

Stories and social structure

A structural perspective on literature in society

Sociologists as well as scholars of literature study structures: social structures and text structures respectively. Of course, the social and cultural sides of life are felt to be related in some way or another. Influenced by cultural anthropology, sociologists have incorporated culture in their theories. Students of literature have paid attention to social reality in authors' biographies and the like. The sociology of literature in particular has focused on the relation between society and literature, usually employing the metaphor that literature mirrors society (see Desan et al. 1989 for a synthesis).

In this paper, I will pursue the relation between literature and society from a different angle. Instead of society as a whole, I will focus on social behaviour at the individual level first. The stories that people tell about themselves, their social relations, and behaviour are closely connected. From literary and non-literary narratives people derive structural models for the stories of their lives as well as scripts for social action. This explains why narrative structures resemble group structures, opening new perspectives on the analysis of narrative structures as well as the significance of stories to social behaviour. However, the link between stories and larger social formations is at stake too, since the process of defining identities and structuring relationships operates not just at the individual level but also at the level of social groups and organisations.

Balance in stories and social groups

Stories and social structure seem to be different worlds, studied in different scientific disciplines. Why would anyone assume similarities between narrative and social structure? My argument starts with the observation that a social-psychological theory, which is explicitly relational, applies to affective relations within small groups as well as stories. I will

use this theory to introduce a relational perspective, which is relevant to the analysis of literary criticism.

In the 1940s Fritz Heider formulated the basic tenet of what was later called balance theory (Heider 1946). It may be summarised as “a person feels uncomfortable if he disagrees on a topic with someone he likes”. This situation is called unbalanced and induces a person to change his affections or opinions. Balance theory predicts that human beings will strive for balanced situations. Soon, this theory was extended to affect relations between three people and more, stating that “a person feels uncomfortable if he dislikes his friends’ friends or if he likes his friends’ enemies”. Group structures are hypothesised to display a tendency towards balance.

In a large number of psychological and sociological research projects balance theory has been tested and found to be fairly accurate (cf. Taylor 1970 for an overview). Small groups, e.g. children in an educational setting, often display tendencies towards balance. Also the theory was applied to social relations that are not affect relations in settings that do not study the classic social-psychological small group, e.g. in political science and history. Important to my argument is the application of balance theory to tales (Auster 1980) and drama (Harary 1963 and 1966). Auster and Harary coded the relations between *dramatis personae* in tale, opera, or play as either positive or negative: like, help versus dislike, combat et cetera. Analysing these relations, they found that the stories and plays always end in complete balance and that most stories and plays contain markedly unbalanced episodes. They concluded that these narratives display a development towards balance as predicted by balance theory. Social-psychological balance theory seems to be a theory of the happy ending story too.

In 1956 Cartwright and Harary (Cartwright and Harary 1956) used mathematical graph theory, which deals with structures that we commonly refer to as networks, to formalise balance theory. They represented actors by nodes or vertices and affect relations between actors by arcs that were either solid, representing positive affect, or dashed, representing

negative affect. Figure 1 represents a balanced network of affect relations. Person B likes person A but he dislikes C, who dislikes A. So B dislikes his friend's enemy as predicted by balance theory. Cartwright and Harary proofed that balance in a network of affect relations may easily be detected. For example, each closed sequence or circle of affect relations in the network that contains zero or an even number of negative affects, is balanced.

