

## INTRODUCTION

The *Contes* of La Fontaine, immensely popular with readers and frequently imitated by other poets up to the end of the nineteenth century, have not fared well with literary critics until recently. Even in the seventeenth century Charpentier commented on the dichotomy between the critic Furetière's censorious attitude and the enthusiastic response of the public: "Le plus impie et le plus sale de tous les hommes [ reproche à La Fontaine quelques contes que le public excuse aisément par la manière agréable et ingénieuse dont le poète les a tournés" (Mongrédien 147).

La Fontaine's *Contes* belong to the vast corpus of licentious literature whose roots extend back into the oral culture of ancient folklore. This tradition was mediated to La Fontaine chiefly through Ariosto, Boccaccio, and the French *nouvellistes* of the sixteenth century. It emerges from his pen, however, as a work steeped in the ethos of the seventeenth-century and filtered through the literary consciousness of one of the most talented of French poets. And yet, the scabrous subject matter has been a major stumbling block to the acceptance of the *Contes* into the canon of French literature. Until not so long ago, the prevailing approach was a paradoxical silence: "En parler pour les blamer," commented the nineteenth-century critic, Nisard, "serait pruderie; les louer, ils n'en ont pas besoin. Ces livres-là ne font que trop leur fortune d'eux-mêmes; n'en rien dire est le plus sage" (163).

The characteristic licentiousness of the subject matter coupled with a deliberately "irregular" style accounts for the genre being considered not only minor, but definitely a *genre bas* and unfit for critical commentary. The *Contes*, unlike the *Fables*, were not "presentable" to the young Dauphin. Nevertheless, they have enjoyed great popularity; over a hundred editions were published in the nineteenth century alone.<sup>1</sup> Despite the popular success of the *Contes*, historians and critics of classical French literature have, until recently, judged them to be unsuitable for scholarly perusal.

The first of La Fontaine's *Nouvelles en vers* were published late in 1664. Despite the controversies and scandal they provoked, La Fontaine continued to compose and publish his tales (1665, 1666, 1667, 1669, 1671, 1674, 1685) until a few years before his death in 1695.<sup>2</sup> La Fontaine restricted his tales almost exclusively to accounts of sexual deception. The narratives he chose to retell present typical trickster motifs in sexual contexts.<sup>3</sup> La Fontaine's choice of this particular focus is one of the strong identifying characteristics of the *Contes*. The licentious subject matter is an essential element of the genre and provides a playful context for the narration, much as the animal world does in the *Fables*.

The rehabilitation of the *Contes* as a subject of scholarly investigation was initiated by John Lapp in 1971 with the publication of *The Esthetics of Negligence: La Fontaine's Contes*. Since then interest in the *Contes* continues to grow, in the genre itself (John D. Lyons, "D'une vérité sans effet: La Fontaine et la théorie de la nouvelle" and Jurgen Grimm, "Le Faucon." La Fontaine et Boccace: Proximité et distance") along with its themes (Jean-Pierre Collinet, "L'Amour et son expression poétique dans les Contes de La Fontaine"), its parody of casuistry (Martha Houle, "La Fontaine's Fun with Casuistry in 'Le Cas de Conscience'"), and its irony (Donna Kuizenga, "La Fontaine's 'Le Faucon': A Lesson of Experience."). A number of studies analyze the narrative structures, using a semiotic approach (Jane Merino-Morais, *Différence et répétition dans les Contes de La Fontaine*) or a poetics of narrative; the latter approach has led to studies of focalization (Madeleine Defrenne, "La Fontaine et les jeux de la focalisation"), of the cognitive dimension (my article, "Erotic Dimensions of Space in La Fontaine's 'La Fiancée du roi de Garbe'"), and of figuration in the text (Michael Vincent, "Reading (through) the Veil: 'Le Tableau' and Anne L. Birberick, "From World to Text: The Figure of the Nun in La Fontaine's *Contes*").<sup>4</sup>

#### THE COGNITIVE DIMENSION AND FICTIONAL CHARACTERS

My study of cognitive space and patterns of deceit in La Fontaine's *Contes* is grounded in a theory of the cognitive dimension in literature and of frame analysis. Since the 1950s literary theorists have been investigating the degree of knowledge accorded to the narrator and to the narratee in fiction. Terms such as the "omniscient narrator" and the "implied reader" have become commonplaces.<sup>5</sup> Literary criticism has, however, explored to a much lesser extent the functioning of the characters' knowledge within the fictional world.<sup>6</sup>

How the characters within the story world (or the "diegetic world" according to Genette) share knowledge or conceal it from each other shapes the various configurations of the fictional narrative, from unexpected turns of plot to the in-

teraction of characters. This cognitive dimension of the text is the locus of the circulation of knowledge and as such directly influences the reader's experience of the text, its ironies, its suspense, its revelations.

