

Narratology and the Convention Refugee Claim: Re-ontologizing the subject in Canadian Immigration Hearings discourse.

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Canadian Immigration Convention Refugee Status Hearings are taped and then transcribed by private firms who furnish legal-size word-processed documents to Immigration Canada. These transcriptions are the principal means by which the Refugee Status Advisory Committee in Ottawa can judge the validity of the claims made by immigrants who claim refugee status. These transcriptions resound with a multiplicity of voices that speak out from a single source the narrative of the claimant. Transcriptions echo with the voices of narrators, authorial speech, the speech of characters, inserted genres, reported speech, and vocalized emotions. In the *Dialogic Imagination*, Mikhail Bakhtin used the term "heteroglossia" to refer to the many voices that speak through a single narration, and he elaborates upon this notion in his search for the links and interrelationships between the many strands of narration that are woven together in the novel.<sup>1</sup> If Bakhtin's theory is correct, then we should be able to utilize it as a starting point for sorting through the vast array of information contained in a single discourse. But to assess the validity of a refugee claim, the first step would be to untangle the individual strands within the fabric of a given narrative by searching for underlying patterns or inconsistencies. By isolating different voices, a single 'authentic' voice might then be discernible amongst the cacophony, a voice that speaks for the subject at the hearings instead of for any (or all) subjects claiming refugee status from certain countries. In other words, if we are to re-ontologize the subject in immigration discourse, it will be necessary to assert that a refugee who claims refugee status is an individual with his or her own characteristic drives, fantasies, desires, and perspectives. To speak for this person, to trace *his/her voice*, would require a consistent, verifiable, (read SCIENTIFIC) methodology that could help analysts (ie. the Committee) find their way through 24 000 refugee claims per year, some of them over one hundred pages long. As Richard Reiner has pointed out,<sup>2</sup> one of the few literary sub-genres willing to make a claim for its scientificity is narratology, and one of the most thorough narratological treatments of a long text is found in Genette's *Figures III* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972). Following a general introduction to the refugee process, pertinent sections from Genette's "Discours du récit: essai de méthode" will be applied to sections of Convention Refugee Hearings in an effort to tease out the various voices present in the single narrative.

If it is utopian to imagine that such a methodology could locate "voices," the Committee might nonetheless hope to finish the narratological analysis with a close reading of the text which would reveal, amongst other things, if (and perhaps 'why') certain facts, chronologies, or narratological combinations consistently reappear in the narrative. With respect to his analysis of Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* Genette notes:

L'analyser, c'est aller non du général au particulier, mais bien du particulier au général: de cet être incomparable qu'est la *Recherche* à ces éléments fort communs, figures et procédés d'utilité publique et de circulation courante que j'appelle anachronies, itératif, focalisations, paralepses, et autres. (p. 68)

It is not my intention to apply Genette's complete methodology to certain transcripts, but to provide an idea of the ways in which narratology could be used to sort out and identify narrative strands that combine to form a single narration.

#### \* A General Introduction to the Refugee Process

The procedure for making a refugee claim follows from regulations set forth in sub-section 45 (1) of the Canadian Immigration Act of 1976. According to this Act, all foreigners who enter Canada have the right to claim "refugee status" at the port of entry. Subsequently, a short fact-finding interview is held, and a date is set for the Hearing. The basic rules for this Hearing were established in the Geneva Convention on Refugees, and Canada's laws pertaining to refugees were modified in 1976 to accord with the tenets of this agreement. The most significant clause for our purposes is that which sketches, in broad strokes, a portrait of a "convention refugee." He or she is a person who, by reason of a well-founded fear of persecution for reason(s) of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion

(a) is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable, or by reason of such fear, is unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country, or,

(b) not having a country of nationality, is outside of his/her former habitual residence and is unable, or by reason of such fear, is unwilling to return to that country.

At the outset of the Hearing, this definition is read aloud to those present. The group consists of: a Senior Immigration Officer (S.I.O.) who represents Immigration Canada and who ensures that all of the mechanics of the Hearing are carried out in accordance with the law; a refugee (the "person concerned"); an interpreter (if required); a Counsel (if the person concerned so desires); and a group of observers who are not given the right to speak unless spoken to.

