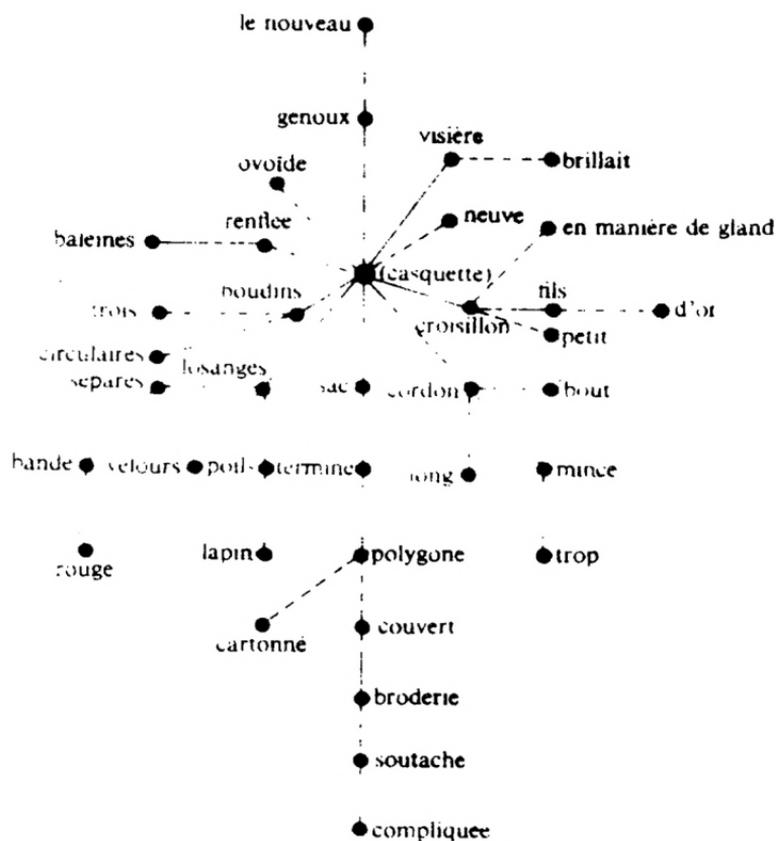
TABLE 4

THEME	PREDICATE
a. une de ces coiffures	d'ordre composite
b. une de ces choses	pauvre
c. elle	ovoïde renflée de baleines neuve
SUB-THEMES	PREDICATES
a. a. éléments du bonnet (1)	à poil
chapska (2)	
chapeau (3)	rond
casquette (4)	de loutre
bonnet (5)	de coton
b. laideur	muette
profondeurs d'expression	comme le visage d'un imbécile
c. boudins	circulaires
losanges	de velours
bande	rouge
losanges	poil de lapin
sac	une façon de
polygone	cartonné
/broderie	couvert d'une broderie
(soutache)/	en soutache
cordons	compliquée
	long
	trop mince
croisillon/en fils/	en fils
croisillon	d'or
visière	en manière de gland
	brillait
où l'on retrouve	
enfin	
a (- between laideur muette and profondeurs d'expression)	
elle commençait	
puis s'alternaient	
séparés par	
venait ensuite	
qui se terminait	
et d'où pendait	
au bout de	

Hamon's analysis is restricted to the lexicon. The relations which are not accounted for contain a noticeable number of aspects which indicate a time lapse. It is now clear that Hamon's model is connected with his opinions about the nature of descriptions. It should be mentioned that the use of pseudo-time indicators in description is considered (though not convincingly so) to be characteristic of Flaubert. His description of the wedding cake, to cite another example, is also built up of components which are connected by *d'abord, puis, enfin*. Ricardou treats these aspects of Flaubert's descriptive style in great detail.²³ The procedure is so widespread, even in «natural narrative,»²⁴ that it seems to me unnecessary to criticize Hamon's model on that particular point. Ricardou considers it to be an indication of Flaubert's *modernité*, paraphrased as his *anti-mimetic* stand: the description is textual; the reference to an object is only secondary. This also appears to be the case with Longus. Ricardou criticizes Hamon's model, stating that such a hierarchic construction cannot be used when analyzing the paradoxical and complicated descriptions of Flaubert. It is understandable that a model such as this should meet with affective resistance. As I have pointed out, the applicability of the model is restricted to a lexical analysis. Within this restriction, however, the model functions reasonably well.

Ricardou presents an alternative which I consider unsatisfactory. Nevertheless I shall discuss it since Ricardou is one of the few authors who has made important contributions to the study of description. Dissatisfied with Hamon's hierarchic construction, Ricardou designed a sort of tree diagram with a central framework. All of the elements are extended from the theme to which they remain joined. Ricardou distinguishes three relations. The *situation* concerns the relation of the parts to the whole; *composition* of the whole to the parts; and *qualification* is distinguished by means of predicates. Because the relations are very poorly defined, and because they overlap one another, they are difficult to determine with any precision. But even if this were possible, there still remain more disadvantages than advantages to Ricardou's model. Table 5 shows Ricardou's own analysis of the description of the cap.

Table 5



situation (object-next or higher object)
 qualification (object-quality)
 composition (object-parts of object)
 comparison (object-exterior object)

The sequence of elements in the text is lost. The metaphors have been omitted, the general characterization has disappeared. And, strangely enough, the pseudo-temporal connections also disappear. Further, the model lacks the neat organization of Hamon's model. Although Ricardou is a creative and sensitive critic whose analyses can be very clarifying, his suggested model is not very useful. It does not provide new information about the description, nor about description in general.

Another, better formulated objection to Hamon's model may be found in an article by Van Buuren.²⁵ This article concerns the position of the metaphor. In Hamon's model, metaphors were treated in the same manner as non-metaphoric qualitative predicates, which resulted in their being placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. Van Buuren demonstrates that, in addition to this sort of description, there are also metaphorically-constructed descriptions. When metaphor functions not as a predicate but as a principle of construction for the entire description, Hamon's model is not fully adequate and, as Van Buuren concludes, a specific model is needed.

4. The Internal Structure: Specification

According to Van Buuren, the construction of a description may follow one of two principles of organization: the metonymical or the metaphoric. Van Buuren uses the term metonymical in its broad sense as used by Jakobson: the components exist in a relation of contiguity with each other. In Peircian terms this relation is indexical. The metaphoric construction implies that 'the coherence between the descriptive components is determined by a relation of identity between two terms.' Van Buuren convincingly demonstrates that one of Hamon's own examples can be described more adequately when the (implicit) metaphoric construction principle is accounted for in an alternative model.

Van Buuren's model is binary, consisting of two series. In Table 6, the elements of the described object itself, the *comparé* (c^b) are on the left; on the right are the elements of the object with which the described object is compared, the *comparant* (c^a).

Table 6

THEME c^e	THEME c^a
sub-theme 1 predicate 1	sub-theme 1a predicate 1a
sub-theme 2 predicate 2	sub-theme 2a predicate 2a
sub-theme 3 predicate 3	sub-theme 3a predicate 3a

Because metaphoric relations are possible among the predicates, these latter are placed under the sub-themes.

One definite advantage of this design is that the interaction between c^e and c^a can be demonstrated. From both themes, a selection is made of elements which motivate and elaborate the comparison. This selection influences both the construction of the series as well as the choice predicates. This is clearly demonstrated in Van Buuren's illustrative analysis of a description by Proust²⁶ in which yet a second aspect of the interaction is also apparent. Elements remain implicit in both series and, consequently, the reader fills in the series himself on the basis of the main metaphor. Because of this, for this sort of description Hamon's model cannot compete with Van Buuren's. The various metaphoric elements could not be seen in coherent relation with each other. Where elements of the c^e remain implicit, elements of the c^a , according to Hamon's predicate with sub-theme model, would remain hanging in the air because of the lack of a corresponding sub-theme.