A.-J. Greimas proposed the theoretical term "cognitive dimension" to describe that aspect of the text to be explored through an analysis of "knowledge about events" in the narrative utterance.<sup>7</sup> Semioticians and others who apply epistemological theories to the study of literature, linguistics, film, and painting are methodically exploring the cognitive dimension.<sup>8</sup> Insofar as the literary text is concerned, however, the primary focus of interest is still what semioticians call the level of the *énonciation*; Jacques Fontanille, for example, has astutely analyzed the presence of an observer in the text, variously defined as *focalisateur*, *spectateur*, *assistant*, or *assistant participant*.<sup>9</sup>

The character in fiction is a problematic area of critical debate. After the Romantic and post-Romantic simplistic equation of characters with real people, structuralists, linguists, semioticians, and New Critics reacted excessively by minimizing the referential qualities of literary characters).<sup>10</sup> In 1979 Greimas and Courtés declared *personnage* an outdated term in the *Dictionnaire raisonné*'s succinct entry:

Employé, entre autres, en littérature et réservé aux personnes humaines, le terme de personnage a été progressivement remplacé par les deux concepts—plus rigoureusement définis en sémiotique—d'actant et d'acteur. (274)

Nevertheless, the tenacity of the concept of the fictive character in literary criticism was confirmed only a few years later at a colloquium on the *personnage*:

La question du personnage s'est posée à nous comme nécessité d'éclaircir une situation ambiguë: après les excès auxquels s'était livrée une critique qui ne faisait aucune différence entre personnage et personne, la réaction avait été saine et violente. Ce fut la mort du personnage, perpétrée par la critique et consommée par le Nouveau Roman français. Pourtant le personnage, expulsé par la porte, revenait par la fenêtre et refusait de se laisser réduire à l'état d'actant-acteur-fonction. (Ezquerro 108)

The concept of fictional characters is being rehabilitated through the works of Baruch Hochman, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, and, especially, Seymour Chatman, who as early as 1978 explored in *Story and Discourse* how narratives

generate in the reader's consciousness a spatial world inhabited by characters. Nonetheless, finding a middle ground between semiotic reductiveness and a mimetic equation of characters with real people remains a challenge for literary theory.<sup>11</sup>

The cognitive dimension is then, in the fictive world, the locus of representation of the characters' knowledge and beliefs. Knowledge states, or mental states, are part of the composition of a character, and constitute constantly changing attributes, unlike other more stable attributes of age, sex, or personality traits.<sup>12</sup> Within the cognitive space of the text the circulation of knowledge determines to a large extent both the subjective transformations of the characters and the narrative action in the story world. I explore this diegetic world in the *Contes* of La Fontaine, a textual space inhabited by characters whose manipulation of knowledge through various covert strategies inscribes in the text patterns of deceit.

### DECEIT AS A COGNITIVE MANIPULATION

Deceit in its diverse manifestations is a subject of intense research on the part of philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, and biologists. An analysis, such as I propose, of deceit in the fictional world, benefits from the hypotheses and conclusions of those who pursue theories about deception in the "real" world. Deception takes on many forms in the human and nonhuman worlds. Biologists document cases of camouflage, mimicry, and delusion. Chameleons change color to blend in with their surroundings and hide from predators. Fireflies mimic one another in using light signals for sexual communication; some females of one species are said to send false signals to a male of another species, then lie in wait to devour the unsuspecting male. There is even evidence of apparently intentional animal deception. A chimp was observed pretending not to know where food was hidden, but later, when the other chimps were asleep, it went directly to the hiding spot to eat the food. Apes trained to use language are reported to have lied to their trainers.<sup>13</sup>

Biologists debate, however, about whether even the most intelligent of animals, the nonhuman primates, can attribute beliefs, knowledge, or motives to others; if they cannot, intentional deception would be an impossibility. The problem of deceit in the animal world is whether chimpanzees, for example, can create a desired state of mind in another and recognize that their own behavior can influence that belief. Attribution of knowledge to another "demands some ability to represent simultaneously two different states of mind. To do this an individual must recognize that he has knowledge, that others have knowledge, and that there can be a discrepancy between his own knowledge and theirs" (Cheeney and

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Seyfarth 207). Human-like deception requires that a signaler create or support a false belief in another. One chimpanzee may, in fact, be unable to recognize that another chimpanzee can possess a belief incompatible with his (or her) own and therefore, “may be unable to accommodate simultaneously both a true and a false belief” (Cheeney and Seyfarth 218).

Deception is a human universal that presents basically the same features whether it occurs in a seventeenth-century context or in our own period of time. It is classically defined as “an act that is intended to foster in another person a belief or understanding which the deceiver considers false” (Zuckerman et al. 3). Two of the most contentious problems that are debated about deception are whether intentionality is essential to an act of deception and whether self-deception is possible. In my analysis I consider that the classical definition needs to include forms of self-deception and some of those less intentional acts of deception where human conduct seems programmed unconsciously, much like the chameleon or the firefly.

Deceit is a cognitive event that depends on the fabrication and manipulation of knowledge. The fundamental cognitive transformations set into play by deception are easily described. First of all, an act, such as lying, changes the belief of the target of the deceptive action. The deceiver gives credence to the deceiver when a fiduciary relationship—a relationship of faith or trust—has already been established. When this relationship is lacking, however, the process of deception is more complex and requires further confirmation of the grounds of belief. If the verification procedure succeeds, the fiduciary contract is established, and acceptance of the false belief ensues. The purpose of the deceit is achieved when the deceiver acts in accordance with the false belief. The deceiver may, in the end, discover the deceit, and, in some cases, punish the deceiver. In the act of deception, basic structures of exchange and substitution underlie the various strategies: falsehood is substituted for truth; exchange pacts are negotiated under false pretenses; and contracts are subverted by covert substitutions.