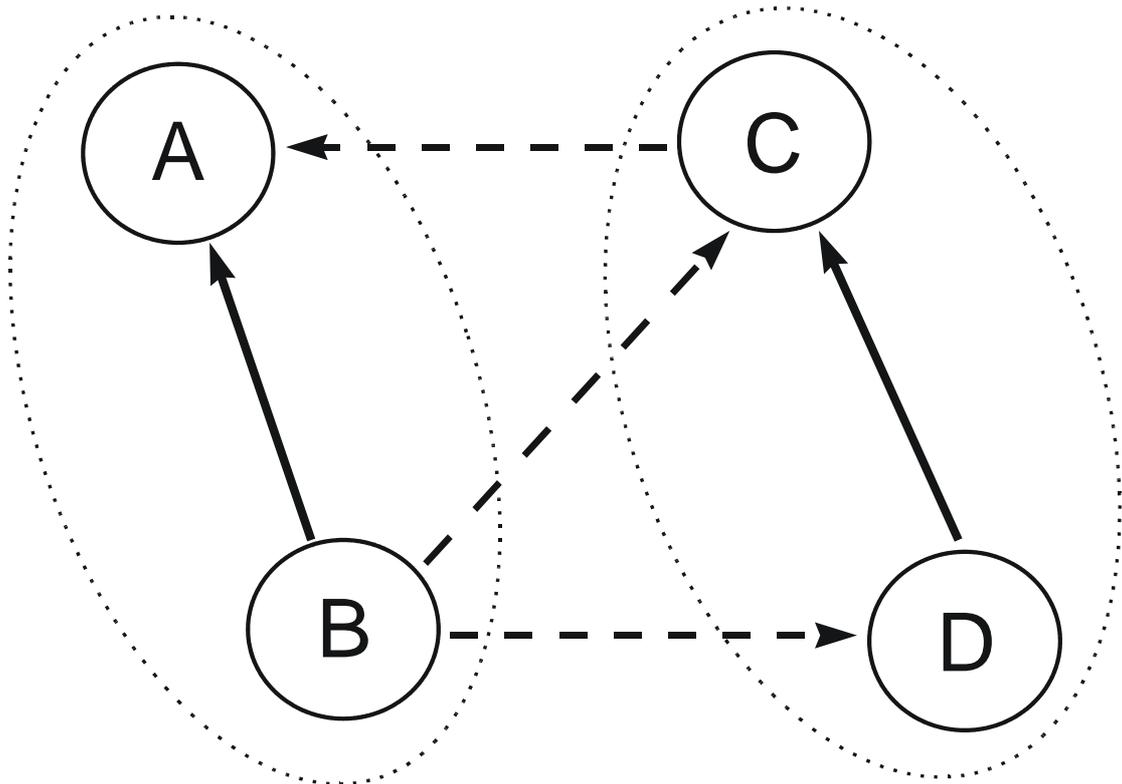


Figure 1 - A balanced network of affections.

The formalisation had two major effects. On the one hand, balance theory could now easily be applied to any structure that may be represented as a network of positive and negative arcs. For example countries at war or peace, competing or co-operating firms, agreement and disagreement between politicians, et cetera. This has lead to application of balance theory on a wide range of topics. On the other hand, formalisation stimulated the search for alternative models. Network analysts contributed substantially to the theory's

development by extending it to hierarchical group structures. Probably balance theory is the first social theory that owes its development in large part to network analysis (Manhart 1995).

There is no need to explain all of these models here (see Wasserman, S., & Faust, K. (1994) for an excellent summary of this theory and the associated mathematical models). However, it is important to note that balance theory as well as methods of network analysis are fundamentally relational. Since I will introduce a relational paradigm in a later section, it is sensible to elaborate a little on the relational character of network analysis as opposed to statistics first.

Network analysis versus statistics

New theories develop in relation with new methods or methodologies. Statistics has fuelled social research and theory-formation for a long time. Of late network analysis has emerged as an alternative method. Although network analysis may use statistical concepts, it is based on radically different assumptions. Let us contrast the two methods.

Statistics focuses on entities' attributes and their statistical relations. Consider the network of affections depicted in Figure 1. In a statistical approach, a variable 'social group' would be defined with values that may be labelled 'hipsters' and 'squares' in case of kids at high school. Each youngster would then be assigned to one of either categories, e.g. pupils A and B would be considered 'hip'. Other attributes may be measured and compared to the first. For example 'hip' may correlate with a specific social background. If 'hipsters' tend to have other social backgrounds than 'squares', the attributes 'social group' and 'social background' are said to be associated statistically. Note that units of analysis are always aggregated in statistics: the set of hip pupils is characterised on average by a specific social background. So it is not necessarily true that each hipster has the specific social background.

In contrast, network analysis does not measure an entity's attributes, but (social) relations between entities. Network analysis looks for patterns of relations. In Fig. 1, for example, A and B would be clustered because they are related by a positive tie, whereas they

have negative ties to and from C and D. Within network analysis, a group of friends is delineated by their pattern of affect relations, instead of their individual characteristics or the kind of person they claim to be. This characterises network analysis as a relational or structural method. There is no need to specify beforehand the number of clusters nor their labels ('hip' versus 'square') as required in statistics. Clusters are extracted from social relations at the individual level. They are interpreted and labelled afterwards. Also data do not need to be aggregated. This is very important to the analysis of narratives. Since the number of characters in a story uses to be fairly small, statistical aggregation makes no sense. Network analysis, however, may be applied since it analyses the relations between characters.

The capacity to analyse socially constructed classifications is an important feature of network analysis that is central to my argumentation. As indicated before, I will concentrate on balance theory although this is but one of the theories developed in social network analysis. Social network analysis is a method that is being used in a wide area of research, ranging from chemistry, logistics and diffusion processes (Rogers 1979) to cultural anthropology (Hage and Harary 1983) and content analysis (Carley 1993). It formalises a relational way of thinking – thinking in relations. Let us now turn to a relational paradigm in sociological theory.

A relational paradigm

In 1992 Harrison C. White published a book titled *Identity and Control: A Structural Theory of Social Action*. Sociologists hailed it as an important but difficult book (Boudon 1993; Calhoun 1993; Meyer 1993; Tilly 1993). Interestingly, White stresses the importance of stories as elements that structure social reality. "Stories come from and become a medium for control efforts: that is the core" White writes (White 1992: 68), and he advises to measure social relations by listening to stories. A social theory dealing with stories may well help to explain the relation between social structure and narrative structure that we are interested in. So let us have a closer look at it.

To understand White's theory, I argue, it is necessary to realise that White grounds it on a relational paradigm. According to White, an identity – an 'I' or a 'we' – arises from an effort at control. If there are two entities that establish a relation, because they try to control one another, a sense of identity comes into being. White replaces individualistic self-awareness '*cogito ergo sum*' by social awareness: 'there is an effort at control, so there is an I (or we), and a you'. Interaction triggers identities, not the other way around. White repeatedly uses children's behaviour at a playground as an example. At a playground, social relations must be settled on the spot. Children are faced with the task to establish social relations by themselves. In order to play, toys must be conquered, playmates must be found, rules must be obeyed or enforced. At the playground, a child is whom and what s/he is able to play with. Identity is expressed in stories that summarise the social encounters that triggered identity. According to White, persons are story sets. Children are the set of stories they can tell about themselves, stories about home as well as the playground.