Following the reading aloud of the definition, there is a short question and answer period in which the subject is asked to respond, with a simple "yes" or "no," to five questions:

Do you, Mr (Ms) X have a well-founded fear of persecution by reason of

i) race?

ii) religion?

iii) nationality?

iv) membership in a particular social group?

v) political opinion?

The problem areas, once established, are then elaborated with the assistance of the Interpreter, the S.I.O., and the Counsel. The statement is meant to be chronological, complete, and without factual errors:

During your statement, try to keep a chronological order of the events, and please be as precise as you can concerning the dates, the places, and the names of any persons mentioned during your examination. Your Counsel may assist you by asking questions. I might also intervene to clarify some points.

The S.I.O. does not have the power to make any recommendations or judgments during the examination, and he/she has no decision-making power in the case. Instead, a tape is made of the Hearings, which is subsequently transcribed by a private word-processing company. Once completed, one copy of the transcript is sent, with all accompanying documentation, to the *Refugee Status Advisory Committee* in Ottawa. The second copy is sent to the Counsel (if applicable) and the third is sent to the Person Concerned.

The Person Concerned is informed at the outset of the Hearing that the Committee is aware of the general situation that exists in the country of origin, and therefore he/she is asked to limit the statement to facts and events pertinent to the particular case. The Committee reviews the documents and makes its recommendations to the Minister of Immigration. Based on the recommendation, the Minister then decides if the Person Concerned is a Convention Refugee. What follows is a proposed methodology which might serve as a guide or consistent approach for a Committee that is burdened with the social and political responsibility of making a decision which will dictate how and where an already-persecuted and uprooted individual will live in the future.

\* Narratology: an approach

Narratology offers the critic (or, in the case of refugee claims, the Committee) the alluring prospect of a "scientific" methodology applicable to a broad range of texts. The scientificity of the method suggests the possibility that the application process could be non-discriminatory, that cases could be judged according to facts instead of according to the biases of the Committee members (or the government office from which it receives its mandate). The supposed "scientificity" of narratology has led to serious questions about the validity of any language

theory based on *immanence*; but at the same time, narratology has been applied by cultural critics who in their search for a 'close reading' that is less reliant upon an impressionistic criterion, have integrated into their own work the elaborate methodology begun by Propp, and since improved upon by its most influential practitioners Gérard Genette, Tzvetan Todorov, Julien Greimas, and Roland Barthes.

The choice of Genette's *Figures III* reflects a widespread confidence in a theory which has been applied with a high level of success to the long and complex novel *A la Recherche du temps perdu*,

Notamment le chapitre intitulé «Discours du récit: Essai de méthode» dans *Figures III*, qui représente une contribution décisive à l'étude scientifique des formes littéraires.<sup>3</sup> Fayolle emphasizes the detail and precision of this "analyse microscopique," the way in which an entire "grammaire du récit" evolves from a single phrase (in the case of an analysis of a refugee Hearing the most general statement would be, say, "refugee becomes citizen," or "refugee fantasizes about being Canadian"). This method, this "amplification du verbe"(p. 215) is, according to Fayolle, essential to a close reading of a large-scale work:

...Genette propose un programme de travail, dont tout critique devrait aujourd'hui tenir compte dès qu'il s'agit de décrire minutieusement l'organisation structurelle....

In fact, what turns out to be important for an analysis of Convention Refugee Hearings is not Genette's "analyse microscopique" that pinpoints and names certain figures, but rather his study of the *relations* these figures have to one another. It is these relations which stand at the centre of the analysis that the Committee will be asked to perform. Thus for any given case, it will be necessary (as Genette notes) to carry out several interrelated microscopic studies simultaneously:

L'analyse du discours narratif sera donc pour nous, essentiellement, l'étude des relations entre récit et histoire, entre récit et narration, et... entre histoire et narration. (p. 74)

