

GENETIC NARRATOLOGY

ANALYSING NARRATIVE ACROSS VERSIONS



EDITED BY
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13. Genetic Narratology and the Novelistic Cycle across Versions

Lars Bernaerts

The novelistic cycle is one of the most ambitious literary forms. In many cases, it requires and is accompanied by a process of careful planning: the narrative arc of a novelistic cycle is often so vast that the author has to rely on extensive notes, sketches, drawings and so on to organise this narrative complexity. For literary scholars, too, these material traces offer insights into the narrative poetics of the cycle. In that respect, a genetic narratology (Bernaerts, Martens and Van Hulle 2011; Bernaerts and Van Hulle 2013) can not only be an aid in the narrative analysis of the cycle but also a way of recognising the ‘conceptual art’ of the novelistic cycle. In order to do justice to the scale and nature of the cycle, I propose an exploration in two movements. The first one considers a particular case in which the unusual genesis of the cycle materialises in the novel and is fictionalised in the narrative. The second one zooms out to the general narrative features of the cycle and its genesis, beaconing a text-genetic narrative analysis of the cycle. Together, the two movements demonstrate how at the intersection of genetic criticism and narratology, a better understanding of the novelistic cycle as narrative can emerge.

The Dossier and the Cycle: *Slow Light*

In 2010, the Dutch author Herman Franke published the novel *Slow Light* (*Traag licht*, 2010), not just the final novel of his oeuvre, in the year of his decease, but also the final novel of a cycle called *Beyond Me and True* (*Voorbij ik en waargebeurd*, 2007–2010). *Slow Light* was not supposed to be the final novel in the series. When it became clear to the author

that his illness was terminal, however, he decided to incorporate the process in the product, the genesis in the work, the unfinished workplan in the published work. As a result, the playful, funny and metafictional ensemble of novels about a portraitist—a man who fashions written portraits—ends with a bang, a cluster bomb of stories, sketches, portraits, but still with a clear story frame about the anonymous portraitist and his personal mission, his family and his relationships. In an interview Franke explains that he had planned to write a novel for the cycle every single year from a certain point on, but then he changed tack and started to include the notes for those novels in the final volume of the cycle (2010, 246). Indeed, not only does this novel contain stories that could have grown into novels, it refers to the looming death of the actual author and fictionalises this authorial figure.

How does this incorporation of the genetic dossier affect the narrative structure of the novel and how does genetic narratology come into the picture? First, the rhetoric of the narrator has a text-genetic dimension. The metafictional opening of the novel introduces a narrator who depends on his terminally ill 'boss':

Ongeneeslijk ziek. Niet lang meer te leven. Dat is verschrikkelijk voor de baas, maar wat moet ik daarmee? Goed, hij heeft me geschapen. Moet ik me daarom door hem laten afmaken? Ik begon net lekker op gang te komen. Ik ben nog lang niet klaar met mezelf en met al die anderen in me. Ik rekende op wel tien delen. (Franke 2010, 7)

[Terminally ill. Not long to live anymore. That is awful for the boss, but what am I supposed to do about that? Alright, he created me. Should I let him finish me off then? I was just beginning to pick up steam. I am not done with myself and with all these others in me. I was expecting ten volumes at least.]

On the one hand, the opening directs the reader's attention towards the reality of the cycle, the author's illness, and the writing process. The reality claim is corroborated by the paratextual publisher's note that precedes the opening, in which the death of the author is mentioned as the reason for the unfinished state of the novel. On the other hand, the opening *fictionalises* the author as a character who controls the life of the narrator. As long as the boss is alive, the narrator can continue telling his stories. By referring to this predicament in his narration, the narrator keeps the genesis of the text on the reader's radar.

Second, the ambiguous—real and fictionalised—presence of the cycle's genesis is strengthened by the insertion of notes between square brackets. The brackets index their temporary and unfixed status as a note by the author, a reading that is triggered by the paratextual information mentioned earlier. Sometimes the notes are like the stage directions in a script, the type of fascinating self-addressed instructions you can often find in modern manuscripts, as in 'finish this' (Franke 2010, 84), or 'maybe add something here about the work of David Claerbout' (193).¹ They become part of the narrator's discourse, where they are at once process and product.