Of course, White is not the first to stress the importance of social relations to behaviour. For example symbolic interactionists (Blumer 1969) argue that human behaviour depends on the way people interpret other people's actions. An action qualified as an attack is met with behaviour that is completely different from the response to an event qualified as help. White goes one step further, arguing that an identity such as the interpreting actor that symbolic interactionists focus on, is not biologically fixed or given; identity is socially constructed in and by means of stories. The definition or classification of identities is a fundamental social 'game' in which entities try to secure their positions, that is their control over other entities. For future action, it makes a difference to be regarded as a friend or as an enemy. Therefore, the verbal games practised at playgrounds are just as important to control and identity formation as non-verbal behaviour like playing or fighting.

This approach relates quite nicely to Pierre Bourdieu's field theory (Bourdieu 1980). According to Bourdieu, intellectual fields are defined by the social struggle over definitions, e.g. the definition of true science in the scientific field or the definition of artistic value in the

literary field. This is a struggle about who is allowed to legitimise texts as true science, literature et cetera (Van Rees 1989). Clearly, statements count as social action to Bourdieu. So it comes as no surprise that White draws many examples from art. Actually, almost simultaneously with *Identity and Control*, White published another book titled *Careers and Creativity: Social Forces in the Arts* (1993), applying the core of his theory to art worlds.¹ According to White art is an important source of stories that people use to model their own stories, that is, their identities (White 1993: Ch. 4). This is an important extension to Bourdieu's field theory, at least if we are interested in the connection between narrative and social structure.

Models from fiction

Especially in this text, which is addressed at students of literature, it is very important to point out the meaning of the word *story* as used by White. White does not refer to the type of narrative texts that scholars in literature tend to study. In his theory a story is what people tell about themselves, about their life or situation. These stories are meant to relate to people and events in the empirical world. If we listen to such a story, we are inclined to relate its characters to actual people and its events to things that have happened in the empirical world. As we know that this representation can be distorted or coloured by the narrator, we do not believe all that we are told. Nevertheless, we do not treat it as mere fantasy, fiction. Relating the story to events in the empirical world, we make up our own story. In the process identities are established, or negotiated if stories differ, and social hierarchies are established or enforced.

As I have mentioned briefly, according to White art offers examples that people use to model their own stories. So, stories fulfil two social functions, viz. efforts to control social relations within a specific social setting and exercises in handling social relations. It is worth

¹ This is not his first book on art worlds. In 1965 he published a book on the rise of French impressionism (White, H. C., & White, C. A. 1965).

to note that these functions correspond quite well to the distinction between non-fiction and fiction respectively. The former function is performed when the author, listener or reader checks the story to ‘facts’ in the empirical world, whereas the latter function requires the story to be treated as a reality in itself. It is quite likely that models for behaviour are better learned by means of stories that do not induce the listener or reader to check its truthfulness and that do not contend for control.

Probably, literature as ‘the art of telling’ often serves as a source of models rather than efforts at control in specific social settings. To scholars of literature this idea is not new and hardly surprising. After all, the study of literature has been motivated by literature’s edifying functions for a long time. However, it is wrong to reserve the model function for literary texts. Everyday stories and narratives that are not considered to be literary, e.g. tales or romance novels, may function as models too. White hypothesises the tale to have the following social function: “here the onus is explaining incremental realignments of constituent segments by coherent ex post interpretation via a balanced set of stories” (White 1992: 331-332). Moreover, literature is just as much a social practice as any social domain, in which identities and control are at stake, notably social positions and literary identities of authors and critics as I will argue below. Therefore texts deemed literary, e.g. a *roman à clef*, may very well be efforts to define and control the author’s social position in the literary field. Such texts can be studied in the same manner as the story that people tell about their neighbours.

Let me stress that I do not intend to use White’s theory to delineate literature from non-literary texts. On the contrary, assuming all texts to be part of the social process of exercising control and establishing identities, I propose to put all texts on a par. Let us study stories as social facts, i.e. with the theoretical concepts and analytic methods developed within the social sciences. Or, to state it differently, why not analyse a story as if it were a social group, even if the identification of characters proves less self-evident than one might expect (e.g. see (Ormerod et al. 1995: 356)? This, in fact, is what Harary and Auster did when they applied

balance theory and network analysis to tales and plays (Auster 1980; Harary 1963; Harary 1966). Thus they revealed the striking similarities between narrative and group structure.