The Committee would begin their study of the "narration" in the *identification section*, where name, fixed address, job history, marital status and so on are noted. In "le récit" that follows, they would then isolate the details of the particular chronotope. Finally, the narrated events could be compared to "l'histoire," the amalgamation of all information about the country that the Committee has glossed from embassies, previous cases, newspaper reports, and so on. Once this is performed, the more important task of discovering the *relations* between the facts can be undertaken. Studying these relations instead of concentrating upon the elements in isolation ensures that uninformed Committee members who think they have found "lies" and "discrepancies" are made to realize that the refugee's notion of time can be incompatible with ours:

...given then that some asylum seekers of non-Western origin perceive time in a different way,

the insistence of most officials on exact dates and consistency of statements on the temporal setting of events raises a serious problem.... cross-cultural differences of time perception can seriously hinder the accurate assessment of credibility during the asylum hearing.<sup>4</sup>

Thus 'le récit' must be analyzed in relation to 'l'histoire,' and to the perspective of the narrator. If Genette's methodology is applied with full consciousness of the importance of this relationship, then it will help Committee members with fundamental problems concerning "truth" because all facts would necessarily be judged according to the value system proposed by the narration.

Genette's study relies upon an intensive study of 'time' as reflected in the verbs of the narration. The narrative has two distinctive (but related) sequences "le temps de la chose racontée" and "le temps du récit." This distinction, as applicable to immigration hearings as it is to cinema or fiction, could be of great importance to a Committee which is trying to unearth the salient episodes in the narrative (i.e. they might begin by noting when time seems to "slow down," when more details of a particular incident are provided). This relation could then be studied with respect to three essential components:

*l'ordre temporel de succession des événements dans la diégèse et l'ordre pseudo-temporel de leur disposition dans le récit,...les rapports entre la durée variable de ces événements, ou segments diégétiques, et la pseudo-durée de leur relation dans le récit,... (et) rapports enfin de fréquence..relations entre les capacités de répétition de l'histoire et celles du récit....(p. 78)*

We begin with the question that initiates "le récit" in the refugee immigration hearing: "When did you first begin to feel persecution in your country?" In theory, "le récit," continues through to the conclusion of the Hearing. In fact, we might wish to revise Genette's theory to account for the multiplicity of narrations that occur during one hearing; all claimants are asked to prove their claims for any (or all) of the five possible areas of persecution outlined in the law (race, religion, country of origin, political beliefs). We could, in other words, have several different "récits" which, as far as the Committee is concerned, have little or nothing to do with one another. If a claimant was persecuted as a result of his or her country of origin, for example, the S.I.O. will ask for a full narration of the circumstances surrounding this particular persecution; then if there is also a history of persecution based on religion, the narrator will provide the information to back up this claim, and so on. This may be another point from which we could carry on a search for different "voices" in the text:

Q. Mrs. Mayagam, we are concentrating now solely upon the incidents pertaining to persecution resulting from your political beliefs.

A. Okay.

Q. Okay. Should you go to K., in V., in M., or anywhere else and say "well, for myself, I really think that I am tired of all these problems, and the only way we are going to have peace is by having a separate country." If you did this....

A. If I tell anything, utter a word about a separate nation, that would be the last day of my life.

Q. Now that is what we wanted to hear. Okay.\*

Mrs. Mayagam is herein speaking vaguely about her political ideals -- "peace," "separate country," and her inability to "utter a word" in public about her beliefs. This is Mrs. Mayagam the concerned but oppressed citizen, the sometimes politically-motivated or politically-interested person. As a mother, we learn later on in the testimony, she is more concerned about the mental and physical harm that could be inflicted upon her children if she were to remain in the country than she is about the independence of her nation (since independence does not guarantee non-violence). These are more emotional pleas, pleas from a mother who is looking for a haven against violence, oppression, and bloodshed. In pleading for these different cases the mother uses different vocabularies, different styles, and she speaks from disparate perspectives. We recall Jameson's study of the subject in discourse; he notes that the existence of a stable and consistent subject is increasingly problematic because of "our insertion as individual subjects into a multidimensional set of radically discontinuous realities."<sup>5</sup> We might challenge Jameson on some of the assumptions that underly this statement, and point out that most analyses that might be employed to discern between different "realities" fall short because of their ethnocentricity (a problem which undoubtedly plagues even the more "scientific" or supposedly "objective" narratological or semiotic analyses -- including the one by Genette to which we are presently referring); but the Mayagam example does give credence to Jameson's basic claim. Nonetheless, we are still left with the task of identifying and defining these "discontinuous realities" and studying the characteristics of the individual's speech that name or identify them.