I consider this model a welcome addition to the study of description. However, I do regard its status in relation to Hamon's to be problematic. Van Buuren himself believes that his model can serve as an adjunct to Hamon's, remaining restricted to those cases in which Hamon's model proves inadequate. Such a situation has one serious disadvantage; since there could no longer be a systematic relationship between the two types of description, the theoretical status of descriptions could no longer be generally described.

Furthermore, such a division is not necessary. However tempting it may be to follow Jakobson's now classic bipartite division here, it should certainly not be considered a matter of course to do so. Many descriptions display a combination of both principles of construction. Genette analyzes the metonymical motivations of many of Proust's metaphors.²⁷ Moreover, metaphors can be introduced at the level of sub-theme and subsequently carried through, and the series c^e and c^a are both constructed according to the principle of contiguity. The simple reason for this is that the two categories are neither opposites nor alternatives, but rather complements.

It is possible to integrate both models, a step which would only involve adjusting Table 6. All of the elements, with the exception of THEME c^e are optional. THEME c^e can remain implicit. The components of the description are filled in along the vertical division. Whenever a sub-theme is not provided with a corresponding c^a , the right-hand compartment remains empty, and vice versa. Implicit, assumed elements can be inserted between parentheses, thereby contributing to the total formation of the image. The vertical division of the series remains contiguous in construction. If THEME c^a is absent, the metaphor then appears at the level of the sub-theme. When the right half of the scheme is empty, we are left with Hamon's model. When both themes develop independently of each other, the line between the left and the right sides is unbroken.

This integrated model has several advantages. The specification desired by Van Buuren is now possible. Moreover, all descriptions can be similarly analyzed, resulting in a greater generalization than was possible when using either model separately. Further, the relation between types can be investigated *systematically*. Because of these advantages, this model satisfies methodological requirements more fully.

With the help of this model, it is possible to develop further the interesting suggestions made by Lodge, in which he analyzes a number of descriptions of places.²⁸ He claims that the difference between 'referential' and 'literary' descriptions can, to a great extent, be attributed to the use of figures of speech. Although his argument is not as systematic as our actual purpose requires, his analyses are creative and inspiring. A careful application of our analytic model enables us to differentiate roughly six types of descriptions. There are no absolute boundaries among these six types. The descriptions are classified according to whether they are situated more to the left or to the right of the model.

1. The Referential, Encyclopedic Description.

In principle, there are no figures of speech in this type of description exemplified by the encyclopedia. The selection of components is based upon the contiguity of the elements of the contents. This means that the presence of some elements implies the absence of others. The missing detail can be filled in by the reader. General characteristics imply specific characteristics, unless the latter represent the former. The objective is to convey knowledge.

2. The Referential-Rhetoric Description.

The tourist guidebook rather than the encyclopedia is the model for this second type of description. The units are combined on the basis of both the contiguity of the components and their thematic function. This function is evaluative. The objective is both to convey knowledge and to persuade. Persuasive works, through the wording (a pleasing rhythm, a style which reflects the value of that described—for example, a sumptuous style to describe the Champs-Élysées) and through the contents; persuasion is also achieved through the choice of traditionally valued sub-themes, and by the addition of evaluative predicates. Even when a number of metaphors are included in such a description, the construction of the text continues to follow the principle of contiguity.

3. Metaphoric-Contiguity.

Here again, contiguity is the dominating principle of construction: each individual component is metaphorized. Various *comparés* may, in fact, be omitted altogether and only the *comparants* found in the text which is very metaphoric as a result. However, no contiguity relation obtains among the components of the c^a . Such a relation exists only among the implicit components of the c^e . One might think that this type of description would make an incoherent impression upon the reader. That such is not the case indicates that the reader is engaged in a filling-in activity. Lodge offers an illustrative example of this type of description which is taken from Forster's *A Passage to India*.

4. The Systematized Metaphor.

This description is one large metaphor. The elements of the c^a and the $c^é$ are systematically related to one another. Each series is built upon the principle of contiguity. The series balance each other. The question of which of the two series dominates the meaning cannot be answered without taking the context into consideration. Also included in this category are descriptions in which elements of both series imply each other, as in Van Buuren's example.

5. The Contiguous Metaphor.

The description is one large metaphor. The elements are contiguously related to each other. They form a coherent description which, taken as a whole, is the c^a of a $c^é$. If this relation can remain implicit, this type of description, when taken out of its context, cannot be distinguished from one of the other types. It is, then, only metaphoric if interpreted as such. An explicit c^a results in a Homeric comparison.

6. The Series of Metaphors.

This description consists of a metaphor which is expanded without continually referring to the $c^é$. The metaphor is repeatedly «adjusted,» creating the impression that the $c^é$ is elusive and indescribable.

This classification clearly demonstrates the need for combining the models suggested by Hamon and by Van Buuren. Although an extensive analysis of examples of all six types of descriptions is impossible here, I shall nevertheless attempt to clarify the typology by examining the following descriptions of Rouen: (see also pp. 122-124 and pp. 125-126)²⁹

ROUEN «an» (en. lat. *Rotomagus*), ch.-lieu de la Seine Inférieure, à 136 kil. de Paris, sur la Seine, au confluent du Robec; 107.739 hab. (*Rouennais, aises*). Chef-lieu de la 3e région militaire. Ecoles supérieure des lettres et des sciences, de commerce et d'industrie, et école préparatoire de médecine et de pharmacie.

Port sur la Seine, comprenant, jusqu'au pont Boïeldieu, un port maritime, accessible pendant la marée aux navires

d'un tirant d'eau de 7 m., et un port fluvial en amont de ce pont. Importation de coton américain, de pétrole, de charbons, de vins et de fruits d'Espagne, de bois. Exportation de céréales, sucre, betteraves, eaux de vie. La ville de Rouen est le grand centre de la filature et du tissage du coton, du lin et du chanvre, des fabriques de cotonnades et d'indiennes, et un marché pour les laines. Les cotonnades prennent volontiers le nom de «rouenneries»; enfin, il y a de nombreuses industries diverses: chaudronneries, savonneries, teintureries, raffineries, confiseries. V. *Supplément. Larousse du xxe siècle*, Paris: Larousse, 1933, p. 58.

[ROUEN (Latin Rotomagus), chief town of Seine Inférieure, 136 kilometers from Paris, on the Seine at the confluence of the Robec, population 107, 739 (Rouennais, aises). Chief town to the 3rd military region, University of letters and sciences, commerce and industry, and preparatory school of medicine and pharmacy.

Port on the Seine, including, up to the Boëldieu Bridge, a seaport, accessible at high tide to vessels drawing 7 meters, and a river port upriver from this bridge. Imports: American cotton, petroleum, coal, wine and fruit from Spain, wood. Exports: grains, sugar, beets, spirits. The city of Rouen is a large center for the spinning and weaving of cotton, flax and hemp, the manufacture of cotton fabric and calico, and a wool market. Cotton fabrics are often called, «rouenneries»; lastly, there are many various industries: metalworks, soap making, dyeing, refineries, preserve making. See *Supplément*.]