Dynamic models

In the preceding section it was suggested that fictional texts train readers' and listeners' abilities to tell stories on their own lives and use these stories to advance their social position. If fictional texts offer models for everyday stories, what is it exactly that they offer? Since the theory used here is based on a relational paradigm, it makes sense to assume that texts offer models for interpersonal relations. As we have seen before, the pattern of affect relations between characters in a tale closely resemble the patterns found within social groups. In this section I propose to look for dynamic structures of relations in particular. Stories have a clear temporal dimension, a plot that is more detailed than an overall tendency towards balance. Probably plots are relatively invariant sequences of relations that people use to make sense of past events and plan or anticipate future events; stories as scripts that are executed in daily life. I will present one example from the study of literature to illustrate this proposition and to show that sociology may benefit from work done by scholars of literature. The example is taken from Vladimír Propp's famous study of the Russian fairy tale (Propp 1928¹, 1968). In the study of literature this study triggered a series of story grammars from too strict a structural perspective some argue (Halász et al. 1988), but it was noticed by sociologists as well (e.g. Franzosi 1998)).

Propp noted that characters often are identified by their attributes. Villains use to be witches living in houses on chicken legs; princesses repeatedly wear gold, et cetera. Although we are accustomed to identify fairy tales by exactly these kinds of characters, Propp argues that fairy tales derive their similarities from the functions that the *dramatis personae* perform. Characters' attributes may well be specific to a culture, a region or time, whereas their functions are more universal. He showed that a large body of fairy tales consisted of a limited number of functions, such as violation (of an interdiction by the hero), villainy, donor

function, receipt of a magical agent, et cetera. The functions are performed by a small number of *dramatis personae*, e.g. a hero, villain, donor, princess and king, dispatcher, and helper.

Not all functions occur in each tale. However, the functions that do occur, appear in a fixed order. So, the fairy tales contain stereotyped roles as well as plots. In contrast to Claude Lévi-Strauss (e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1966 and 1969), who looked for universal, static structures of meaning, Propp investigated temporal sequences. Action and functions derive their meanings from their place within a plot. "Function is understood as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action." (Propp 1968: 21) If fairy tales offer moulds for people to model their experiences, we should note that the moulds have a clear time dimension. They offer scripts to interpret the sequence of events that have happened, or will happen.

What strikes me about Propp's functions, is the patterns of relations they are associated with. Most functions involve the meeting of two characters², one of whom invariably is the hero. The relations consist of one or two functions or actions initiated by or directed at the hero. Several characters can be identified uniquely by the pattern of relations that connect them to the hero. Let us turn to the example used by Propp, the tale of the swan-geese (Propp 1968: 96-99). This tale typically starts at the hero's home: the hero (a girl), her old parents and her younger brother. The parents command our hero to stay at home while they go out shopping. She will be rewarded if she obeys (function 1 in Figure 2). The hero, however, breaks her promise and goes out to play in the street (function 2 in Figure 2). Then the swan-geese kidnap the little brother (function 3 in Figure 2) and the hero is forced to leave home in order to find her brother and bring him back home. Disobedience, villainy or misfortune causes the hero to leave home; it gets the action started. The family represents the hero's allies: people that are always good to the hero and that the hero wants to be good to. Let us represent this by positive ties. By mistake this tie is broken by the hero. The positive tie will be re-established only at the end of the tale, when the hero arrives home with her brother

(function 11 in Figure 2). A mutual positive tie corresponds to a balanced situation, so the tale starts with the introduction of unbalance and it ends with the restoration of balance. The tale displays a tendency towards balance as predicted by balance theory.

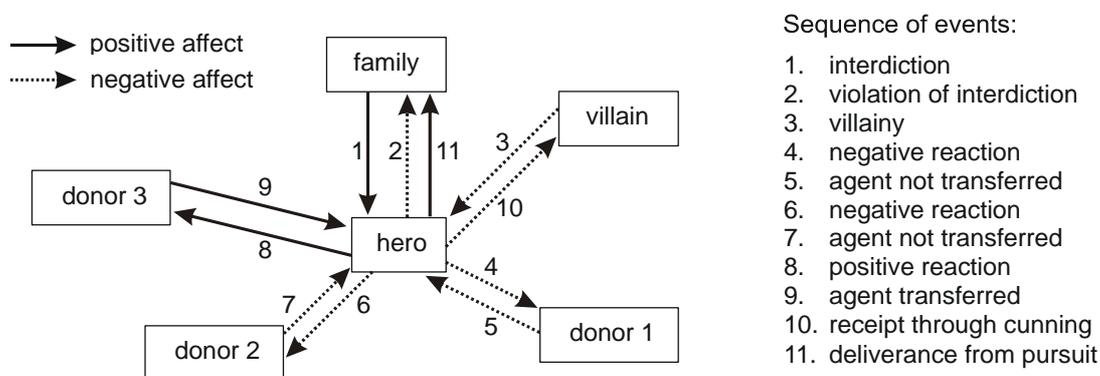


Figure 2- Basic functions of the Swan-Geese tale as a graph.