### FRAME ANALYSIS AND PATTERNS OF DECEIT

I situate deception within the cognitive dimension and account for the circulation, withholding, and fabrication of knowledge within the story world by focusing on the characters’ epistemic frames. Seymour Chatman’s statement approaches my view of the inner diegetic space of fiction as a locus of cognitive transformations:

Only characters reside in the constructed story world, so only they can be said to “see,” that is to have a diegetic conscious-

ness that literally perceives and thinks about things from a position within that world. Only their “perspective” is immanent to that world. (*Coming to Terms* 146)<sup>14</sup>

I am not proposing a study of “focalization” nor of “point of view” as an approach to the analysis of the cognitive dimension in which the characters of La Fontaine’s *Contes* function.<sup>15</sup> Although focalization and point of view are popular and useful critical terms, they are no more appropriate for analyzing deceit in a literary text than for describing dramatic irony.<sup>16</sup> We need a theory that takes into account simultaneously the circulation of knowledge within the story world and its perception by the extradiegetic agents—the narrator, the narratee, and the reader.<sup>17</sup> Dramatic irony, like deceit, involves comparing discrepant knowledge states. The audience, which incorporates into its own cognitive frame all the knowledge that has been communicated about the individual characters’ knowledge, compares divergent mental spaces. Take two simple examples, one from Moliere’s *Tartuffe* and the other from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. When Orgon hides under the table in *Tartuffe* the audience knows he is there, and so does Elmire. Only Tartuffe has a false framing of the situation. All of Tartuffe’s words, as they are being pronounced, are filtered through the audience’s interpretive frame, “Tartuffe is under the table.” When Romeo returns to find Juliet in the tomb, he falsely believes she is dead. The audience has within its true knowledge frame the information that she is not dead. Again, all his actions and words have as their referent the true belief state of the audience. Simultaneously, the audience sees two frames that are contradictory, the false frame of Romeo or of Tartuffe and its own “true” framing—shared by Elmire and, to some extent, Orgon, in *Tartuffe*. Conventional theories of focalization and point of view fail to adequately account for the presence of contradictory mental states.<sup>18</sup>

The ability to hold simultaneously contradictory mental states may prevent most animals from being capable of deception: they cannot recognize their own mental state and they cannot attribute beliefs to others. The authors of *How Monkeys See the World* imagine an audience of chimpanzees watching *Romeo and Juliet*:

Unlike monkeys, chimpanzees seem to understand each other’s goals and motives, but may be unable to attribute false belief to others (like small children), do not recognize the discrepancy between their own states of mind and the states of minds of others. How would Romeo’s death appear to an audience of monkeys, unable to distinguish between their own beliefs and Romeo’s? (Cheeney and Seyfarth 254)

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The approach of frame analysis is more useful for my purposes than the concept of focalization or the semiotic schematizations of manipulation and deceit.<sup>19</sup> The term “frame” is most often associated with anthropology, sociology, and linguistics.<sup>20</sup> Scholars such as Bateson, Hymes, Goffman, Frake, and Fillmore adopt an interactive model for their theories, considering the framing activity as an interpretive process. If, for example, a television announcer is commenting on an imminent nuclear disaster, the frame of interpretation needs clarification for the viewer: Is this truly a newscast or is it part of a science-fiction film?

Scholars of cognitive science and information theory discuss the construction of mental spaces in the process of passing from one belief state to another.<sup>21</sup> They use the term “mental space” as a metaphorical way of designating subjective constructions of knowledge, or the processing of information by an individual. Just as the world of dreams seems to occupy another space, so do beliefs, hopes, or fears. The spaces are, we might say, framed, or contextualized, by a myriad of factors that act as guides for the interpretation of experience or information.<sup>22</sup> These factors build cognitive space inasmuch as they generate interpretive frames. The space encompassed by the frames is mental space, not topographical space.

Frame analysis examines how human experiences are organized into understandable contexts. Events are framed or set into perspectives that aid in their interpretation. For example, a violent scene on the stage is perceived differently from the same scene viewed in a subway station. Erving Goffman explains:

I start with the fact that from an individual’s particular point of view, while one thing may momentarily appear to be what is really going on, in fact what is actually happening is plainly a joke, or a dream, or an accident, or a mistake, or a misunderstanding, or a deception, or a theatrical performance, and so forth. (10)

When the frame of interpretation shifts suddenly, the framing activity and the mode of framing become most apparent. Television provided an example of a shifting frame of interpretation some years ago on April Fool’s Day when at the end of the news a lengthy documentary explained the harvesting of spaghetti from spaghetti trees in Italy. At the outset viewers understood the information in the factual framing mode set up by a news broadcast. Then, as the absurdities of the reportage accumulated, the viewer inevitably switched to a counterfactual mode of interpretation in which the full irony of the situation could be appreciated.