For a narrative analysis of the notes from a genetic and narratological perspective, let us turn to one of those passages. When the anonymous first-person character meets his friend Ilonka in present-day Brussels, she reveals that she knows about his secret quest for a nineteenth-century female prostitute he knows from a picture. Then, suddenly, the text is interrupted and at the same time continued in the interruption (2010, 84):

[Afmaken. Ze heeft in New York een vriendje, een hackertype, dat mijn googlegedrag heeft weten te achterhalen. Ze weet dus niet alleen dat ik op zoek ben naar ene Mathilde, maar nog veel meer, ook dat ik heel vaak haar naam heb gegoogled (...)] (The ellipsis is mine, LB.)

[Finish this. She has a boyfriend in New York, a hacker of sorts, who managed to trace my google searches. Not only does she know that I am looking for Mathilde, but she knows much more, also that I have frequently googled her name (...)]

Immediately below this note between brackets is another one:

[Goed, nu ligt de baas weer in het ziekenhuis. (...) nu wordt het wel erg moeilijk het alleen maar over mezelf en al die anderen te hebben]. (The ellipsis is mine, LB.)

[Fine, now the boss is in the hospital again (...) now it becomes really difficult to only talk about myself and all the others].

A narrative analysis and a genetic narratology are instrumental in making sense of this passage. At first sight, these notes are clearly

1 David Claerbout is a contemporary Belgian video artist.

separated from the main text. They are put between brackets, set in another typeface (a sans-serif letter) and in a smaller font size. In that way, they are visually rendered as provisional and severed from the main text. The first word of the note ('Afmaken' ['Finish this']) suggests that the narrator of the note is the author who is instructing himself. This is the reading elicited paratextually in the preface, on the jacket blurb and in the interview added at the end of the novel. However, as the note continues, it is clear that the 'I' is still the character-narrator, the portraitist, who explicitly distinguished himself from the 'boss' in the opening of the novel. In the above note, the narrator mentions the boss again, drawing him further into the story: he explains that Ilonka knows about the imminent death of the boss. In the second note, the boss is about to die and he is in hospital again. Again, it is clear from the note that the narrator can only go on as long as the boss is alive. When he dies, the narrator has to quit as well.

The postmodern metafiction in this narrative situation is obvious, but it works as metafictional play because it also refers to the actual genesis of this novel and the cycle. If we read the narrative situation as *communication*—a conventional option but by no means the only one—then we can discern multiple channels and layers. Through the lens of rhetorical narratology and in James Phelan's terms (2017), we can see how the novel assumes an authorial audience that is cognizant of the author's predicament, while the narrative audience accepts the unusual relations between the narrator and the boss as a given. For the actual reader, the fun as well as the gravity of the narration lies in that double communication.

On my reading, the boss is the fictionalised flesh-and-blood alter ego of Herman Franke, quite literally reduced to flesh and blood, while the autodiegetic first-person narrator is his writing alter ego. In introducing a boss character, the narrator fictionalises the author, putting him on the same ontological plane as himself. Somehow the narrator knows how the boss is doing, so the boss is part of the same fictional world, but their relationship is also 'unnatural', as unnatural narratology would call it (see below). This means that it cannot be reduced to real-world parameters. The narrator emphasises that he depends upon the boss's survival. Calling him a 'boss' implies that the author-character has a certain power, while at the same time the narrator inverts the power

relations by creating him as a character. It is only in the narrator's words that this character takes shape.

This is a conventional metafictional gesture at first sight, but it gains special meaning from a genetic perspective. The self-instruction in the first sentence adds to the rhetorical and narrative complexity. To invoke Phelan's rhetorical definition of narrative, there is 'someone telling somebody else on some occasion for some purpose that something happened' (1996, 218). In this case, the first sentence is not retrospective (it is not the recounting of something that already occurred); instead it is an imperative, oriented towards the future. It has a silent narratee. The message in 'Finish this' is directed towards the extratextual author if we simply read the note as a document from the genetic dossier, but it is addressed to the narrating self who is writing the story if we consider the entire narrative context of the note. What is more, the initial sentence changes the status of what follows. 'She has a boyfriend in New York', seems to be simultaneous narration, but in fact, 'Finish this' indicates that the story of what Ilonka knows about the portraitist still has to be written, still has to be narrated in the future. The narrational act is ambiguous in this case. In Phelan's view, narrative is an action shaped by the narrator as well as the narrative audience (2018, 2). In this case, the action is telling the authorial and narrative audience that something happened but also telling the narratee along with the authorial audience that something has to be told.