These narrations, these elucidations of the persecution felt by the individual claimant, are fundamentally "autodiagetic." The refugee is not only inside the narrative, but he/she also figures as the principal character. Sometimes, however, he/she is forced to rely upon other voices (i.e. reported speech) who report on events, describe circumstances, inform, and so on (these often take the form of "analepses externes" or "analepses internes"). Thus, for example, when the refugee is asked to explain how the guards normally work in the prison, or what role a particular official plays in the government hierarchy, the narrator speaks of things about which he has no direct knowledge and his speech becomes "hétérodiagétiques." (p. 91) Genette's method helps us to locate these voices within the cacophony of narratives by pointing to other possible relations between the time of the narrative and narrative time; homodiegetic (inside the narrative as in first person stories), heterodiegetic (absent from his/her own narrative), or autodiegetic. Again, we would need a new category for refugee claims since Genette cannot account for an "interview" style narrative. The impetus in such an autodiegetic narrative comes from outside (the Counsel, the interpreter, the S.I.O.). We could call this, perhaps, a "controlled autodiegetic discourse." The narrative has a "controlled" beginning and end, and discussions that do not pertain directly to the issue are immediately cut short by the interrogators:

Q. Sir, I will interrupt you. It is very interesting to know what your feelings were, but the question was for a date: the question started with a "when" and the "when" calls for a very short answer, and it is a date.

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\* Examples of Refugee's statements, although realistic, are fictional. They make no reference to any persons, living or dead.

A. Between August and September.

Q. Very good.

Since the goal of the refugee is to be accepted into Canada, the narration will appear to be forthright and directed, with each fact or reference serving as an adequate illustration or explanation for the issue discussed. Finding the rumours, the advice, or the misinformation in the text would help to clarify the motivations behind the actions taken by the refugee:

Q. Did you have any trouble with Immigration leaving C.?

A. No.

Q. Why did you choose Canada?

A. Because in this country democracy really exists.

Q. Who told you about Canada?

A. A friend of mine knew that Canada was helping people who had these kinds of problems. Political ones, I mean.

Q. I've noticed that your itinerary was as follows: Santiago, Buenos Aires, Miami, New York. Correct?

A. Rio de Janeiro too.

Q. Had you not contemplated claiming refugee status or political asylum in any of those countries?

A. They are not real democracies.

This *style* of narrative also demands a different methodology, a segmentation of fragments which can take into account the interview's interruptions, clarifications and summaries. Genette gives no clear indication of how a simple dialogue in a novel could be segmented, although it would appear the method outlined in the chapter "ordre" could accommodate numerous variations in speech patterns. The difficulty with an interview, particularly one involving several interrogators and/or respondents, would be in allocating the various summaries and comments made by the interviewers. For example, sometimes the Counsel describes, for the sake of the Committee, the actions or emotions displayed by the refugee during the interview. How could we account for the

*order* of the narrative when summaries or descriptions are made by somebody other than the narrator?

Q. For the benefit of the Refugee Status Advisory Committee, who will be studying this case, Mrs Nayagam is obviously experiencing some emotional distress, thinking of her family and her country.

In an analysis of the various voices in the transcription, questions or summaries of this sort would have to be relegated to the role of sub-text which would later be analyzed and correlated with the results of the principal analysis. Furthermore, except in long, illustrative, non-interrupted passages, statements pertaining to the "position temporelle" of the segments and the hierarchy of certain segments relative to others could only be made with a clause explaining the role and the importance of interjections during the interview.