THE METHODOLOGY OF FRAME ANALYSIS

My theory of frame analysis represents deceit patterns in the fictional world; the metaphor of a “frame” of knowledge effectively conceptualizes and expresses in a diagram the states of knowledge of the characters and the extradiegetic agents (the narrator, the narratee, the reader). I consider the epistemic constructs in the text as bound by frames, not static frames, but interactive interpretive frames, much as Gregory Bateson and Erving Goffman describe them. The diagrams in which I illustrate more graphically the patterns of deceit are, like all schematizations, oversimplifications. They are valuable, however, because they readily translate the various levels of opacity between characters and take into account simultaneous discrepancies in the interpretation of situations. While Erving Goffman did not devise visual diagrams, his use of the term “frame” invites this type of graphic elaboration:

Observe that for those in on a deception, what is going on is fabrication; for those contained, what is going on is what is being fabricated. The rim of the frame is a construction, but only the fabricators see it. (84)

Deceit is a manipulative process that involves shifting the deceivee’s interpretation of information into either a counterfactual frame, a doubtful frame, or a hypothetical frame.<sup>23</sup> The shifting of perspectives, or frames of interpretation, is accomplished by what I term space-builders, such as lying, false promises, or other forms of cognitive manipulation. When a deceiver’s lie falsifies the deceivee’s belief space, the interpretive frame of the victim is altered. The belief space generated is false—a counterfactual representation of reality—and contrasts with the true belief space of the agent of deceit. When doubt and suspicion surround a character’s perception of a situation, the doubtful frame acts as a filter through which a scene is interpreted. When a deceiver’s false promise produces another kind of false representation—a distorted view of the future—I call this frame hypothetical because it is grounded on a false hypothesis. In any of these situations both the deceiver and a knowledgeable spectator simultaneously perceive two mental spaces, the true and the false, and comprehend the contradiction between the two.

An example of counterfactual framing occurs in La Fontaine’s tale, “Le Muletier,”<sup>24</sup> in which the deceit is accomplished by the space-builder of disguise. A mule driver appears at the queen’s bedroom door disguised as the king; he gains access to her bed without her understanding that she is committing a sexual transgression. This pattern of deceit can be represented by a diagram in which

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a broken line represents the queen’s false frame of belief, while the deceiver’s factual framing, indicated by an unbroken line, comprehends the whole situation.

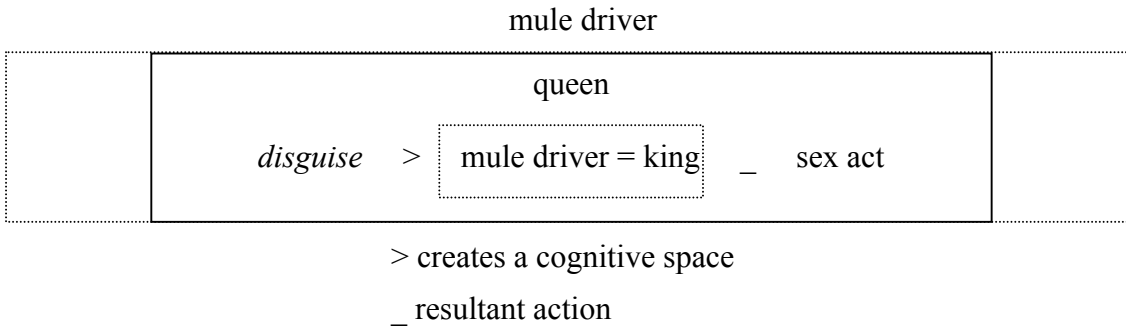


Figure I.1

Doubtful framing takes place when doubt or suspicion make the perception uncertain. In this case the person who is being deceived tentatively believes the information provided by the deceiver. The fiduciary relationship is not yet established; further verification is required. A doubtful mental space is relatively weak because the subject is aware of the uncertain nature of the basis for belief. When further evidence reinforces and confirms the initial information, the doubtful frame shifts to a false or counterfactual interpretation of the data. Doubtful framing—indicated below through a frame of question marks—is present at the outset the second woman’s tale in “La Gageure des trois commères” : the husband doubts his wife and her lover’s protestations that they were not making love beneath the pear tree.

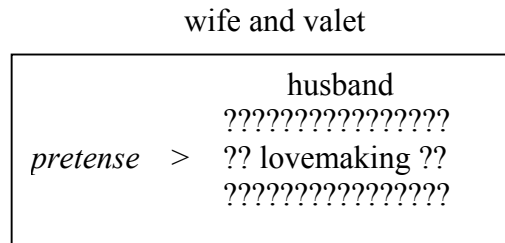


Figure I.2

Hypothetical framing functions when the cognitive space-builder is a false promise. A false anticipatory space is generated when the deceiver promises in a hypothetical fashion the attainment of a desirable future goal provided that the deceivee consent to the conditions of an agreement, The seduction of Lise in “Comment l’esprit vient aux filles” is accomplished by manipulating her into falsely believing in the attainment of a hypothetical future state of intelligence— only to be achieved, however, if she consents to sex with Bonaventure, the

priest. In the following diagram we see within Bonaventure’s all-encompassing mental space Lise’s false framing of the situation, indicated by a frame of broken lines. She has constructed a hypothetical cognitive space, indicated by a frame of exclamation marks, within which she sees herself as intelligent.