Trans. Robert Corum

The first description of Rouen agrees with the conventions of the *encyclopedic* description. The topics which are mentioned are the same for all such descriptions of place: government, education, import, export, industry. Because of the generic conventions, it is possible to compare these descriptions with one another. Having read several different descriptions, one can compare cities with one another and conclude, for example, that Rouen is a more important city in many aspects (trade, industry) than Chambéry. There are no metaphors in the description. Elements which have been omitted can be filled in. For example, only the technical schools

and schools for higher education are mentioned; their presence implies the existence of primary and secondary schools. The words «textile industry» are not specifically mentioned, since such a generalization would be too all-inclusive. Instead, the specific subdivisions of this industry are listed. The description conveys knowledge, but no attempt is made to force the knowledge upon the reader.

a. ROUEN Seine-Maritime, 124.577 hab., ancienne capitale de la Normandie, siège d'un archevêché et d'une cour d'appel, port maritime sur la Seine (le 5e port de France), est une ville d'art et de tourisme, en même temps qu'une cité industrielle et commerciale. Par ses églises gothiques, ses musées, ses rues pittoresques bordées de vieilles demeures, Rouen, la 'cité gothique,' appelée aussi la 'ville musée,' a conservé, malgré les graves destructions de la guerre de 1939-1945, son rang éminent de ville d'art. De nouveaux quartiers ont surgi sur les deux rives de la Seine; celui de Saint-Sever, sur la rive g., est dominé par la tour des Archives, haute de 88 m., et par la nouvelle préfecture. [...]

b. On commence la visite de Rouen par les quais, où, du pont Boïeldieu, on a une très belle vue d'ensemble sur la ville et le port maritime. C'est du pont Mathilde, qui précéda à peu près à cet emplacement le pont Boïeldieu, que les cendres de Jeanne d'Arc furent jetées dans la Seine. En amont, l'île Lacroix est reliée à la ville et au faubourg Saint-Sever par le nouveau pont Corneille. En aval, le quai de la Bourse borde les quartiers reconstruits, qui forment un vaste quadrilatère s'étendant jusqu'à la cathédrale d'une part, et de la rue Armand-Carrel à la rue Grand-Pont d'autre part. En suivant le quai de la Bourse vers l'aval, on trouve à dr. la *rue Jeanne-d'Arc*, large percée moderne reliant les quais à la gare Rive-Droite. Au bas de cette rue s'élève le nouveau théâtre (1962), puis, en la remontant, on voit, à g., les ruines de *l'église Saint-Vincent*, des XVe et XVIe s. dont il ne reste que la croisée du transept et le portail. Un peu plus haut, sur le même côté, se trouve la *tour Saint-André*, du XVIe s. seul vestige de l'église de Saint-André-aux-Fébvres. On arrive à la *place Foch* (monument de la Victoire, par Réal del Sarte), bordée à dr. par la façade moderne du palais de Justice dont la cour d'honneur s'ouvre sur la rue aux Juifs. A côté a été aménagé

un garage parking (576 places dont 380 en sous-sol; 1961).

Guide Bleu

a. «Rouen, Seine-Maritime, population 124,577, former capital of Normandy, archdiocese and court of appeals, port on the Seine (5th largest in France), is a city of art and tourism as well as a commercial and industrial center. Because of its gothic churches, museums, picturesque streets lined with old houses, Rouen, the «gothic city,» also called the «museum city,» has maintained, despite serious damage from World War II, its eminent standing as a city of art. New neighborhoods have sprung up on both sides of the Seine; Saint-Sever, on the left bank, is dominated by the Tour des Archives, 88m. high and by the new police headquarters.

Trans. Robert Corum

b. One begins his visit of Rouen at the quais, where, from the Boëldieu Bridge, one has a beautiful view of the entire city and port. It was from the Mathilde Bridge, which occupied the site of the present Boëldieu Bridge, that the ashes of Joan of Arc were thrown into the Seine. Upriver, Lacroix Island is connected to the city and the suburb Saint Sever by the new Corneille Bridge. Downriver, the quai de la Bourse borders reconstructed neighborhoods which form a vast quadrilateral extending to the cathedral on one side, and from the rue Armand-Carrel to the rue Grand-Pont on the other. By going downriver from the quai de la Bourse, one finds to the right the rue Jeanne-d'Arc, a wide modern thoroughfare connecting the quais to the Rive-Droite train station. At the end of this street appears the new theater (1962), then, going back up the street, one sees, to the left, ruins of Saint-Vincent church, 15th and 16th centuries, of which there remain only the transept and the portal. A little further along, on the same side, is located the tour Saint-André-aux-Fèbvres church. One ends up at the place Foch victory monument, by Réal del Sarte, bordered on the right by the modern facade of the court building whose courtyard of honor opens to the rue aux Juifs. Next to it a parking garage has been built (576 places of which 380 are underground, 1961).»

Trans. Robert Corum

The second description (R2) is a combination of type 1 and 2. It is also intended to convey knowledge, namely more specific

knowledge about the appearance of the city. The excerpt can be divided into two parts. The section which has been omitted presents a historical survey, and is therefore not descriptive but narrative. The first part of the description very much resembles R1. Here too, a number of elements of the contents are mentioned. These elements are selected on the basis of the *contiguity* of the components, all of which form part of the city's image as a whole. Further, the elements are selected on the basis of their *thematic* character. The theme of the tourist guidebook is that of touristic attractiveness, largely determined by a locality's antiquities and its picturesqueness. The first sentence of the excerpt clearly illustrates how this type of description is constructed. The sentence is long and contains many elements. As a result, the reader receives the impression that the city is *interesting*; there is a great deal to be said about the city. The first entry word, *ancienne capitale*, recapitulates the importance of the city and its antiquities. Both aspects are repeated at the end of the sentence, here joined by *en même temps*. Each of the two subsequent sentences elaborates upon one aspect, and in the same sequence. The information is not very specific. The experienced tourist is made suspicious by the list of plurals (Gothic churches, museums, picturesque streets, old houses); he knows that, in tourist guidebooks, quantity often disguises a lack of quality. A less attentive reader, on the other hand, is led to believe that the city has innumerable sights of interest. The reason why both aspects of the city, old and modern, are emphasized is casually mentioned in a sub-clause: the city suffered extensive damage during the Second World War.

The purpose of this first section of the description is to give the reader just enough information to motivate him to visit the city despite its modern appearance.

In the second section (R2b), the rhetorical objective has already been achieved. The reader begins to walk, in reality or in his imagination. The description is built entirely around the principle of the (walking) *tour*. It is impossible to see all the objects described if one remains in a single fixed position. The narrative aspect is strongly emphasized by the form of the text. The strolling tourist is taken from one scene to the next by means of such phrases as «on commence-en amont-en aval-d'une part-d'autre part-en suivant-vers l'aval-à droite-au bas-en la remontant-à gauche-un peu plus haut-on arrive à-à droite-à côté.» A respectable number of place adjuncts for such a short passage. Here again, the description conforms to the rules of the genre. All descriptions of places in

tourist guidebooks are written in the form of a walking tour; the picturesque and the dynamic are emphasized in all of them. The analogy does not continue any further. In R2a, the elements which are mentioned are predictable. In R2b, the elements are selected according to the characteristics of the specific object (in this case Rouen) within the projected purpose and fixed theme of the guidebook.

«Puis, d'un seul coup d'oeil, la ville apparaissait. Descendant tout en amphithéâtre et noyée dans le brouillard, elle s'élargissait au delà des ponts, confusément. La pleine campagne remontait ensuite d'un mouvement monotone, jusqu'à toucher au loin la base indécise du ciel pâle. Ainsi vu d'en haut, le paysage tout entier avait l'air immobile comme une peinture; les navires à l'ancre se tassaient dans un coin; le fleuve arrondissait sa courbe au pied des collines vertes, et les îles, de forme oblongue, semblaient sur l'eau de grands poissons noirs arrêtés. Les cheminées des usines poussaient d'immenses panaches bruns qui s'envolaient par le bout. On entendait le ronflement des fonderies avec le carillon clair des églises qui se dressaient dans la brume. Les arbres des boulevards, sans feuilles, faisaient des broussailles violettes au milieu des maisons, et les toits, tout reluisants de pluie, miroitaient inégalement, selon la hauteur des quartiers. Parfois un coup de vent emportait les nuages vers la côte Sainte-Catherine, comme des flots aériens qui se brisaient en silence contre une falaise. Quelque chose de vertigineux se dégagait pour elle de ces existences amassées, et son coeur s'en gonflait abondamment, comme si les cent vingt mille âmes qui palpitaient là eussent envoyé toutes à la fois la vapeur des passions qu'elle leur supposait.»