The latter point reveals the cognitive function of the note as a note. It is a reminder, a placeholder, for something that will never come; it fills a gap in the text *and it creates* further gaps by suggesting possible additional volumes for the cycle. For the author, these notes are part of the 'extended mind' that is so characteristic of the creative process (Van Hulle 2014). The cognitive processes of planning, thinking ahead, developing ideas, remembering decisions about narrative progression and character development, are not just recorded on paper. They also emerge from the interaction between the author and the written traces, if we follow the logic outlined by the philosophers Andy Clark and David Chalmers in their pioneering article about the extended mind (1998).

For the reader, the notes enable the projection of stories, worlds and further volumes in the cycle. Prompted by the paratext, readers may activate their knowledge of the cycle as a whole to fill in the gaps and

imagine how the brief notes would have been expanded into novels. 'Would have been': arguably, this cognitive response engenders an experience of potentiality as well as loss. The alternative possible world the reader is invited to imagine is one in which Franke would have written several more books. In mentally responding to the cues in the novel, the reader is thus confronted with existential questions: what is the meaning of writing when life is ending, what does it mean to finish a cycle of novels that accompanies a writer's life, what is the role of the reader in retrieving those lost imagined worlds?

The previous paragraphs suggest that rhetorical and cognitive narratology help us to account for the powerful metafiction in this novel. Along the way, though, we notice that the narrative situation cannot be reduced to a natural communicative situation or a mimetic structure. Our text-genetic narrative approach can thus also benefit from unnatural narrative theory, developed by Jan Alber, Brian Richardson and other narratologists. Rather than simply explaining away this unnatural dimension, we should integrate it in our reading and consider how it supports narrative meaning-making. Illuminating in this respect are the reading strategies distinguished by Alber in *Unnatural Narrative: Impossible Worlds in Fiction and Drama* (2016, 47–57). In this case, the logical impossibilities of the narrative situation can be understood through 'the Zen way of reading'—accepting the unusual nature of this narrative aspect—or 'foregrounding the thematic': in *Slow Light* the metalepsis asks whether the intrusive reality of the human body (the boss figure) can trump the power of literary imagination.

All these narratological angles, which enrich the reading of the novel, can also feed into a genetic narratology. At stake here is the diachronic aspect of the writing process and the genetic story not just of the novel but of the entire cycle. The case of Franke leads us to a few broader points about genetic narratology and the cycle across versions. First, the example reminds us that works are, on some level or another, never finished and that the unfinished has an aesthetic value and a tradition in itself. In painting and sculpture, the deliberately unfinished style, which foregrounds the process of creation, is known as the *non finito*. In the case of the cycle, and certainly that of Franke, the constitutive relationships between parts and whole elicit reflections upon the possibility and impossibility of finishing a work. Second, the

writing process is emphatically present in Franke's novel. If one studies versions of literary works, however, one realises that the process is always also part of the product, and sometimes it can break through the barriers of the textual world. Again, the cycle offers a special case: until the final volume is published it leaves questions open by its nature, and remains 'process'. Third, on a methodological level, a functional genetic narratology integrates narrative concepts available in a range of narratologies today, such as, in this case, rhetorical, unnatural and cognitive narratology.

The Cycle's Narrative Complexity from a Genetic Perspective

In the second part of this chapter I want to zoom out from Franke's cycle to genetic narratology and the novelistic cycle across versions. What can genetic narratology do for the study of the novelistic cycle? How do the defining narrative features of the cycle evolve from one version to another? Clearly, the most interesting answers to these questions come from close readings of individual cycles, which is what the previous section suggests. However, there are some general insights we can glean from a broader comparative analysis of cycles and their genetic dossiers. In three respects, the study of the cycle and genetic narratology can cross-fertilise: a narratological approach to the genetic dossier can shed light on the narrative building blocks of the cycle's complex construction; theoretical frameworks in narratology can be refined and developed in the study of the cycle's genesis; and narratology offers an ideal vantage point to examine text-genetic narratives, i.e. the telling of stories about the writing process.