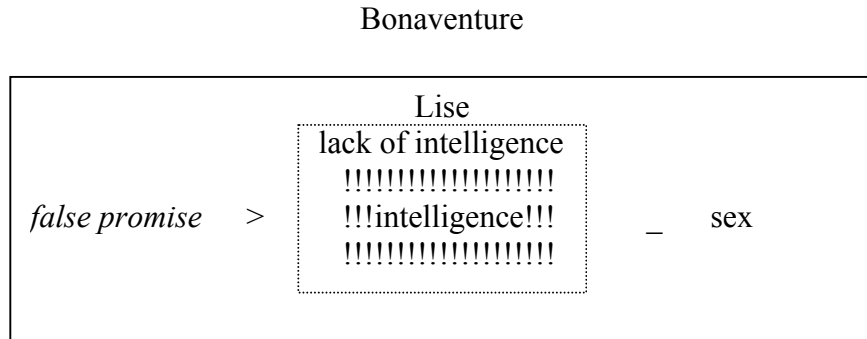


Figure I.3

COGNITIVE CLOSURE

Barbara Herrnstein Smith demonstrates in her book on poetic closure a variety of devices ranging from thematic allusions to typographical features that come into play at the end of a poem:

Closure occurs when the concluding portion of a poem creates in the reader a sense of appropriate cessation. It announces and justifies the absence of further development; it reinforces the feeling of finality, completion, and composure which we value in all works of art; and it gives ultimate unity and coherence to the reader’s experience of the poem by providing a point from which all the preceding elements may be viewed comprehensively and their relations grasped as part of a significant design.(36)<sup>25</sup>

While all the usual poetic devices operate to bring about closure in the *Contes*, the patterns of deceit that are so prominent in the cognitive dimension require special attention to the way closure is effected on this level of the text. Within the cognitive dimension of a Lafontainian conte closure is effected by the narrator’s final gaze at the partitioning of the cognitive space among the participants in the deceit process. In some tales the deceivee remains blissfully ignorant at the end; in others, discovery of the dupery brings a final sense of retribution. In most instances my diagrams include a schema of the cognitive closure.

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### FRAME LAMINATIONS

Frame analysis is a method that takes into account simultaneously the circulation of knowledge within the story world and its perception by the extradiegetic agents—the narrator, the narratee, and the reader. In all my diagrams the diegetic frames are surrounded by a lamination of *observateurs* (which are understood but not graphically represented). The outermost cognitive frame belongs to the reader. The extradiegetic first-person narrator occupies the next frame, within the text, while the implied reader, the textual narratee (who sometimes interrupts the narration), and the sporadic narratees—the narrator addresses from time to time husbands, wives, parents, French women, nuns—occupy frames progressively closer to the diegetic frames. In this study, however, the primary focus is deception and centers on the inner story world.

### THE CORPUS

The corpus to be analyzed comprises all the *contes en vers* published in La Fontaine's *Contes et nouvelles en vers*. The *conte en vers* genre, which has been variously termed the *conte gaillard en vers*, the *conte libertin*, or the *conte galant*, is a specific subgenre of the *conte*.<sup>26</sup> This subgenre can be described as a lengthy poem presenting, from the perspective of a narrator who is not part of the tale (Genette's "narrateur extradiegtique-hdttdrodiégétique," 255), a licentious narrative told in a ludic mode and involving human dupery. The *conte en vers* with its specific characteristics was invented by La Fontaine; its status as a distinct genre was confirmed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by his imitators, by critics, and by editors of his and other authors' *contes en vers*.

La Fontaine's prefatory comments to the *Contes* (Collinet 555-57, 603-05) describe the genre as dealing with a licentious subject, "la nature du conte le voulait ainsi," treated with playful humor, "cecy est jeu," and typified by an irregular style, "ces sortes de négligences qu'il ne se pardonnerait pas lui-même en un autre genre de poésie." He highlights the primacy of narrativity: "Ce n'est ni le vrai nile vraisemblable qui font la beauté et la grace de ces choses-ci; c'est seulement la manière de les conter." Well aware of having invented a new genre and referring to himself in the third person, La Fontaine states in the 1666 Preface: "Il s'est véritablement engage dans une carrière toute nouvelle, et l'a fournie le mieux qu'il a pu."

Before the end of the seventeenth century the poet Saint-Glas acknowledges in the Preface to his *Contes nouveaux en vers* (1672) that La Fontaine created the genre: "Comme je ne suis pas le premier qui dens en cc genre, je trouve non seulement le chemin frayé, mais encore les difficultés ostées." Most critics and editors emphasize the erotic subject matter as the most salient feature of the *conte*

*en vers*. The seventeenth-century editor Callières admires La Fontaine's talent for presenting crude subjects with an elegance of style, "l'adresse de l'ouvrier, lorsqu'il est obligé de raconter certaines aventures qu'il est difficile d'exprimer honnêtement, ou d'en reciter d'autres qui paroîtroient un peu trop libres, si elles n'étoient assaisonnées de certains adoucissements propres a en corriger le venin" (154). In 1734 the critic Rémond de Saint-Mard highlights the libertinage of the *conte* in his *Réflexions sur la poésie en général*: "[A]u lieu de nous faire acroire, comme les autres genres de poësie qu'il va réformer nos moeurs, on diroit qu'il prend à tâche de nous les gêter: il peint pour cela la volupté avec les couleurs les plus vives, et quelle volupté? Ce n'est seulement pas celle du roman; c'est cette volupté des sens qui, aprêtée sans tant de façons, se nomme libertinage" (143). In 1802 J.-F. Guichard defends the licentiousness of his own *contes en vers* by commenting, "l'excuse n'est-elle pas dans le genre même?" (vi).