Madame Bovary, p. 564

All at once you looked and saw the town ahead to you. Sweeping down in great tiers, plunged in the mist, it spread out far and wide beyond the bridges, confusedly. Behind it the open country rose in a monotonous movement, to touch the pale sky at the blurred horizon. Seen from above like this, the whole landscape looked still as a picture. In one corner ships crowded at anchor. The river curved round the green hills, the oblong islands looked like great dark fishes resting on its surface. Immense brown billows of smoke poured from the factory chimneys, to drift away in the wind. The roar of

the foundries clashed with the clear chimes pealing from the churches that rose up above the mist. Bare trees on the boulevards showed as clumps of purple amid the houses; the rainwet roofs made a glistening patchwork all across the slopes of the town. Occasionally a gust of wind would carry the clouds towards St. Catherine's Hill, like aerial breakers tumbling soundlessly against a cliff.

That mass of life down there gave her a dizzy feeling. Her heart swelled, as though those hundred and twenty thousand throbbing hearts had sent up to her all at once the fumes of the passions she imagined to be theirs.

Trans. Alan Russell (Baltimore: Penguin, 1950), pp, 273-4.

The third description (R3) is taken from a well-known novel. Let's call it a *literary* description. As in the passage discussed above, this text also presents a view of the city. It is possible to view the panorama from one fixed position. The large number of metaphors is immediately apparent: metaphors such as «en amphithéâtre-noyée-comme une peinture-semblaient de grands poissons noirs arrêtés» are the most obvious; in addition, there are metaphors that remain almost inconspicuous, metaphors such as the pronominal verb forms. The components of the c^e are selected on the basis of contiguity. They constitute the various parts of the panorama. The components of the c^a are not related to one another. For example, there is no contiguity between «amphithéâtre» and «grands poissons noirs.» This description, therefore, may be included in the category of descriptions based on *metaphoric contiguity*. The components of the c^e conform to the rules of the panorama: only those elements which can be seen from a certain distance are described. The resulting image is both unspecific and static, compared to R2b.

An entirely different image presents itself when we examine the elements of the c^a . Here, the emphasis is on movement and confusion. The wide-angle view («descendant tout en amphithéâtre...la pleine campagne remontait ...») collides with negatively connotated elements («monotone ... se taissaient ... panaches bruns ... se brisaient»). The passage is characterized by *contradiction*.¹⁰ The city simultaneously represents an ideal, an illusion, and the disappointing reality of Emma's life. Both aspects shape the structure of the description. This same contradiction can be found in the preceding sentence as well. The amazement which is voiced in «d'un seul coup d'oeil» is refuted by the imperfect verb iterative

form in «apparaissait.»¹¹

On the basis of the context—the remainder of the chapter and the novel as a whole—this description can justifiably be classified as one large though implicit metaphor. Rouen with all of its contradictory aspects is then the c^a , and Emma's life, the fabula of the novel, is the c^c . Placed in context, the text can thus be classified under the fifth type of description. Because the c^c of this metaphor includes the entire fabula of the novel, the description may also be regarded as a *mise en abyme*, a mirror-text. I shall return to this point in the following section.¹² I shall not discuss any further either the fourth or the sixth types of description, since Van Buuren's analyses are sufficiently clear.

This description which, for the sake of convenience, I have termed *literary* differs from the two other types in several aspects. It is impossible to perceive the purpose of the description directly from the description itself. The text is thematically polyvalent. There are numerous figures of speech, and these are not restricted to metaphor and metonymy. It is impossible to classify the excerpt under one particular type of description exclusively. The rules of the panorama do not prescribe the selection of elements. The description is not *a priori* comparable with other descriptions of place in the novel; if descriptions of place should prove to be comparable, this may be attributed to the internal structure of the novel rather than to generic conventions of description. Finally, it is not possible to characterize the description adequately without taking the context into consideration. It is tempting to draw conclusions about literariness from these observations, but I find this impossible. It is easy enough to find journalistic examples which display the same characteristics. Nevertheless, I assume that these traits are characteristic of—or at least frequently appear in—narrative descriptions, because they account for the semantic dependence of description in relation to its context, as well as for the plurality of meaning.

5. Place and Function: An Integrated Descriptive Model.

In order to characterize the internal structure of descriptions, it was necessary to expand Hamon's model and to make it more specific. In some cases, it also proved necessary, when using this typology, to refer to the context. The effect of the description is not restricted to the descriptive passage itself. Where the narrative structure is sufficiently flexible, the meaning of the entire narrative

text may be laid open, predicted, summarized, transformed, or produced. As has often been shown by literary critics, descriptions provide the necessary flexibility. In this section, I shall discuss a number of aspects which influence the functioning of descriptions.

My working premise is functional. Every detail is related to the whole; nothing is superfluous; nothing is irrelevant; nothing is meaningless. Although the rise of semiotics has rendered this premise almost banal,³³ it nevertheless refutes the premise of the Proppian structuralists. Proceeding from the primacy of action, this group could only accord description a marginal position, at best that of *indice*. Even Genette, who emphasized the need for description, regarded it as the boundary of the narrative—hence the title of his article. Hamon talks of the descriptive *expansion du récit* and thus agrees with Barthes. Ricardou, perhaps the most naive reader of the realistic novel whose representational function he regards too literally, in order to later be able to react against it, moves from comments about the absolute uselessness and *gratuité* of descriptions to amazement with respect to what he calls «l'inénarrable,» an infelicitous and untranslatable term by which Ricardou means that the description succeeds in narrating that which cannot be narrated. This paradox must also be considered seriously. Does description narrate? And, if so, does it narrate that which cannot be narrated?

An investigation into the function of a description can be organized in various ways. The possibility which will be presented here is nothing more than one practical suggestion, one which has been shown useful to apply to R3 in any case. The analysis is carried out in three phases. First, the descriptive excerpt is itself described. Second, relations with the direct context are investigated. And finally, the excerpt is placed back within the text as a whole. In all three phases, both paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships are investigated, along with the connection between them. In principle, all possible data may be used: rhythm, sentence construction, lexicon, thematics, symbols, etc. The question which must be answered is the following: Is it possible, on the basis of this analysis, to offer an interpretation which differs from the current, general interpretations of the novel? If not, is it then possible to continue to insist that description is more than an accentuated *indice*, eventually with some symbolic value? It should be mentioned that, in practice, analysis and interpretation are arrived at by a process of mutual interaction, and that it is difficult to distinguish them rigorously from one another. Further, the general interpreta-

tion of the narrative genre as an exciting, linear course of action must be taken into consideration. I shall return to this point later. The current interpretation of *Madame Bovary* may be summarized as «the collision between a stifling life in the province and romantic illusions, a collision which results in ruin.» This interpretation is not contradicted by the analysis of R3. Rather, it is expanded in such a way that I am able to answer the above mentioned question in the affirmative.

a. Stasis and Movement

We have already seen that the supposed stillness of the object described (criterion 2 in Table 1) is not a general characteristic of descriptions. In fact, many descriptions are «in motion.» This motion can reside in the object itself or in the subject which observes and focalizes. Or it can reside in both. Compare, for example, the following excerpts:

Far in the distance, you could see an occasional church steeple between the green trees, other than this nothing of the surrounding world was visible, and then a wreath of rushes and flowering water plants which encircled the pearly surface of the water. On one side, exactly where the sun rose, it was impossible to distinguish the boundaries of the water. Now the cloud had disappeared again! The sun slowly rose higher and higher. And now a movement came from the water....It actually looked as if a sleepy giant were stretching himself. It was as if a peculiar sound, a curious shuddering rose from out of the depths.