First of all, in view of the size and scope of many novelistic cycles, it is evident that planning and global structure become very important.² Material traces such as sketches, notes, drafts, even drawings and maps are vital in the process. An excellent example is Emile Zola's *Les Rougon-Macquart* (1871–93), the cycle of twenty novels that centers around a family during the Second Empire and sketches the social conditions of

2 More accurately, the cycle emerges from a creative interplay between planning, coincidence and revision.

the family and the hereditary relations between one generation and the next. Zola's preparatory materials, which are accessible online as well as offline (Becker 2003-2013),³ contain notes, sketches and drawings related to the plot, settings and characters of his cycle.⁴ The narratologist and genetic critic Philippe Hamon among others has examined how these narrative aspects develop across versions and in which ways the *avant-texte* shapes the published version (Hamon 1983; Hamon 1997), showing how they serve to support, reflect and advance the narrative and cognitive complexity of the cycle.

A particular type of complexity defines the novelistic cycle. It consists of a number of volumes that are perceived as autonomous narrative units, but at the same time contribute to the same overarching narrative. The cycle emerges from the manifold narrative relations between its parts, such as recurring settings, the continuation of plot patterns or the return of the same narrator—but also discontinuities such as temporal shifts, shifts from one main character to another one and so on. This combination of continuities and discontinuities creates a narrative complexity that goes hand in hand with a cognitive complexity. Just consider the challenge of the cycle for the reader as well as the author when it comes to long-term memory, to activating and re-activating the relevant mental schemata for recurring characters, their backstories, for a setting familiar from volume 1 and evoked again in volume 4 published ten years later.

In the genetic dossier, this complexity often materialises. For some novelistic cycles, the genetic dossier contains elegant lists, drawings, or tables which summarise the envisaged logic of the cycle. In some cases, the cycle is a form of conceptual art, one could argue: the artistic value already lies in the concept, in its graceful and neat design, in the instructions for its execution. This is another analogy with the visual arts, where conceptual art is widely recognised. In sum, to the extent that the notes, sketches, manuscripts are available, they give us an image of the type of narrative ambition and the scope of the ambition that goes into the cycle. The genetic dossier often visualises the narrative complexity

3 Manuscripts and other materials are accessible at the Bibliothèque nationale de France through Gallica (<https://gallica.bnf.fr>).

4 For a view from genetic criticism, see e.g. (Leduc-Adine 2002) and (Lumbroso and Mitterand 2002).

that results from relations between the parts and between the parts and projected whole. The experimental *Alpha Cycle* (1963–79) by the Belgian author Ivo Michiels, for example, displays the conceptual ambition of breaking down narrative and language step by step.⁵ Each volume contributes to that goal, each volume represents a step in that process. In a series of notes and what the genetic critic Pierre-Marc de Biasi calls the ‘precompositional and compositional schemata and sketches’ (1996), Michiels creates a conceptual blueprint for the cycle,⁶ in which each volume develops a certain concept: doubt, interchangeability, imprisonment, communication and death. Each volume also correlates to an autobiographical phase, a historical episode, and certain formalistic principles (such as rhythm and dialogue). The result is a complex grid of relations on which the narrative (and anti-narrative) of the four books is grafted.

From the perspective of the cycle as an ambitious conceptual and narrative art we can study the cycles across versions. An important recent impetus for this endeavour has been given in a special issue of *Genesis*,⁷ edited by Alain Pagès and Olivier Lumbroso, and devoted to the genetic criticism of the novelistic cycle. In France, the discipline of *critique génétique* has had a strong tradition since the 1960s (Van Hulle 2007, 11), the modern tradition of the novelistic cycle is particularly influential, and the theory of the novelistic cycle is well developed. The special issue acknowledges the legacy of *La Comédie humaine* (Balzac), *Les Rougon-Macquart* (Zola), *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Proust), *Les Thibault* (Roger Martin du Gard) and *Les Hommes de bonne volonté* (Jules Romains). These cycles and *romans-fleuves* open up a special space in genetic criticism, the editors argue, in the sense that they require a view that transcends an individual work and considers the macrotext, i.e. the artistic project of the ensemble. In their contributions to the issue,