In contrast to the hero's family, the villain always intends to do the hero harm. Of course, the hero's quest is motivated by her desire to give as good as she gets. Later on, she will deceive or defeat the villain, who turns out to be the witch Bába Jagá living in a hut on chicken legs, and free her brother (function 10 in Figure 2). Before she finds her brother, the hero has to gain the help of a donor: a character possessing magical agents or information vital to the hero's success. Here again, reciprocity of relations is key. If the hero refuses to comply with the donor's wishes, e.g. if the girl refuses to eat a little rye-cake offered by a stove or an apple offered by a tree (functions 4 and 6 in Figure 2), she does not receive the help needed (functions 5 and 7 in Figure 2). She only finds out where the swan-geese have gone, when she helps a donor (function 8 in Figure 2) and the donor renders her a service (function 9 in Figure 2). The donor may be characterised by paying the hero in kind. In this

² Since these are fairy tales, characters are not necessarily human beings.

relation the hero is the first one to show her affect and this determines the response of the donor.

The core characters and functions of the tale may be characterised by their relations to the hero and the timing of relations in particular. Tales seem to centre on reciprocity of relations. From the point of view of the hero, reciprocal relations represent clarity on friends and enemies: I help friends, who help me, and I oppose enemies, who oppose me. This is a basic and very useful social classification. In the tale reciprocity is established step by step. The tale instructs the reader to be good to your allies, combat your enemies and try to be friends with those who are neither friendly nor unfriendly, because they may become donors. In the tale of the swan-geese, friends and enemies are easily recognised by their appearances. More elaborate tales, however, are less unambiguous. Brothers may turn out to be adversaries, false heroes seize the award, et cetera. In real life recognising friends and enemies, of course, is much more difficult. Maybe this tale teaches us to make that judgement by the temporal pattern of relations rather than appearances. In psychology and social therapy it is well-known that the perceived timing of events or punctuation (Watzlawick et al. 1967) within a relationship is important to the roles that people play and the character of their relationship. E.g. the accusation of being the one who “started all that crap” assigns the villain-role within a marriage. By means of different punctuation of events, both spouses may accuse the other of having started the conflict, causing severe marital problems.

Self-similarity

A sociologist would be untrue to his profession if he would restrict his theory to interpersonal relations and pay no attention to larger social structures. So, how does White progress from interpersonal relations to the structure of groups, organisations, or society at large? To this end White introduces the concept of self-similarity ((White 1992): 5). Structures that occur at the level of interpersonal relations, White notes, can be found at other levels too. The principle of self-similarity ensues from the theory’s relational paradigm. If identities result

from efforts at control, identity is not necessarily an attribute of a single human being. Groups of people that try to control one another establish identities as well. To a considerable degree, members of a group or organisation will use the same stories to account for what has happened and what is going to happen. “[S]ocial organization can be seen as the interlocking of stereotyped stories that actors proffer and through which they perceive and perform and maneuver. Cultural and social organization thus wind around each other.” (White 1993: 194). The stories will shape inter-group relations in the same manner as interpersonal relations. Hence, patterns of relations at several levels of aggregation will be similar.

Thus, White’s relational paradigm offers an elegant solution to the problem of the micro-macro gap in sociology. As suggested by Randall Collins in his overview of sociological theories, the relational or network perspective may bridge the cleavage between micro-theories on interpersonal relations on the one hand and macro-theories that deal with the structure of society at large (Collins 1988: 412-414). Let us have a look at movements in literature in order to illustrate this.

Literary movements refer to small groups of relatively young authors that claim or are claimed to represent a specific – usually a ‘new – kind of literature. Clearly, identity and control are at stake here: recognition of artistic identity and competition for scarce opportunities to publish go hand in hand. Authors tend to be classified into movements according to the literary magazines in which they publish, references to literary examples, as well as the way they evaluate one another’s work (De Nooy 1991 and 1993). Recently, I applied balance theory to the judgements that a set of authors and critics pass on one another in reviews and interviews (De Nooy 1999). I did not restrict the analysis to the model initially proposed by Heider; I included hierarchical models developed later. In some years the evaluations displayed a statistically significant pattern as predicted by extended balance theory. Figure 3 shows the social structure that results from the positive (white arcs) and negative (black arcs) judgements passed within a set of Dutch authors and critics in 1976.