Nienke van Hichtum, *Afke's tiental*.³⁴

In the sky the planes look very small. On the runways they look very big. Therefore close up they should look even bigger-but in fact they don't. His own plane, for instance, just outside the window of the assembly lounge, doesn't look quite big enough for all the people who are going to get into it.

David Lodge, *Changing Places*.³⁵

A mesure qu'on avançait, le cercle des monts semblait se refermer derrière le bâtiment qui nageait avec lenteur dans un lac d'azur si transparent qu'on en voyait parfois le fond. Et la

ville apparut soudain, toute blanche, au fond du golfe, au bord des flots, au pied des montagnes. Quelques petits bateaux italiens étaient à l'ancre dans le port. Quatre ou cinq bargues s'en vinrent rôder autour du Roi-Louis pour chercher ses passagers.

Guy de Maupassant, *Une vie*.³⁶

As the ship proceeded, sailing slowly on an azure lake of such transparency that sometimes the bottom was visible, the ring of mountains seemed to close in behind it. Presently at the end of the bay, close to the water's edge, at the foot of the mountains, the dazzlingly white town came in sight. A few small Italian vessels lay at anchor in the harbour. Four or five boats circled around the *Roi-Louis* to take off passengers.

Trans. Marjorie Laurie (London: Wyman, 1923) p. 57.

At first glance, we might say that in the first text the object moves, in the second text object and subject, and in the third, where the observers are standing on a boat as it approaches a city, the subject moves (except in the last sentence, which resumes the narrative).

Roughly speaking, the above statement is correct, but there are some complications. In the first text, the sun rises; this is the object in motion. But it is more difficult to classify the movement of the water. This motion is described by three metaphors, two of which are synaesthetic. When a motion is so indirectly described by means of a personification (giant), hearing (sound), and feeling (shuddering), the impression arises that the experience, the *observation* (focalization), of an imperceptible change is being described rather than a concrete, observable motion such as the movement of a cloud. Not only are the events of the sunrise related in this fragment, but, more importantly, the sensation brought about in the characters (inexperienced children) by this moment of the day is also related.

In the second fragment, only one aspect of airplanes—their dimensions—is described. The distance between the object described and the focalizing subject continually changes. Both are mobile. The person-bound focalizer, the character, remains the same. What changes is the moment of observation. This is possible because the character generalizes, and considers other airplanes in addition to the one in which he is about to depart. What is described is not one airplane, but the dimensions of airplanes in general.

In the third text, the focalizer (the two characters Jeanne and Julien who are on board a boat) moves as the boat approaches land. A passage such as «la ville apparut soudain» is acceptable only if we consider the movement of the focalizer. Similarly, other, more subtle, phenomena can only be explained in this manner. If a considerable distance had not been covered between the two sentences, it would be impossible to observe the objects described in the second and third sentences respectively. This is emphasized by the adjective «petits.»

b. Focalization and Interpretation

Focalization, the relation between the point of observation and the object described³⁷ is not only important for aspects of motion. The act of observation involves more than physical registration. As soon as we see something, we interpret it. In other words, every description is a depiction in words of our vision of an object. In the first of the above three fragments, movement-in-experience is described. In the second fragment, it is Swallow's view of the airplanes rather than the airplanes themselves which almost completely constitutes the object presented. In the third text, the city «appears» suddenly because Jeanne, now on her honeymoon, arrives with many pre-conceived images of the romantic Corsican city. The romantic aspect of her fantasy shapes the image of the city, set forth in a sentence which is significant both in its contents and in its wording.

Reality (fictive or «real») is misformed, transformed, mutilated, or idealized by our view of it. Or it is misunderstood as is evident in the following description:

In addition to the girl and the chickens and the geese, there were two men. And in the middle of the farmyard, standing as calmly as if they'd been standing there for hours, were two pigs. One of the pigs, the biggest one, leaned on the back of the other and wiggled its tail. It almost looked as if he were embracing the back of the other pig with his two forefeet.

Maarten 't Hart, *De aansprekers.*³⁸

It is only when one of the men says, «If you watch how often Berend winks, you'll know exactly how many piglets are to be born» that an ironic twist is given to the metaphor «it almost looked as if he were embracing the back of the other pig with his two

forefeet.» There the c^a is actually the c^c , and what the six-year-old boy sees functions as an innocent metaphor for the real situation. When one analyzes a description, therefore, it is relevant to determine the point of view from which the object is presented to determine who the focalizer is. In 't Hart's fragment, the focalizer is not the adult speaker, but rather the young child; in the excerpt taken from Maupassant, the focalizer is not the skeptical narrator, but the romantic bride.

In R3, Rouen is seen by Emma. She is not seeing the city for the first time. She is going there to meet her lover Léon. The contradictions in the description, in which euphoric and dyphoric aspects alternate with one another, may be attributed to Emma herself. She is trying to escape her stifling existence. Related to this desire are those aspects of the city which emphasize its openness, its space, its activity. But Emma does not succeed in fooling herself completely. «Reality» (within the fictive life of this character) also has its negative side. To this immanent realism correspond such aspects of the city as enclosure and suspension of motion. The combination of both sides leads to an accentuating of the contradiction in images such as «les navires à l'ancre se tassaient» and in metaphors such as «de grands poissons noirs arrêtés.» Although these combinations are justifiable from a realistic point of view, they must be interpreted symbolically. Emma longs for movement, for travel (see, for example, her dream trip with Rodolphe). Ships and fish are travellers. It is highly significant that precisely these elements of the panorama are described and that the lack of motion is emphasized.

c. Theme and Motifs

Both of the aspects thus far discussed, stasis and motion, and focalization and interpretation, can be determined on the basis of formal characteristics. They become interesting when they can be related to the thematics of the description. By thematics I mean the semantic unity of which the theme is the (abstract) center. The theme is expressed by means of (concrete) motifs, put into words in the text itself. Thus, the theme can be determined from the motifs which it joins and motivates.

We have already noted a contradiction between illusion and reality in R3, between what Emma wants to see and what she is shown. This contradiction, with its components of illusion and reality, is the theme. One such motif is the metaphor of the inactive

fish. Both aspects of the theme are included twice in the first sentence. «Descendant tout en amphithéâtre,» the spacious greatness (as well as theatrical, but this can only be interpreted in light of other scenes) stands opposed to and is negated by «noyée dans le brouillard,» this same is true of «elle s'élargissait» and «confusément.» Sometimes, as in this sentence, both aspects are presented in succession, more or less independent of one another. And they are both sometimes contained in a combination of words such as in «ciel pâle,» «mouvement monotone,» «navires à l'ancre,» «poissons noirs,» «arbres sans feuilles» etc. The last sentence, similar to the first, again contains an emphatic succession of both aspects. The «flots aériens,» pre-eminently a moving element, «se brisaient en silence.»

An analysis of the theme can be combined with precise description of the *construction* of the thematics. The place of the metaphor is important for this purpose. As we have seen, in the sentence «les îles, de forme oblongue, semblaient sur l'eau de grands poissons noirs arrêtés» the c^e denotes reality, and the c^a can be joined to the person-bound focalizer Emma. «Semblaient» automatically raises the question about *who* considers the islands to resemble fish. When we assume that Emma focalizes, an assumption based on the preceding context, it then becomes clear that the contradiction in the image of Rouen is not a contradiction between the vision of the overall external focalizer on the one hand who represents realism, and the actor, the internal focalizer who idealizes reality. *Both* aspects, the euphoric and the dyphoric, must be ascribed to Emma. Both are represented in the c^a «poissons (euphoria) noirs arrêtés (dyphoria)» which can be attributed to Emma via the verb «semblaient.»