To broaden the narrative expanse, and to deepen its significance, Genette then turns to "durée," a critical part of the analysis process as presently practiced by Genette and, in fact, by Immigration Canada. One of the most easily verifiable array of facts provided by the refugee concerns the dates of major events, including riots, assaults, assassinations, political atrocities, celebrations, and so on that occurred in the country of origin. The S.I.O. then turns to "la chronologie interne," details concerning the chronotope of the claim. This is the area in which the S.I.O. attempts to "trip up" the refugee by pointing to inconsistencies in the testimony:

Q. When was it?

A. I think it was December, I don't remember.

Q. 1986 or 1987?

A. Not 1986, not 1987.

Q. It was 1985?

A. I think so.

Q. Okay.

A. But I'm not sure.

Q. You are not sure. It could be 1986?



A. Maybe, because I go...

Q. Because this document is dated 6th of February, 1986.

The chronology that the Committee establishes also helps to locate the refugee's testimony within an array of other narratives from refugees. Canada usually receives Convention refugee claims from large groups of refugees who have fled a particular nation all at the same time. This occurs when travel restrictions between nations are eased, when boatloads of refugees arrive on Canada's shores, and so on.

Genette is not interested in this chronology per se, but in its relationship to the chronology of "l'histoire" (i.e. real time) and also the time that the reader takes to read the document. Studying the testimony reveals that intensive, drawn-out descriptions of important events are rarely deviations or detours, but rather they serve to bring the testimony as close as possible to what Genette calls "notre hypothétique degré zéro" (p. 123). Passages in which time thickens and events are described in microscopic detail are generally described diagetically, and thus they represent firm ground upon which one could place a claim for the narrator's authentic voice. Here, in near "real-time" the refugee relives his/her persecution, and it is generally here that all other voices normally present in the discourse are hushed as they listen the voice of "experience." These descriptions are often chronological, filled with vivid details, and they often contain details of the refugee's physical strain (detected thanks to Counsel's interruptions or

Q. What did you see?

A. The four were dead.

Q. Did you see your brother's body?

A. Yes.

Q. What did it look like?

A. They had shot him in the face. All of this was totally destroyed, and he had many gunshots in his legs.

Q. When you say this, we are on tape, your gestures cannot be seen. What are you pointing to?

A. As they shot him through the face, it exploded out of the back of his head. His brains had exploded out of the back of his head and....

Q. Would you like a break?

With the Counsel's urging, the passage "the four were dead" is examined and re-examined in ever more minute detail, and as the narrative continues there is increasing "contemplation" in which the narrator, like the narrator in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, becomes ever more active and therefore 'present' in the discourse:

On le voit, la contemplation chez Proust n'est ni une fulguration instantanée (comme la reminiscence) ni un moment d'extase passive et reposante: c'est une activité intense, intellectuelle et souvent physique, dont la relation, somme toute, est un récit comme un autre. (p. 138)

Genette's conclusion, that "contemplation chez Proust" is not a "pause" but rather a time of intense activity, is equally true for refugee Hearings. Such contemplation, such reconsideration of events that occurred in the narrator's life, is the period in which the subject emerges most vividly against the background of many narratives -- the "heteroglossia."

The final section of *Figures III*, "fréquence," describes "sans doute la plus décisive" modification of the Proustian text. Here the critic is given the tools to account for the oft-discussed but difficult to analyze "Proustian moment."

Il est tentant de rapporter cette caractéristique (ivresse de l'itération) à ce qui serait l'un des traits dominant de la psychologie proustienne, à savoir un sens très vif de l'habitude et de la répétition, le sentiment de l'analogie entre les moments. (p. 153)

Given that "fréquence" in a refugee testimony is controlled by the questions posed more than by the narrator, this section is less interesting to the Committee than the previous two. What is of interest to the Committee is the ways in which Genette analyzes the composition of "le récit itératif." Envisioning a single narrative as a *series* of chronologies allows the Committee to focus in on salient events within their respective time frames. Since, as a matter of course, the interview begins with a rough chronology ("the government started harassing me every day after work in 1974") which is later fleshed out ("they came to my house on the 4th of November and each weekday thereafter"), Genette's prescribed methodology for analyzing "fréquence" is both appropriate and easily applicable.