A small number of poems published in the *Contes* (Collinet edition) are excluded from my study because they do not properly speaking belong to the genre of the *conte en vers*. The corpus I deal with does not include the epigrams and minor poems (586-600) published at the end of the first collection with the avowed purpose of enlarging the volume—"pour le grossir"—as La Fontaine himself explained in his 1665 Preface. The epigram is closer to the *bon mot* genre and highlights a *facétie verbale* rather than narrative. In the Deuxième and Troisième Parties I do not consider the epigrams ("Le Villageois qui cherche son veau," "Le Bat," "Le Baiser rendu," "Epigramme" [755-57 the imitations of Anacreon, and "Le Différend de beaux yeux et de belle bouche" (758-63). From the *Nouveaux Contes* I exclude the stances, "Janot et Catin" (872-74). "Clymène" (777-804), is not usually included among the *Contes* by La Fontaine's editors; Collinet acknowledges in a note that "elle ne se laisse pas ranger dans un genre déterminé" (1442). On the other hand, Collinet (unlike other modern editors) places "La Matrone d'Ephèse" and "Belphegor" (508-21) among the fables. I consider both to be *contes*, not fables, because they fulfill all the criteria of the *conte en vers* genre. The corpus I consider comprises, then, the 52 tales that are listed in Appendix A.<sup>27</sup>

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The narrative poetics of the *Contes* includes as an essential component an epistemological focus. The following chapters categorize the *Contes* on the basis of types of deceitful cognitive manipulation. The first type operates through magical, or pseudomagical space-builders; others function by nonverbal means of deception—disguise, displacement, misplacement and replacement; still others employ verbal space-builders—lying, casuistry, and false promises.<sup>28</sup> The first

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chapter examines the exchange and substitution structures that underlie the “commerce” of sex; it highlights two problematic areas, the portrayal of women and the comic figure of the cuckold.

I do not propose a static classification of the different types of deception, such as that usually practiced by folklorists in search of “tale types”; I focus rather on how strategies of deception and the recurrent epistemic patterns that they generate contour the inner cognitive space of the *Contes* of La Fontaine. Such an analysis of the typology of deception in the *Contes* will lead to a more complete understanding of their inherent poetic composition.

I am convinced that the deceit patterns and the cognitive spaces they engender are an integral part of the poeticity of the *Contes*.<sup>29</sup> While there is no satisfactory theory of narrative poetry, poetry’s innate self-referentiality and highly paradigmatic nature would make *all* repeated features, whether they be phonetic, semantic, or morphological, part of the poetic universe.

There is, in fact, something paradoxical about narrative poetry: narrative is linear and referential, whereas poetry is more synthetic and self-referential. Alain Vaillant sees a poem as producing in the reader an experience of simultaneously interacting components, much as a painting creates a unified perception for the viewer:

La *mimésis* poétique a l’ambition, comme la *mimésis* picturale, de produire une représentation de la réalité; mais le poète, à la différence du peintre, ne peut disposer sur l’espace de la toile traits et couleurs, perceptibles d’un seul coup d’oeil:

il lui faut le temps de la lecture, à condition que les mots ne s’évanouissent pas de la mémoire aussitôt qu’ils ont été lus. La *mimésis* poétique se reconnaît à cette tension particulière qui s’établit entre la linéarité du langage et la permanence artistique, vers laquelle elle tend sans jamais la réaliser pleinement; concrètement, c’est au nom de cette tension que le commentateur s’accorde le droit d’analyser un poème comme si tous les mots étaient présents, au même instant, dans la conscience du lecteur. (14)

In defining the poetic function of language, which is not exclusively confined to the genre of poetry, Roman Jakobson examines how linguistic signs are made palpable by the poetic functioning of language: “Comment la poéticité se manifeste-t-elle? En ceci que le mot est ressenti comme mot et non comme simple substitut de l’objet nommé, ni comme explosion d’émotion. En ceci, que les mots et leur syntaxe, leur forme externe et interne ne sont pas des indices indif-

férents de la réalité, mais possèdent leur propre poids et leur propre valeur” (124).<sup>30</sup> The Russian Formalists speak of poetry’s “autotelicity”: poetry (and art in general) is its own end.<sup>31</sup>

If the very shape and sound of words vibrate with the paradigms of interacting metaphors, rhythms, and semantic allusions, then repeated narrative patterns, as well, become palpable as an integral part of poetry. Narrative patterns occur ring in the cognitive space of a poem take on their own paradigmatic importance. They are not only narratological “functions” (see Propp, *Morphologie du conte*), nor simple linear signifiers, pointing the way to the next step in the story. Exploiting the poetic function (in Jakobson’s sense of the term), the deceit patterns inscribed in the text of the *Contes* are an integral part of La Fontaine’s narrative poetics and possess a poetic value of their own in the same way metaphor, rhyme, and rhythms do. Figures, such as simile or anaphora, are not specific to poetry, and yet, when they appear in a poem they become integral to the poetic universe. In this way the patterned recurrences of deceit structures reverberate and interact with other poetic features of the *Contes*.

I hope that in my analysis of deceit structures I have not lost sight of a desire to arrive at a fuller appreciation of the *Contes* as poetry. “At any rate,” states John C. Lapp, “there appears no doubt that far from being either ‘base’ or ‘repugnantly facile,’ the poetry of the *Contes* demonstrates an artistry equal to that of ‘Adonis’ or of the *Fables* themselves” (*Aesthetics* 170).