The difference between the general interpretation of the novel and the meaning of this description gradually becomes evident. Critics often accuse Emma of romanticizing and idealizing life, of failing to see the more banal aspects of reality. It now appears that she does see the banal side, but that she does not wish to be conscious of it. She sees it and simultaneously *represses* it. The description, which can be attributed to her on the level of focalization and not on the level of narrative, makes this clear. As will later be shown, this small difference has several consequences. So far, we can characterize this description as an intermediate form between the second and the third types, and we can also classify it with the fifth type. At first sight, Rouen is described according to the pattern of the tourist guidebook, but the metaphors introduce

elements of type three. The contradiction functions as an implicit metaphor, so that the whole makes a metaphor of Emma's attitude towards reality.

d. Style and Rhythm

I understand style to be the choices which are made from the medium of language.³⁹ Rhythm, the linear aspect of style, may be regarded as a more or less regular movement. I introduce this somewhat vague concept here in order to demonstrate that, for the analysis of a descriptive passage, all of the data can, need not, be used. An alternation between stasis and movement has already been noted in R3. The first half of the description is constructed according to a ternary rhythm in which this alternation is developed. The verbs contribute to this development. The resulting rhythm is equivocal. The alternation is, in fact, a mixture. Compare the verbs in the first three sentences:

1. «elle *s'élargissait au-delà des ponts.*»
2. «*La pleine campagne remontait* ensuite d'un mouvement monotone.»
3. «Le paysage tout entier *avait l'air immobile* comme une peinture.»

The verbs in the first two sentences express a standstill by means of an active form. In the third sentence, the stasis is absolute. The same is again evident in the following three sentences:

1. «les navires à l'ancre *se tassaient* dans un coin».
2. «Le fleuve *arrondissait* sa courbe».
3. «Les îles...semblaient...de grands poissons noirs *arrêtés*».

The elements of the landscape seem, like Emma, to choose stagnation for themselves. This is suggested by the active verb form. This development is summarized in a comparison in the third sentence of each group. In the second half of the text, we (and Emma) approach the city, and the description consequently becomes livelier and more detailed. Motion now disappears, engulfed in smoke and mist. As has already been pointed out, the excerpt ends with the most mobile element, the clouds, in a state of absolute stillness.

The use of rhythmic information for interpretation is often regarded as excessive, as an interpretation which merely confirms the one already held by the investigator. This is an actual danger. For this reason, I have introduced this data only at this later stage. Rhythm is a difficult concept to grasp. Nevertheless, during the process of reading, rhythm is very penetrating. Everyone has at one time or another been aware of the extent to which rhythm, convincing or placating, can be used for rhetorical purposes. Political speeches, football commentaries, and advertisements all make extensive use of it as a manipulative device.

A special use of rhythmic possibilities consists in allowing the rhythm to coincide with the contents. Rhythm then becomes a sign of the contents, a sign which has meaning through a partial analogy: an icon. The effect of such an icon depends on a number of different factors. But in all cases, this phenomenon attracts attention. In R3, rhythm underlines the development from (illusory) motion to total standstill and stagnation. The iconic character of the description does not contribute to the meaning itself (this was sufficiently expressed in the thematics), but thrusts this meaning upon the reader.

This same phenomenon has another function in the following example from a well-known comic duo:

They can neither read nor formulate properly in correct sentences the condition in which men are. Because they're too busy being men. Men? I think that they're becoming worse. And what have they accomplished in the last 20,000 years?

Koot en Bie, *Calendar 1977*.⁴⁰

The iconic nature of the first sentence is obvious. The sentence which states that men cannot formulate correctly is itself incorrectly formulated. The meaning cannot be said to be thrust upon the reader since it is stated explicitly enough. This sign has another function. The sentence concerns other people, and it is written «in the third person.» The speaker identifies himself by formulating the sentence so poorly. He too is evidently a man. And therefore, this same infelicitous rhythm proves the premise which forms the contents of the sentence. This is representative of Koot and Bie's humor. They identify themselves with the group they ridicule, and this makes their humor universally acceptable. It is evident from this example that the meaning and the function of iconic signs are not always purely redundant. The icon may contain information,

not conveyed in the language-bound message, which is essential for a successful interpretation and explains the comic effect of the passage.

e. Interpretation

What can we do with the assembled data concerning the descriptive fragment R3? We can now read the description as a narrative text in the sense that things *happen* in the description. In addition to the moving focalisation, the contradictory thematics, there is also a dynamic rhythm which is equivocal in detail (in the first half) and in general (the development to a state of total standstill). «Still» is expressed by means of development and motion. Following the equivocation of the first two sentences, the standstill in the third sentence is indicated by a metaphor, underlined by the presence of the modaliser («avait l'air de,» «semblaient,» «comme»). The emphasis which is continually placed upon contradiction by means of various *procédés* indicates that this should not be overlooked.

The description is thus a set of *instructions for use*. The fragment must be read as a general metaphor. The c^a of this metaphor is the reality of Rouen; the c^b is Emma's idealistic vision. Both contribute to the image which she sees before her. The absolute standstill with which the text end predicts the uselessness of Emma's attempts to bring diversity into her life. It predicts death. The instructions for use are concealed. The indications are hidden in metaphors, in indirect motifs, in rhythmic phenomena. The description also remains equivocal because the reader must not discover this predictive power too quickly or with too much certainty. For between (action-oriented) suspense and this form of *over-coding* there is a tense relationship.⁴¹

f. The Direct Context

The above interpretation is further motivated and justified in the chapter from which the passage has been taken. The most important aspect which is manifest here is a phenomenon of frequency.⁴² Emma goes to Rouen *every* Thursday. This habit has become an institution in her life. The emphatic and exclusive use of the *imperfect* underlines the fact that the entire scene is exemplary. Flaubert is clearly the predecessor of Proust here. How can someone who has been making this same weekly journey for such a

long time be «surprised» by the panorama? This is explained in the sentence «afin de se faire des surprises, elle fermait les yeux»: by cheating. The sentence which immediately precedes the description emphatically recapitulates the conflict.

The contradiction which we have noted in the description, and which is further emphasized in the context, can be found in all three aspects of the narrative message. In the *text*, this contradiction is expressed in words and forms. In the narrative, we see that the focalizer cheats. And in the *fabula*, the event—the arrival in the dream city—is absorbed into a routine.

When considering the sequence of events in this chapter, we observe that the journey to Rouen «takes» longer (is presented more extensively) than the return journey. Even more striking is the fact that both the journey and the purpose of the journey, the visit with Léon, receive so little attention. The narrative rhythm can be termed realistic when we consider how unimportant a person Léon is for Emma. He represents a desire, as does the city in which he lives. Because Emma is unable to grasp her moments of happiness, these moments are very brief and they are overshadowed by the routine which engulfs them.

When we examine the various elements of the entire journey rather than the sequence of events, we become aware of a similarity between the arrival and the departure. This point can be treated very briefly. The final glimpse of the city, a glimpse which is symmetric with the first, results in a shorter description in which only aspects of confusion and incomprehension remain («large vapeur», «confondues»). The relationship between the description and the direct context often provides information about the interpretation of the description. For example, the farmer's comments in *De aansprekers* was necessary in order to understand the confrontation between the child's view and the adult's, it was necessary to present these words *after* the description and not before it. In the fragment from *Changing Places*, the sequence from the general («the planes») to the particular («his own plane») was also motivated by the context. Immediately following his reflection about airplanes, the character boards his own plane.