5 The first two volumes were translated into English by Adrienne Dixon (Michiels 1979).

6 Undated notes on paper, kept in the archives of the Letterenhuis, Antwerpen. The status of the notes remains uncertain: it is plausible that they were made when Michiels had already started writing the first volumes. In any case, the blueprints do not yet mention the volume *Samuel, o Samuel* (1973), which was added as volume 3 ½ in the early seventies.

7 A more recent issue on serial writing (issue 54, 2022) is also relevant to this discussion. It examines popular seriality across versions, for example in crime fiction or the *Harry Potter* franchise.

Thomas Conrad, Aude Leblond and Christophe Pradeau, who helped develop a theory of the cycle in previous work (Conrad 2016; Leblond 2015; Pradeau 2000), demonstrate the importance of the genetic dossier for a theoretical and narratological understanding of the cycle. Their essays reveal how the narrative features that define the cycle as a cycle are foregrounded in the *avant-texte*. Building on this, a genetic narratology can provide a touchstone for the analysis of those features. We can distinguish four narrative parameters that typify the cycle (but that do not necessarily occur to the same extent in particular examples): (1) the return of characters; (2) the fundamental relationship between temporal structure and the theme of time; (3) the way in which closure is distributed, with weak closure in individual volumes and strong closure for the complete cycle; and (4) the principle of cyclicity that complicates narrative linearity.⁸ The genetic dossier offers insight into the conceptual narrative art of the cycle and the conceptual role played by these narrative aspects, which are the core business of the cycle. A few examples may illustrate this point. The role of recurring characters and temporality as theme and structure, for example, clearly surfaces in the genetic dossiers of novelistic cycles that I have been able to look into. In varying degrees, they are clearly given narrative priority during the writing process, for example in the *Gangreen Cycle* by Jef Geeraerts, published between 1967 and 1977, a semi-autobiographical cycle of four novels. The available documents suggest that Geeraerts organises the novels and the relations between the novels around characters which he lists and supplements with anecdotes and character traits, and also around moments in time. For each volume of the cycle there are a number of sheets with a chronological order and then a sketch for the narrative for the relevant years.⁹ Figure 13.1 is an example from *Gangreen IV*, which shows the procedure Geeraerts already uses in *Gangreen I*: each bit of narrative information is tied to a date or brief period in time ('March-April', 'May-June', '8/7/1963').

In the first volume, the most rudimentary structure is a list of women who then represent episodes in time. Figure 13.2 shows one of the sheets from that dossier. Leaving aside the intriguing stylistic self-instructions

8 The studies that argue for these aspects as fundamental are Aranda 1997, Bernaerts 2022, Besson 2004, Conrad 2016, Pradeau 2000.

9 The author's archives are kept at the Letterenhuis in Antwerp.

(‘cool observation’, ‘control’, ‘cold irony’), we can see that list of women on the left as the narrative skeleton for *Gangreen I*. In the third volume, there is an interesting shift from character to setting in that phase: setting becomes more important as a structuring device. Figure 13.3 shows a list of locations from the author’s childhood, which will structure the novel. Visually and conceptually, the note prioritises settings over characters: the characters are associated with the setting on this sheet.