Tout récit itératif est narration synthétique des événements produits et reproduits au cours d'une *série* itérative composée d'un certain nombre d'*unités* singulières. (p. 157)

Picking out the different "unités singulières" allows for the most economical and substantive method of determining all possible time frames within which relevant actions occurred. The Committee, to verify or clarify the transcript (or to assemble a set of questions for a later hearing) might wish to begin an analysis with these "traits distinctifs:" determination (every day after work in 1974); specification (weekdays beginning November 4th), and extension (they came for two hours each time). In the analysis of "traits distinctifs" the Committee would begin

by establishing the 'normal lifestyle' an individual living in Ghana in 1974 by (for example) noting certain adverbs (i.e. usually, often, most days, frequently, regularly, etc.), and only later turn to "les diachronies internes et diachronies externes," (p. 167) "les alternances et transitions," (p. 170) and so on. Genette's methodology does not, in this case, ask anything *new* of either the Committee or the interviewers (S.I.O. and Counsel). It simply ensures that avenues of analysis are carefully mapped out and explored; when the series of choices that faced the refugee are better understood, the actions that he or she took might appear in a new light. Although this section contributes less to our search for a living, breathing, desiring subject in the immigration discourse, it does help to clarify the relationship between the individual's own narrative and what is "acceptable" within a given chronotope.

What follows, in Genette's study, is to determine the "mode" of "le récit," the answer to the question "Quel est le personnage dont le point de vue oriente la perspective narrative?" (p. 203) This is a study of the point of view from which the narrative is recounted. The refugee claim has a narrower orientation than a novelist does because there is an identifiable aim towards which the narrative is directed. Furthermore, there are clear-cut guidelines governing the narrative, and the refugee is assigned an assistant (Counsel) to explain the rules of the Hearings (ie. the Immigration Act). The substance of Genette's analysis in the chapter "mode" is therefore undermined, because the narrative will always be told with the same intention; whereas for a Proust novel, the point of view could be altered to achieve a different effect on the reader.

In immigration testimony, there is ample evidence of failed attempts to seduce the Committee because they attempt to project a more "likeable" character, and by doing so demonstrate the ways in which a refugee tries to guess the desire of the other. In doing so, he/she relies upon advice from lawyers, friends, refugee smugglers, and so on. But they are up against a legal system which, like their own discourse, is informed by different processes, values, norms, and structures of meanings. The refugee must be made to feel comfortable and confident *with his/her own story* so that he doesn't feel the need to rely upon erroneous advice.

Q. Just one second. Before we go to 1986, we jumped from 1983 to 1986. Am I to understand that you did not have any political problems from 1983 to 1986?

A. I was told to make my declaration short.

Walter Kälin notes that

Many (refugees) ... are victims of what Oberg (1960) calls "culture shock" and Furnham Bochner (1982:171) describes as the "bewildering, confusing, depressing, anxiety-provoking, humiliating, embarrassing and generally stressful" situation of persons who move from one culture to another. Especially in the case of refugees from Third World countries, the experience of culture shock obviously can gravely impair the applicant's ability to make a forceful statement: such an asylum seeker may speak in a confused, nervous, fragmented and unconvincing manner not because he or she is lying but because of the anxiety and insecurity caused by the difficulties of life in an entirely new social and cultural environment. (p. 232)

To re-think the subject in immigration discourse is to realize that he/she is trying to root him or herself in a place which will legitimize his or her rights to an acceptable level of status; and to that end he/she is willing to take extraordinary measures (tearing up passports in the airplane and eating them) or saying incredible things he/she thinks will help achieve the goal. These voices are identifiable through analyses outlined previously, and by a careful search for the different *modes* of expression: "raconté" ("l'état le plus distant et en général...le plus réducteur"); "transposé" ("bien plus mimétique que le discours raconté, et en principe capable d'exhaustivité, cette forme ne donne jamais au lecteur aucune garantie, et surtout aucun sentiment de fidélité littérale aux paroles «réellement» prononcées), or "mimétique" (p. 191-2). None of the voices offers a guarantee of accurate representation, but combined with other analyses the study of "mode" may help to ensure that there haven't been (conscious or unconscious) "altérations" (paralipses, paralepses, etc).