If we examine description exclusively in relation to context, we shall never be able to attach more than an illustrative (redundant) and global meaning to it. For this reason, it is advisable to begin with the descriptive text itself. However, the interpretation of the description will have to be continually referred back to the context, a process which can be regarded as a form of testing one's inter-

pretation. The context will support the interpretation. This support can take the form of confirmation, motivation, explication, or expansion.

g. Integration in the Macrostructure

Placing the descriptive fragment back within the text as a whole has another function. The testing procedure is no longer necessary. Not the correctness, but rather the relevance of the analysis must be evident at this level. In other words, the meaning of the description is related to the general interpretation of the narrative text. As a result, the latter can *change, be further expanded, or be prematurely disclosed*. All three possibilities occur in the case of R3. These possible functions of the narrative description distinguish this type from the encyclopedic or referential-rhetorical description with their more restricted function. Because of lack of space, I shall present the methodical steps involved only briefly. Here again, the analysis follows two directions. The description has a place within the diegetic development. It is examined in the light of the existing situation at that moment in the fabula. Paradigmatically, the description can be compared with other descriptions from the same class. In the case of R3, a comparison of all descriptions of place can be made. The definition of the class is dependent upon the anticipated results. It would be rather useless to compare all of the descriptions first, and then to compare all descriptions of place. Here again, a choice must be made. By working from a connection between the described characteristics of places and the state of mind of the focalizing heroine, we can further limit the series. For example, we could choose to examine only those places which Emma views with optimistic expectations. If we should do so, then the descriptions of Yonville, Vaubyessard castle, the dream city to which she will flee with Rodolphe, and Rouen would constitute one class. In one respect, the first description of Yonville does not belong to this series. The focalizer is not Emma, instead, an anonymous though minimally diegetic pedestrian views the city at the moment that the Bovarys are on their way to Yonville.

An analysis of these descriptions reveals that there are a number of common aspects. There are more analogies in addition to that based upon Emma as focalizer. All of the places are seen from a distance and from above. The scenes are panoramas. All of the descriptions are general and lacking detail. They have various

elements in common, such as trees, water, and mist, which is particularly important thematically. Mist is related to the theme of inaccessible happiness, of confusion and the change in this motif is striking. It can appear both in a euphoric and dyphoric sense without breaking away from the unifying theme. It develops from *brouillard*—*brume*—*vapeur*—*voile*—to *clarté*. What changes in this series is the mood which is related to the motif. What remains the same is the theme of uncertainty, transitoriness, confusion which is evident also in the motif of water which, from «*ruisseau*—*fleuve-mer*,» (from a country stream to the wide ocean) remains connected with the impossibility of the desired journey. Thematic investigations can result in rigidity and reduction if we only consider the similarities between various motifs. A dynamic thematics enables us, by means of similarities, to see differences in their true perspective.

Here too, we have a paradox. According to the banal-realistic point of view, descriptions should be realistic precisely in their difference from one another because the places described also differ in reality. Any similarities could be explained by their relation to the fictive character. Just the opposite is true. The differences can be related to Emma's wish to see the locations other than as they really are. The similarities indicate an imminent realism. In those instances where Emma continues to make the same mistake by attributing her dissatisfaction to the world around her rather than to her own expectations and passivity, «*reality*,» her world, is unchangeable. This realism is a component of the fiction. It implies the predictability of misfortune, the inherently boring locations, the futility of cheating.

The diegetic structure of the novel contains a series of attempts in which Emma tries to break through the mediocrity of her existence, attempts which fail. The fabula so formulated also demonstrates the effect of repetition. Repetition works cumulatively. Every failure is more disastrous, more definite than the one before. The character carries all of her previous failures with her.

According to Barthes, one characteristic of the diegetic structure is its predictability. In this case, the link that connects one episode with another and that predicts the conclusion of each episode is Emma's lack of insight. This lack of insight must somehow be conveyed to the reader. It is only after Emma's death that this predictability can be communicated by Charles who misinterprets it: «*C'est la faute de la fatalité.*» It is only possible to speak of this fatality *afterwards*. Having chosen the realistic man-

ner of writing, Flaubert cannot discuss fatality earlier in the novel. Furthermore, Flaubert does not wish to interfere so explicitly, and any information conveyed must therefore remain limited to that available to the character. Emma's lack of insight forces the same lack upon the reader.

Because of this situation, description, with all of its apparently innocent referential character, is employed. The meaning, the necessary and inevitable failure of every attempt based on contradiction, is placed in the description and transmitted in a concealed form. In this fashion, description completely alters the meaning of the novel as a whole. The suspense created by the question of «how will it end» disappears. We already know the conclusion. The novel becomes increasingly pessimistic, a phenomenon which occurs with the «fatalité» of the character which is not, as Charles believes, metaphysical, but rather is psychological. The essential conflict is made more profound by the intrinsic function of realism within the novel.

h. Maximal Integration

For those who wish to do so, it is possible to continue the investigation. The various motifs of the description which have an integrating function, can be analyzed further in the text. This is certainly worthwhile for the motif of *mist*. In addition, less obvious phenomena such as rhythmic characteristics may appear elsewhere in the novel and may then be related back to the description.

Not only is this model integrative for the object, the narrative description, but it is also methodically integrative since it combines various approaches. The description is treated as a specific, isolatable discourse and yet remains within the context in which it functions. All aspects of the narratological framework have been discussed, including the combination of a simple narrator's text with complex focalization, and the diegetic side of description. Description in the novel is narrative. For this reason, an analysis which is limited to the description itself is not adequate. Yet a descriptive passage remains a description, and, for this reason, an analysis of the novel in which the descriptive fragments are regarded merely as illustrative material is also insufficient.

6. Concluding Remarks.

Description is a type of *text*. It cannot be treated within a plot-

oriented narratology. To do so would be circular reasoning. Nor is description an independent type of text, but rather an integrative component of the (usually narrative) text in which it appears. (There are, it is true, autonomous descriptions, but they are not included in this discussion; these descriptions do not cause the problems which have been raised here.) This article has been concerned with the «marginal,» subordinate descriptions in longer texts. None of the existent models proved adequate for the analysis of descriptive fragments. They had to be combined and adjusted. This combination led to the relativization of the opposition metaphor: metonymy. As a result, these two were regarded as the two extreme types of a sliding scale of six types. It is probable that further text analysis will result in an expansion of this taxonomy.

An analysis of the descriptive fragment only is insufficient, and often results in a superficial, overly direct, and unequivocal indication of symbolic meaning. This is avoided in the method suggested here. The relation between description and novel is *dynamic*, *indirect*, and *polyvalent*. In addition, the structural contribution of description to meaning is often more powerful than first assumed. The function of a description is certainly not always limited to illustrating the meaning which is already present. Whoever proceeds from the principle of redundancy will meet with difficulties in such cases as this passage which appeared in a Dutch newspaper [*Trouw/Kwartet*] on October 27, 1979:

The extremely zealous, kind, intelligent, and honest president Herbert Hoover, who, shortly before the crisis, had promised his people in his inauguration speech in March, 1929 a very prosperous future, remained fanatically devoted, month after month, year after year, to the idea that the crisis would resolve itself, that the American system was prepared for such shocks, and that it would automatically survive.⁴³

The same president who is described as admirable by the first words of the sentence appears to be lazy, evil, stupid and corrupt in the rest of the sentence; the description can hardly be considered redundant or illustrative. And this is just a simple newspaper sentence. It is possible, by means of descriptions, to criticize with praise and to praise with criticism. Or to transmit other, less obviously contradictory values.

I have omitted one important aspect of description. This is the status of the object to which the text refers, the referent. I have

avoided two problems by my omission. The first is the distinction between the deictic and the anaphoric function. Descriptions refer to something which is located elsewhere, whether or not it «exists.» This is their deictic function. Descriptions also refer to other elements of the text, and so contribute to textual cohesiveness. This is their anaphoric function. Both functions are indexical.

I have not discussed this further here. The second problem is the problem of fictionality. I have avoided this issue because it raises problems which are too numerous to discuss in one article. Furthermore, fictionality as a general problem is not specific to description. It is, nevertheless, desirable that descriptions be included in any such investigations, especially because the world which is evoked in a fictional text is constructed precisely in the descriptive passages. It is here where the illusion of reality is created.