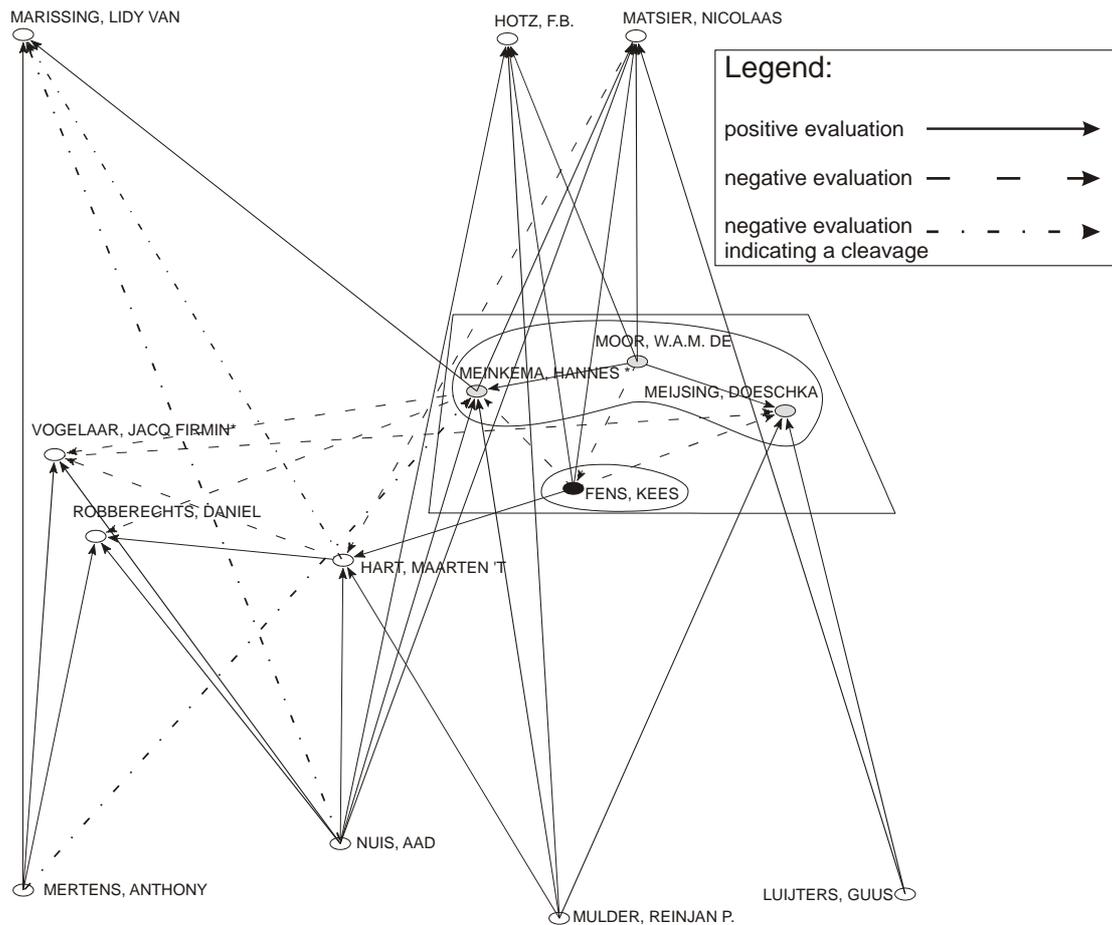


Figure 3 - Social structure of Dutch literary criticism in 1976.

The structure contains three ranks. Authors (light spheres) occupy the top rank, whereas critics (dark spheres) populate the bottom rank. Interestingly, the analysis separates authors and critics that were regarded as advocates of Marxist literature at the time, from the main structure by a social cleavage (depicted by the vertical glass pane). In a group of children, a social cleavage often is found to separate the girls from the boys. This implies that the ranking of girls according to popularity is incompatible with the ranking of boys. In an extreme case, all girls dislike all boys regardless of their ranking, and vice versa. In the example of the Dutch literary field presented here, the cleavage separates a left wing from the main body of literature. By the end of the 1970s this movement in Dutch literature was discredited and its authors published less or left the literary scene. The cleavage may well represent a collective effort to determine the boundaries of the literary field and to expel some authors from the

literary domain. Individual evaluations interlock to create identities at the level of the literary field as a whole. This is what self-similarity is about.

In a similar vein, though using another technique in network analysis, Gerhards and Anheier (Gerhards and Anheier 1989) found an interesting pattern of social relations between literary authors in Cologne that enabled them to distinguish between High and Low Culture segments. Also, it was possible to delineate a centre and a periphery that could be further subdivided (Anheier and Gerhards 1991). Relations within the centre are dense compared to relations in the periphery. Also, actors in the periphery maintain relations more often with actors in the centre than among themselves. So it is not just the number of relations that counts, but also to whom they are directed.

Again, I want to point out the advantage that network analysis has over statistics in this type of analysis. Judgements in literary reviews have been used by several researchers to analyse the stratification of the literary field in terms of artistic success. A literary author's seniority (e.g. size of his/her body of works), publishing house, print numbers, literary prizes, sideline activities, and the like, are being used as indicators of his/her literary standing along with the number of reviews published on his/her books. Subsequently, statistical association between indicators and other characteristics (age, sex) is calculated. Significant results convey social determinants of literary success (e.g. see special issues of *Poetics*: vol. 12 (1983) issue 4/5, vol. 15 (1985) issue 1-2, vol. 18 (1989) issue 1-2, vol. 21 (1992) issue 1-2, and vol. 26 (1999) issue 3-4).

In the end statistical analysis always aggregates the original data. For example, the attention for a title measured by the number of reviews received does not take into account who wrote the reviews. Therefore, it is very difficult and often impossible to take into consideration the reciprocity and dynamics of prestige. The standing of the critic is paramount to the impact of his/her reviews on the reputation of the author. At the same time, however, the critic's authority depends on the acceptance of his judgements by peers as well as the author him/herself. All players in the literary field owe their prestige to their peers.

Nevertheless, either the author's standing or the critic's is taken for granted in statistical analysis.

In contrast, network analysis just needs the actors' relations to analyse their relative positions. Knowing their relative positions, actors are clustered and ranked. The positions of authors and critics are analysed simultaneously, as the example presented above shows (Figure 3). The labelling of clusters and ranks comes afterwards and may even be skipped. New action, e.g. reviews, may change the relative positions of authors and critics, hence the ranking and clustering. It may even change the boundaries of the population involved if some actors are dismissed from the scene, and new players make their appearance. In the end, a social entity defines itself by means of the relations that are kept or broken. This is what makes it a field (Bourdieu 1983) or an autopoietic system (Schmidt 1987).