Genette's chapter on "voix" attempts to answer the central question which we have been posing indirectly in the studies of *ordre*, *fréquence*, *durée* and *mode* "qui parle?" Here is where Genette comes closest to addressing the theoretical questions raised by Bakhtin's "heteroglossia:"  
Une situation narrative, comme toute autre, est une ensemble complexe dans lequel l'analyse, ou simplement la description, ne peut *distinguer* qu'en déchirant un tissu de relations étroites entre l'acte narratif, ses protagonistes, ses déterminations spatio-temporelles, son rapport aux autres situations narratives impliquées dans le même récit, etc. (p. 227)

Genette is herein proposing a methodology for determining which perspective the narrator uses to address the audience (first person, third person, and so on), while providing a means of dividing up the narrative into its constituent "voices": "ultérieure" ("he also wanted to leave the country"); "antérieure" ("If I were to go back to Sri Lanka, I would immediately be killed"); "simultanée" ("Abu has just entered the room where I am searching through government files"); and "intercaléc" ("I have just returned to my country to find my daughter"). This section is a sort of recapitulation for Genette, and it offers little in the way of new tools or methodology. Nonetheless, by this point, the voices, with their constituent narratives, should be emerging from the text, and the Committee should by now be sensitized to the clear, unassuming, forthright voice of a subject attempting to represent a plight of suffering and persecution.

Such an assumption is, of course, utopian. Although the proposed methodology is arguably less politically-motivated or inspired than the one (or many) that are currently applied by the Immigration Department, it is nonetheless profoundly ethnocentric and therefore more readily applicable to Western fictions. Furthermore, this kind of analysis doesn't necessarily offer the analyst any more concrete information than that which could be glossed from an *impressionistic* (or shall we say "unsystematic") reading undertaken by a competent immigration official (a similar critique has been made by Culler in his analysis of Greimas -- see *Structuralist Poetics*). Finally, Genette's theory is only applicable to discourse that appears in the transcription; the Committee would need a new theoretical framework to confront the "unsaid," and a new methodology to recuperate the language of the body (gestures, facial expression, etc). An oral Hearing and a legal document convey different kinds of information; the question of hidden, unspoken, condensed, fragmented or coded discourse is a more urgent problem for a Committee

which is trying to find its way through the complex and often tedious text that has been transcribed onto 8 1/2 X 14 inch sheets.

former members of political parties and groups which were illegal in their home countries have deeply internalized the values of secrecy and suspicion toward outsiders; they were part of a social network largely founded on these values which were crucial for the success of the organization and the freedom and even survival of its members. Such persons have difficulty in communicating openly and revealing themselves, their feelings, beliefs, and experiences to everyone not belonging to their social group because by doing so they violate basic norms of that subculture. If, in the course of the asylum hearing, they perceive the interrogating official as not sharing their own ideology and political views, they are likely to be reserved and hesitant in the manner in which they express themselves and thus to present an fragmented and confused story. (Kälin 232)

Nonetheless, if we consider the 14 000 documents that must be read each year, Genette's textual narratology is one valuable tool (among many) which could be employed in a search for the elements that make up the narrative and the relations between them. Studying these relations suggests that Genette's treatment of texts, however unwillingly, speaks for the multiplicity of voices and for the presence of a unified but ever-interactive and oft-dependant subject in discourse.

#### Notes

1-Mikhail Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, edited by Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.

2-"Narratology: Science, protoscience, prescience?" in *Discours social / Social Discourse: The International Working Papers Series in Comparative Literature*, I,1, Winter 1988, pp 69 ff.

3-Roger Fayolle. *La Critique*. Paris: Armand Colin, 1978, p. 215.

4-Walter Kälin, "Troubled Communication: Cross-Cultural Misunderstandings in the Asylum Hearing." *International Migration Review*, Volume XX, No. 2, p. 231.

5-Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Edited and with an introduction by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossbar. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

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