## NOTES

1. See my article, “Le Jeu de l’imitation: Un Aspect de la réception des *Contes* de La Fontaine.”

2. For ample details on these editions and on the controversies they instigated, see Collinet’s edition (1324-42), referred to from now on in the text as Collinet.

3. In the fabliaux, themes of seduction and adultery are prominent, but about two-thirds of the tales do not deal with such subjects—they “focus primarily on tricks and anti-social acts of varying kinds; many do not even have a male/female conflict” (Schenck 34).

4. The works listed are representative of recent research on the *Contes*. For a more complete listing see the bibliography in Sweetser’s book and the bibliographical material regularly appearing in the journal published by La Société des Amis de Jean de La Fontaine, *Le Fablier*, especially in the 1991 issue.

5. See Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*; Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms*, chapter 5; Gerard Genette, *Figures* ill; Gerald Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, 42-43; Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 86-89, 101-4.

6. In their *Dictionnaire encyclopédique* (1972) Ducrot and Todorov stated: “La catégorie du personnage est, paradoxalement, restde l’une des plus obscures de la poétique” (286). In 1976 Jonathan Culler added that “character is the major aspect of the novel to which structuralism has paid least attention and has been least successful in treating” (*Structuralist Poetics* 230). Two years later Seymour Chatman in *Story and*

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*Discourse* still found “remarkable how little has been said about the theory of character in literary history and criticism” (107). The paucity of critical interest in the fictional character has changed little since then, although notable exceptions are Chatman, *Coming to Terms* and Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*. Chatman calls for “a terminological distinction between these two loci of ‘point of view’: that of the narrator, and that of the character” (143).

7. On the cognitive dimension of the literary text, see Greimas, *Maupassant: La Sémiotique du texte* and the articles under “Cognitif” in Greimas and Courtés, *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*.

8. On literature, film, and painting, see Fontanille, *Les Espaces subjectifs*; on film, Jost, *L’Oeil-camera*; on linguistics, Nuyts, “Epistemic Modal Verbs and Adjectives and the Layered Representation of Conceptual and Linguistic Structure” and Kerbrat-Orecchioni, *L’Enonciation: De la subjectivité dans le langage*.

9. Fontanille explains why narratologists of the 1960s and 1970s were unable to construct a theory incorporating a cognitive agent: “les principales thèses narratologiques ont été conçues dans les années 60-70, après la grande fièvre cinématographique de l’après-guerre, et dans le contexte du structuralisme anti mentaliste, où les accusations de ‘psychologisme’ fleurissaient comme des anathèmes; pas question à cette époque, d’admettre parmi les instances du récit un sujet cognitif” (*Les Espaces subjectifs* 37). He points out that Genette did admit, although hesitatingly, to the presence of a “sujet intermédiaire” (*Figures III* 179), but never really incorporated it into his theoretical framework.

10. See Hochman for an account of the assault on characters in the 1960s and 1970s (chap. 1, “The Case against Character,” 13-27). Among the earlier group of semioticians, Philippe Hamon was the least reductive in his approach. See his schematization and analysis of *acteurs-actants* in “Pour un statut semiologique du personnage.”

11. For arguments on the complicated issue of characters as representations of people who, while not ontologically real, inhabit through fiction a possible world, see: W. H. Gass, *Fiction and the Figures of Life*; T. O. Pavel, *Fictional Worlds*; L. Pollard-Gott, “Attribution Theory and the Novel”; K. Walton, “How Remote are Fictional Worlds from the Real World?”; and R. Wilson, “The Bright Chimera: Character as a Literary Term.”

12. Paul Ricoeur, in his analysis of the identification of the reader with the fictional character, finds the character's identity in a series of subjective transformations: "Si, en effet, toute histoire peut être considérée comme une chaîne de transformations qui conduisent d'une situation initiale à une situation terminale, l'identité narrative du personnage ne saurait être que le style unitaire de transformations subjectives réglées sur les transformations objectives qui obéissent à la règle de la complétude, de totalité et d'unité de l'intrigue" (292).

13. See these and other examples in R. W. Mitchell and N. S. Thomson, *Deception: Perspectives on Human and Nonhuman Deceit*; in particular, the articles by Lloyd on firefly communication, by Miles on deception among apes, and D Waal on deceptive communication among chimpanzees.

14. Chatman proposes the terms *slant* and *filter* to distinguish the "point of view" of the narrator from that of the character. His plea for new terminology is of capital importance:

It is high time that we introduce a terminological distinction between these two loci of "point of view": that of the narrator and that of the character. I propose *slant* to name the narrator's attitudes and other mental nuances appropriate to the report function of discourse, and *filter* to name the much wider range of mental activity experienced by characters in the story world—perceptions, cognitions, attitudes, emotions, memories, fantasies, and the like. (Coming to Terms 143)

For Chatman *filter* still describes the mediating function of a character's consciousness. I believe that the concept of a cognitive framing of experience within the diegetic world is more appropriate to my analysis of deceit, which focuses on the characters as agents with discrepant states of knowledge.

15. Narratologists, such as Genette, Mieke Bal, or Rimmon-Kenan, who use such terms are chiefly interested in analyzing a center of consciousness mediating the story.

16. See my analysis of cognitive irony in "Ironie dramatique ou ironie cognitive?"

17. Gerard Genette's terminology (*Figures III*) concerning narrative levels (diegetic, extradiegetic, and metadiegetic) is precise and particularly apt for my purposes. These terms will recur throughout my study.