Punctuation

How do collective patterns of judgements within literary criticism emerge? How should time be incorporated in the analysis of social formations, e.g. the literary field? I will now attempt to show the relevance of narrative plots for social process. The timing of affect relations and their relevance to narrative functions or roles of characters that I suggested earlier, will serve as an example.

Hitherto researchers of the literary field have adopted a rather static stance. In the literary field, choices and judgements are assumed to be orchestrated, i.e. adjusted, all the time. This is not to say that adjustments are perfect. On the contrary, results indicate broad consensus only. But the people involved are supposed to fine-tune their opinions continuously. However, application of balance theory to judgements expressed in reviews and interviews mentioned before, suggests limited periods of collective evaluation rather than continuous fine-tuning (De Nooy 1999). In what may be a critical phase, positions are defined, which remain unchallenged for some time. Probably 'orchestration' is not the right metaphor since it refers to the adjustment of all instruments within an orchestra for an entire

composition. As noted before, balance theory itself does not specify the development of balanced patterns. It just expects a tendency toward balance at the interpersonal level.

According to White social ties are stories retelling efforts at control that happened between identities. Past experiences are incorporated in a social relation. So, instead of looking at events occurring at one moment, we should derive the structure of relations for a specific point of time from all events up to and including that moment. People do not forget. With respect to the genesis of movements within literature, I propose to concentrate on the first ‘encounters’ between literary authors or critics, their first evaluations. Usually, movements within literature concern authors just making their appearance within the literary field. First evaluations are very important then. In fact, classifications according to movement help them to attract attention and make a name, no matter whether they are self-proclaimed or proposed or imposed by literary critics.

Publishing a text classifying beginning authors according to movement in itself is an interesting example of a ‘story’ in White’s sense. To a considerable degree classifications retell previous clashes between the authors classified, and the distribution of opportunities to publish. Also, publication itself is an effort at control in the sense that authors’ names and reputations – their identities – are being established or reinforced. I will go into the details of the correspondence between classifications and events here (see De Nooy 1991). Rather, I want to point out the importance of punctuation. Defining a movement, a classification introduces a boundary in time, demarcating a new kind of literature from previous types. Self-proclaimed movements sometimes are very explicitly dismissing existing literature as “obsolete” or “old-fashioned”, to be replaced by a “new” or “fresh” literature. The strategies behind these claims are obvious. But if they succeed, they do establish a collective punctuation or periodization in the history of literature.

In line with White’s concept of self-similarity, I will now try to demonstrate that punctuation at the collective level relates to punctuation at the interpersonal level. The quality and punctuation of affect relations connected to Propp’s functions will serve to assign roles to

literary authors and critics that develop towards a rather dramatic denouement. The preliminary results presented here, suggest that the timing of evaluations triggers dramatic roles that reach a climax in short periods of collective judgement and changes in individual careers. I will analyse the data that I used before to depict the social structure of Dutch literary criticism, viz. all evaluations within a set of 40 literary authors and critics published in the years 1970-1979. Since I will restrict the analysis to first evaluations, it is important to note that most authors and critics started their careers in this decade. With respect to these authors and critics, first evaluations are covered. However, some of them started publishing before 1970, so it cannot be ruled out that some evaluations exist previous to the ones analysed. Therefore, results are preliminary.

Table 1 - Types of relations within Dutch literary criticism.

Type	Description	Symbol	Number
1	no positive or negative evaluations	<none>	
2	single positive evaluation from A to B	<none>	177
3	B reciprocates A's favourable judgement	B \longrightarrow A	13
4	B evaluates A negatively after A's positive evaluation of B	B \dashrightarrow A	9
5	single negative evaluation from A to B	<none>	104
6	B reciprocates A's unfavourable judgement	B \dashrightarrow A	11
7	B evaluates A positively after A's negative evaluation of B	B \dashrightarrow A	6
Total			320

Looking at the quality (positive or negative) and punctuation (which one was first) of evaluations, a relation between two members of the literary field may be classified according to seven types (see Table 1). The first type, viz. an empty relation is of little interest to us. It is represented in Table 1 for the sake of completeness only. The vast majority of relations within the case study turned out to be unilateral (types 2 and 5). However, Propp's roles concern mutual relations between two characters. Therefore I restrict my analysis to evaluations that

were ‘answered’ within the period studied (types 3,4, 6, and 7). Reciprocal relations (types 3 and 5), which are in balance, are slightly more numerous than unbalanced relations (types 4 and 6). Note that the arcs used to denote roles as types of relations carry different meanings than the arcs used to show single evaluations, e.g. in Figure 1. Now, they point towards the person that passed the first judgement.