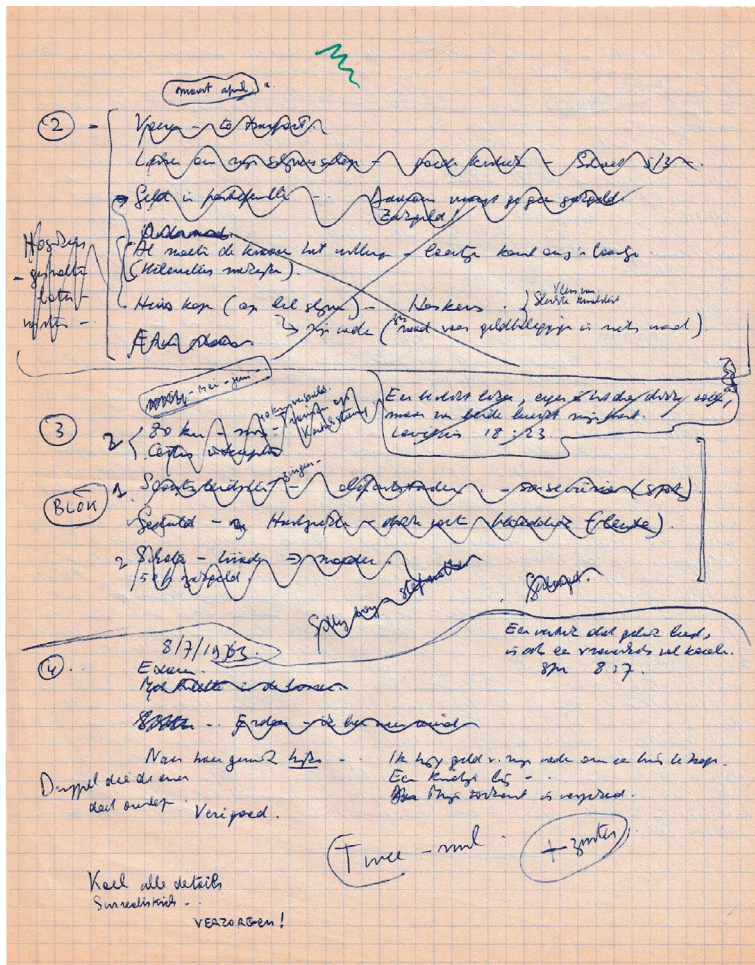


Fig. 13.1 Jef Geeraerts, notes for *Gangreen IV* (1977). Collectie Stad Antwerpen, Letterenhuis.

Het Huis tussen de Schedels

*Piet m'n moeder liep
Vader achterna.*

Gangreen III BAADE 28/6/1974
40-41

~~Piet van Hildebrandt - Tempelmeier~~

Haarstraat 17 } *Boekpaal v.s. n.*
Stoelstraat 6 (Madie Jellingh) } *Boekpaal*
Keistraat (Driessch) 41 } *1e wijk*

Dome des Halles. Bachtan Maria Leene (⇒ DRONGE).
Roosendaal. (Piet's moeder).
Nankel Jan de massena (boekwijf - joden)
Tante Lige - met roedel Euskepijden. 2000000's

Vlaamse Markt 23 - S^r Michielskari (cafés).

S^r Bernadine stuy 584 - Eigenen (Droogst - van de Hooftposten)
Savage (Bos Nadel Chmel - steekwonden - stellingen) } *Selonte Enay
in café
(piano)*

Tin - M^r Kisten - Jillen - karraden - Centra -

The Sibert (kuyf kuyf - Jillen) } *Mugrit
D^r Lechabee*
Van Volsen } *Louis (proet).
Wustad*

Franse De Racer } *Hubert Hoos
Vader Hoos - V. u. - jellie*
Jonny Liekens (Brommelde moeder - jellie) } *on van de Betsen
(schoot - v. u. - jellie)*

Jaques Zimmermann } *Valer Langen - Carlo Va Redde
Huy Van d'udeghem*

Jonny Van Marseille

M^r de Japh - Marthe (hans) - tinnen - Tante Jet.
Zandstraat 45 - Marinduy (Jan - Annie -) 95 - Fieke -
Schilderijen - Nadel Guit - Maria - Yvette - piano - Buide 1929
Tante Jean - Minge 11 - Wast 101 - Offendertant -
Piet 64 - Delist 13. (Lieve v. Heideval)

Fig. 13.3 Jef Geeraerts, notes for *Gangreen III* (1975). Collectie Stad Antwerpen, Letterenhuis.