18. Wayne C. Booth's discussion of the scene in *Tartuffe* (66-67) does not analyze the audience's perception of irony: "The audience need not be subtle; they need only be awake and morally engaged and every ironic touch will be evident."

19. See the analysis and diagrams under "manipulation" in both volumes of Greimas and Courtés, *Dictionnaire*, and in Fontanille, *Le Savoir partagé*, 38-42.

20. For an overview of the chief theorists on the subject, see *Framing in Discourse*, edited by Deborah Tannen, particularly the introduction to her own chapter, "What's in a Frame? Surface Evidence for Underlying Expectations," where she categorizes the main theorists according to their disciplines, and their choice of the following terms: schema, script, and frame.

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21. On the concept of mental space in terms of cognitive science and information theory, see Dinsmore and Fauconnier.

22. See the canonical text on the subject, Goffman's *Frame Analysis*. Gregory Bateson initiated the term "frame" and describes frames as metacommunication, "communication about communication" (209). Ludwig Wittgenstein sees them as the description under which an event is to be seen (198, 202). Manning and Hawkins in *Beyond Goffman* see a frame as providing the rules and principles that lead to an understanding of experienced events: "A frame addresses the question 'What is going on here?'" (207).

23. For a taxonomic approach to the arrangement of these frames into patterns of deceit, see the Conclusion and Appendix B.

24. All references to the *Contes* are to Collinet's 1991 edition in the Pléiade series.

25. On closure in La Fontaine's *Fables*, see the perceptive analysis of Richard Danner in his chapter, "Irony and Closure" (64-95).

26. In the bibliography of conteurs published at the end of my article, "Le Jeu de l'imitation: Un Aspect de la reception des *Contes* de La Fontaine," the entries reveal that the most common generic expression used by the authors themselves in the titles of their works is *contes en vers*. Indicative of the hesitation over the nomenclature, however, the 1905-06 Van Bever anthologies of licentious tales in verse were entitled: *Les Conteurs libertins du XVIIIe siècle*, *Conteurs galants du XVIIIe siècle*, and *Contes et conteurs gaillards au XVIIIe siècle*. Folklorists commonly use the term *contes en vers* to describe this body of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century libertine tales—see G. Legman, "Toward a Motif-Index of Erotic Humor" (236-38) and my article, "The *Conte en vers*:"

Expanding Stith Thompson's X-File of Obscene Motifs."

27. If certain poems in the *Contes et nouvelles en vers* can be excluded from the genre as such, then, one might ask, could some poems published in the *Fables* not be considered *contes en vers*? After all, there are lengthy fables, there are fables without explicit moral lessons, and there are even fables that tell tales about humans. I argue that the specificity of the *conte en vers*, as compared to the fable genre, involves more than the length of the tale, the lack of an explicit moral lesson, and the presence of humans as opposed to animals. The specificity

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of the *conte en vers* genre precludes extending the genre, either to include animal fables or those fables having human characters, but which have neither an erotic dimension (understood minimally to include a male-female relationship) nor an element of deception in the narrative. Self-deception is present, for instance, in “La Laitière et le pot au lait,” but the licentious component is absent. Such fables quite plainly do not belong to the genre of the *conte en vers* because the sexual dimension is lacking, although they are a type of *conte*. Aside from the problematic “La Matrone d’Ephèse” which has found its way at different times into both the Fables and the Contes, six fables do, in varying degrees, resemble the *conte en vers* genre: “L’Ivrogne et sa femme” (III, 7), “La Femme noyée” (III, 16), “La Jeune Veuve” (VI, 21), “Le Ma! Marie” (VII, 2), “Les Femmes et le secret” (VIII, 6), and “Le Man, la femme, et le voleur” (IX, 15). The first two, however, center on a *facétie verbale*; in the next two dupery is not a prominent element; the last two approximate most closely the *conte en vers* as it was practiced by La Fontaine in the *Contes et nouvelles en vers*.

28. Mary Jane Stearns Schenck, following a Proppian methodology (Propp, *Morphologie du conte*) analyzes 66 self-proclaimed fabliaux by attempting to isolate functions from the actions. Her fifth function is deception under which she enumerates six different forms: lying or fabricating a story, hiding, disguising/substituting, cheating, playing on words/riddling, using magic.

29. On the Contes as poetry, see John C. Lapp, “*The Esthetics of Negligence: La Fontaine’s Contes*” and *The Esthetics of Negligence* (159-70), as well as Collinet, “La Fontaine est-il poète?”

30. I am aware that some do not accept into the category of true poetry a poem possessing the degree of narrativity present in the *Contes*. And yet, in French poetry before Baudelaire, poetry and narrativity were not mutually exclusive. The attempt to reduce poetry to the lyric genre has not been wholly successful: “Il semble que, très récemment, depuis les années 1970-1980, l’exclusion qui frappait le narratif, le descriptif et le didactique de la poésie tende à s’atténuer. Le ‘terrorisme’ contre le récit, en particulier, ne semble plus aujourd’hui de mise en France, de sorte que le rêve d’une ‘poésie pure’ paraît avoir fait long feu” (Combe 73).

31. On Sklovskij’s discussion of the palpableness of poetic language and of the autotelicity of poetry, see Ejxenbaum, “The Theory of the Formal Method,” 12-14.