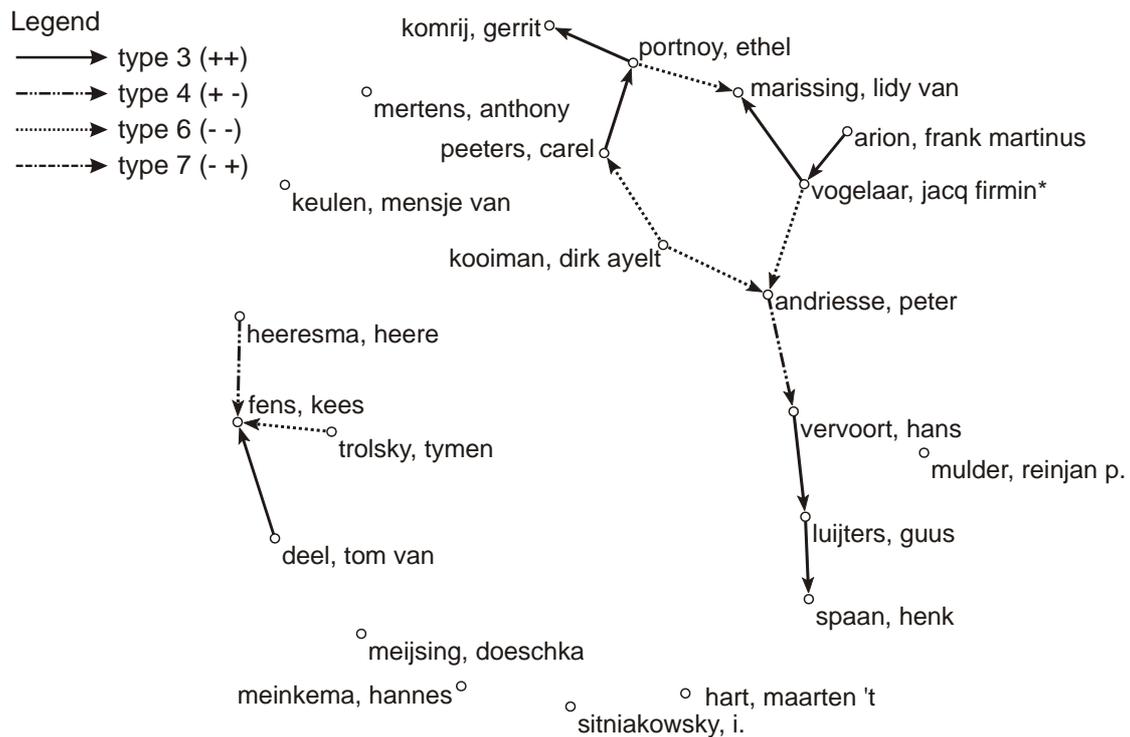


Figure 4 - Relational roles in March 1975.

For each day an evaluation was published, a network has been constructed containing the mutual relations that had been established up to this moment. Once a relational role is established, it does not change any more, since I only analyse the first positive or negative evaluation. Inspecting the evolution of the network, I notice two developments or ‘plots’ which are separate at first (see Figure 4). One plot revolves around a critic (Fens), the other involves some authors, notably Vogelaar en Van Marissing. The latter plot anticipates a classification according to movement. As early as 1972 Vogelaar en Van Marissing are clustered by mutual approval and mutual disapproval towards other authors. In 1974, both

The other plot reveals a steady accumulation of imbalance around the distinguished critic Fens. In the 1960s Fens established his name as a critic by introducing the literary theory of Wellek and Warren in Dutch literary criticism. Fens and his collaborators of the literary magazine *Merlyn* applied this method to Dutch literature, especially to works by poets and novelists that had won their spurs by that time. In the 1970s, Fens concentrated on reviewing contemporary Dutch prose in a weekly magazine. He praised most authors included in my case study. However, as of 1973 several authors expressed their disagreement or dissatisfaction with Fens in public. In consequence, Fens received three type 4 relations, whereas no other author or critic in this case study received more than one. Although the numbers are low, this suggests that the accumulation of type 4 relations is peculiar to him. Referring to Propp's morphology, this type of relation indicates a parent-role: positive towards the hero, but the hero breaks his promise or violates an interdiction, causing harm to the parents. Negative responses to appreciation pushes the benefactor in the role of a parent, an elder. In this perspective, the quality and punctuation of evaluations creates a boundary between literary generations at the collective level of the literary field: Fens marks the border between old and new literature. In spite of a reconciliation of hero and family as a happy ending in the tale, the story of this critic tends towards patricide. Near the end of 1977 Fens decides to quit reviewing contemporary Dutch prose. Members of the literary field considered this a tragedy.

Conclusion

This paper proposes to look upon stories as social action and models for social action. From this point of view, social theories and social methods should be applied to characters, events, and plots either to extract relational models or to compare social relations to narrated relations. Thus, scholars of literature may learn from sociologists. Fairy tales offer scripts for dealing with friends and enemies. It is quite likely that other narrative genres offer scripts too. Balance theory is a helpful theoretical point of view, although patterns of positive and

negative relations probably do not suffice to identify all functions. Additional structural properties must be looked for. Descriptions of genres drawn up by scholars of literature are valuable sources of data and suggestions on how to extend basic balance theoretic patterns of relations. Harrison White invites us to contribute to sociology in this way: “literary criticism has much to say about stories and their grammars and voices” (White 1992: 21). Do we accept his invitation?

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