The first novel, *Gangreen I: Black Venus*,¹⁰ famously deals with the erotic escapades of a colonial official in the Belgian Congo from 1955 until the battle for independence in 1960. The narrative stands out for the combination of a monologous flowing narrational style and an episodic structure. The episodes are mainly tied to the women

10 The novel was first published in 1967 and translated into English by Jon Swan in 1975 (Geeraerts 1975).

with whom the Belgian colonial officer hooks up. It is this structure that the preparatory notes already make visible. In the novel itself, the textual genesis and the relations between novel and cycle crop out in a telling note: ‘....I skip the period of 22 April until 16 March 1960. Perhaps later I will write about it, or maybe not...’ (Geeraerts 2003, 185: my translation, LB). In a way similar to the example of *Slow Light*, the note interrupts the flow of the narrative, foregrounds the narrator’s and the author’s writing process and emphasises the temporal and thematic coherence of the novel. For the main character, the deleted period is a period of battle and violence. The first volume of the cycle, however, foregrounds themes of vitality and sexuality. It is only in the second volume, centring around violence, that this episode will be narrated.

Another example is a four-part cycle by Walter van den Broeck, *The Siege of Laeken* (1985–92). The author’s archive contains a number of documents, drawings, sketches, diagrams, and timelines that show and support the narrative complexity of the cycle. In particular, again, the temporality and the distribution of characters are conceptually planned ahead. Van den Broeck uses timelines in and across the volumes to pre-structure his narrative. Figure 13.4 shows such a timeline for the second volume of the cycle, *Gek leven na het bal!* (1989), in which the narrator looks back on his relationship with his German friend Ursula and his trip to her hometown Paderborn. In Figure 13.5, the timeline exceeds the boundaries of the individual volume. It visualises the narrative arc of the entire cycle, from ‘moorddroom’ [‘murder dream’] to ‘droommoord’ [‘dream murder’]: the two palindromes indicate how the beginning and the ending of the cycle mirror each other, emphasising the cyclical nature of the ensemble of novels. In the cases of Geeraerts, Van den Broeck and others, the narrative core business of the novelistic cycle is materially prominent in the genetic dossier.

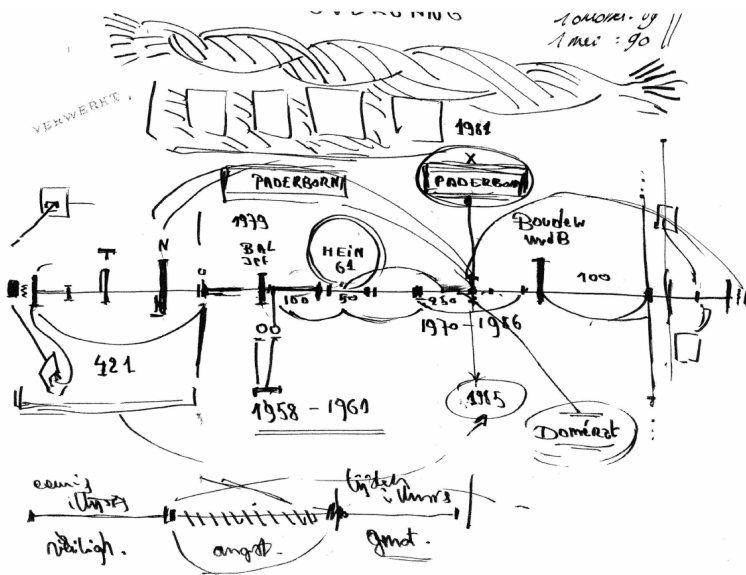


Fig. 13.4 Walter van den Broeck, timeline for *Gek leven na het bal!* (1989). Collectie Stad Antwerpen, Letterenhuis.