The problem of fictionality concerns more than the description of that which does not exist. Whenever we must express in language something which does not exist in language, we face the problem which confronted Columbus. He had to make the unfamiliar familiar, to describe the exotic, the unreal, and to do so with such flair that the King of Spain would be willing to invest gold in the unknown. To evoke the unknown by means of the real, by comparisons as well as by differentiations, in such a way that the unknown becomes believable and the fictive becomes real: That is the task of the describer. But that is also a vicious circle, as is shown in Robbe-Grillet's «Le mannequin»:

L'anse a, si l'on veut, la forme d'une oreille, ou plutôt de l'ourlet extérieur d'une oreille; mais ce serait une oreille mal faite, trop arrondie et sans lobe, qui aurait ainsi la forme d'une 'anse de pot'.

La Maison de rendez-vous, Paris: Minuit, 1965.⁴⁴

«A jug handle has, more or less, the shape of an ear, or rather of its rim; but it would be an ill-formed ear, overly round and lobeless, which would therefore have the shape of a jug handle.»

Trans. Robert Corum

NOTES

The present article has been through several stages. Its first draft was the result of a seminar on description which I gave in 1979. The participants contributed much to its final conception. Critical remarks by Jonathan Culler, Raymonde Debray Genette and Claudine Gothot Mersch on a previous version are gratefully acknowledged. I am especially grateful to Ann Jefferson for correcting the English.

1. Ed. Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, 1975 (1904), p. 72.
2. Gérard Genette, «Frontières du récit,» in *Figures II* (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1969). Appeared in English as 'Boundaries of Narrative,' in *New Literary History*, 8 (1976), 1-17.
3. Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*. (1848; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd. 1974), p. 297.
4. Genette, «Frontières du récit .» p. 57.
5. Roland Barthes, «Introduction à l'analyse structurale du récit,» in *Communications*, 8 (1966), 1-27; reprint in R. Barthes e.a., *Poétique du récit* (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1977).
6. See for this notion and its semiotic foundation: Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (London: The Macmillan Press), pp. 48-54.
7. This critique has been pointed out by Jonathan Culler in his basic study of structuralism, *Structuralist Poetics. Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 96-109.
8. William O. Hendricks, «Methodology of Narrative Structural Analysis,» *Semiotica*, 7 (1973), 163-148.
9. Pieter Dirk Van der Ven, *From Narrative Text to Narrative Structure. A Method Examined and Applied* (Utrecht: Instituut voor Algemene Literatuurwetenschap, 1978).
10. Philippe Hamon, «Qu'est-ce qu'une description?,» *Poétique*, 12 (1972), 465-485. See also his recent book, *Introduction à l'analyse descriptive* (Paris: Hachette, 1981).
11. Peter Klaus, «Description in Narrative,» *Orbis Litterarum* (forthcoming).
12. See, for example, Claude Bremond, «La logique des possibles narratifs,» *Communications*, 8 (1966), 60-76.
13. This definition is proposed by Klaus. See footnote 11.
14. Gérard Genette: *Figures III*. (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1972), p. 186-189. An excellent English translation by Jane E. Lewin appeared recently as *Narrative Discourse* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980).
15. For the notion of authentication, see Lubomír Doležel, «Truth and Authenticity in Narrative,» *Poetics Today*, 1, No. 3 (1980), 7-26.
16. For a discussion of the importance of motivation in an esthetics of

vraisemblance, see Genette's article «Vraisemblance et motivation,» in *Figures II*, pp. 71-100. Culler analyses several types of motivation in *Structuralist Poetics*, p. 131-160.

17. The notion of iconism is basic in a peircian semiotics. Eco's extensive critique of iconism in his quoted book (see footnote 6) is not altogether convincing, in spite of several points he makes. If carefully defined and applied, iconism is a useful concept that allows us to account for many interesting phenomena in language and literature.

18. In: *Tigers are Better-Looking* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1977).

19. See for an account of such a model, and for its foundation both in narratology and in semiotics: Mieke Bal, *Narratologie. Essais sur la signification narrative dans quatre romans modernes* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977), and *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, a forthcoming translation of *De theorie van vertellen en verhalen* (Muiderberg: Coutinho, 1978). This model is also discussed in «Notes on Narrative Embedding,» *Poetics Today*, 22 (1981), 41-60.

20. Quoted and translated from the Dutch version (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1976) 1972.

21. See for example Wolfgang Raible, «Literatur und Natur. Beobachtungen zur literarischen Landschaft,» *Poetica*, 51, Nos. 1-2 (1969), 1-1g.

22. French text quoted from the Garnier edition, edited and introduced by Claudine Gothot Mersch, p. 22. Subsequent citations in the text refer to this edition.

23. Jean Ricardou, *Nouveaux problèmes du roman* (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1978).

24. See W. Labov and J. Waletzky. «Narrative Analysis: Oral versions of Personal Experience,» in *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts*, ed. J. Helms (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967).

25. Maarten van Buuren, «Metaforische beschrijvingen. De presentatie van personages bij Proust,» in Mieke Bal (ed.): *Mensen van papier. Over personages in de literatuur (Paper-People. On the Concept of Character in Literature)* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1979).

26. Van Buuren, p. 50.

27. *Figures III*, pp. 41-63.

28. David Lodge, «Types of Description,» in *The Modes of Modern Writing*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), pp. 93-103. The following typology can be considered as a more systematic and extended version of the one sketched by Lodge.

29. The first two descriptions have been translated from the French by Robert Corum.

30. This is discussed in the chapter «Descriptions» of my *Narratologie*, which contains a more detailed analysis of the fragment than I can display here.

31. For this concept see Genette as quoted in footnote 2.

32. A discussion of the «mise en abyme,» a phenomenon which in some ways resembles the play in a play, can be found in Lucien Dällenbach, *Le récit spéculaire. Essais sur la mise en abyme* (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1977), and in my review article on

this book, «Mise en abyme et iconicité,» *Littérature*, 29 (1978), 116-128.

33. See, for example, Lotman's well-known study, *Die Struktur des künstlerischen Textes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973).

34. Alkmaar, ed. Kluitman. I choose this example from a rather banal, moralistic children's book from the 30's on purpose. Too often, complexity of narrative structure is considered a characteristic feature of literature. I object to the taking for granted of that position.

35. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1978 (1975), p. 9. It seemed interesting to me to take an example from the work of an author who proves in his theoretical work to be highly sensitive to the differentiating power of descriptions. Furthermore, it is a contemporary novel without being a theory-founded experimental one, like the works of the *nouveau roman*.

36. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1950 (1863). This example is chosen because the novel resembles *Madame Bovary* both in plot and in literary school, while at the same time it is recognized more traditional in form. Thus the choice is implicitly polemic against Ricardou's exaggerated insistence on the «modernité» of flaubertian description, supposed to be based on the paradoxical movement that can be noticed. The same movement is to be found in this Maupassant fragment, without the slightest effect of modernity.

37. For this concept, see the works mentioned in footnote 19. A controversy around the concept can be found in *Poetics Today*, 2, No. 2 (1981), 193-212, in which it is compared to related concepts like «point of view,» «free indirect discourse» and «implied author.»

38. Amsterdam: Ed. De Arbeiderspers, 1979, p. 171. The example may also illustrate the possibilities of the concept of focalization for the analysis of metaphor.

39. This definition is formulated by Todorov in Oswald Ducrot et Tzvetan Todorov, *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du langage* (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1972), p. 383.

40. Amsterdam: Ed. De Harmonie. This typically Dutch humoristic calendar contains masterpieces of hardly translatable descriptions.

41. For the concept of overcoding, see Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, pp. 129-130.

42. See Genette's *Narrative Discourse*.

43. The example may seem provocative to the American reader, for which I apologize. It is, however, too clear a case of this frequent reversion of values in the description/narration cluster, to leave out here.

44. This text is published at the end of *La Maison de rendez-vous* (Paris: Ed. Gallimard), 1971.