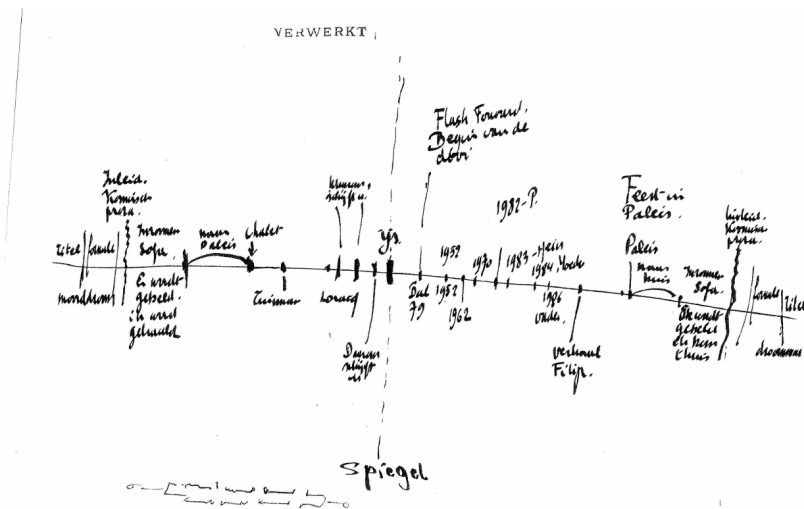


Fig. 13.5 Walter van den Broeck, timeline for *The Siege of Laeken*. Collectie Stad Antwerpen, Letterenhuis.

The second point is that our theoretical understanding of narrative can be advanced by the study of the cycle's genesis. It can be a catalyst in the development of theory. Key works in narratology took interest in the novelistic cycle. Philippe Hamon examines the system of characters in Zola's cycle while at the same time contributing to a theory of characters in *Le personnel du roman* (1983). The equivalent for 'time and temporality' is Gérard Genette in *Narrative Discourse* (1972). He analyses temporal relations in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, laying bare the chronology, the complex anachronies, the amount of acceleration and deceleration, the significance of iterative narration. It is telling that in Genette's pioneering work the narrative analysis transcends the boundaries of an individual work, and this in fact made the model possible. For the narrative theory of character and time, it has proven valuable to turn to the cycle across versions.

Third and finally, genetic narratology has a role in analysing and demystifying the genetic narrative itself, the story about the writing process and the genesis of a literary work. The novelistic cycle is one of those literary phenomena that give rise to elaborate and successful genetic narratives. Those genetic narratives are often but not always told by the authors themselves. Sometimes they acquire the status of a myth. These myths refer to material processes but become infused with ideas about creation and creativity, authorship and readership, craftsmanship and visionary qualities. They can be analysed as narrative discourse with referential traces in the genetic dossier. A.F.Th. Van der Heijden is the author of *The Toothless Time* (1983-present), a novelistic cycle that is not finished yet but already consists of nine parts (about twenty books) and more than 6000 pages. At several points in his career, he narrativises his own working process and the genesis of the cycle in essays, interviews and letters. In that genetic narrative the always expanding cycle goes back to a manuscript he started writing around 1967, when he was sixteen years old, in which he fictionalises the main themes of his life (De Roder 1986, 58). A few years later, he wrote a novel which would be repeatedly revised until it became *The Toothless Time* (see e.g. Van der Heijden 2003, 93; Van der Heijden 2006). That narrative is not only created in interviews and egodocuments, but also integrated in the cycle itself. As in the case of Franke, the genetic process is fictionalised in Van der Heijden's work. Genetic narratology can examine the strategies of

narrativisation involved, the material traces that back up or belie the story and the way genetic stories are integrated in fiction. In that sense, genetic narratology provides the tools to debunk the myth, to analyse the actual material traces and the transformation into the narrative told by authors, publishers, critics, fans and scholars.

Conclusion

As part of the aesthetic value of novelistic cycles often already lies in its design, the cycle is a conceptual art. Since the novelistic cycle is not just a conceptual but also a narrative art, we need a narrative theory geared towards those material traces of the design, to the diachronic dimension inherent in it, and also to the intricacies of the cycle. Genetic narratology can contribute to the understanding of the cycle, first in the development of a narrative theory of the cycle—which is still fragmented –, second as a touchstone for narrative analysis and third for the research into the story of a work's genesis, the genetic narrative.

The narrative analysis of cycles across versions also benefits from particular narratological frameworks for a better understanding of the mentioned narrative and cognitive complexity. As the case of Herman Franke demonstrated, a combined cognitive, rhetorical and unnatural narratology illuminates the powerful and playful rhetoric of the cycle in *Slow Light*, where the genetic narrative becomes part of the narrative text and adds another layer in the narrative communication. Along those lines, we can refine, combine and expand the available narratological concepts to improve our understanding of the large-scale narrative projects we call cycles.

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