UNIT 3: NARRATOLOGY

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Narratology: Meaning and Scope

3.4 Important concepts in Narratology

- 3.4.1 Story and Plot
- 3.4.2 Narrative, Narrator, Narratee
- 3.4.3 Point of View

3.5 Let us Sum up

3.6 Further Reading

3.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

3.8 Possible Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the meaning and scope of Narratology
- make the differences between a story and a plot
- identify the narrator and the narrates in a narrative
- explain point of view as an important aspect of narratives

3.2 INTRODUCTION

Narratology is the term used since 1969 to denote that branch of studies devoted to the analysis of narratives, most specifically to the forms of narrations and the varieties of narrators and narratees. Narratology as a modern theory of narratives is innately associated with the emergence of European structuralism (about which you will read in detail in Semester 3), although older studies of narrative forms and devices can be dated back to Aristotle's 4th century BC work *Poetics*, which can also be seen as a narratological work. Modern discussions on Narratology can be said to have started from the Russian critic Vladimir Propp's work *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) with its emphasis on

narrative Functions. However, for this present unit, we are not going to discuss Narratology in terms of theory, but in terms of the different components discussed under the area of Narratology. For your convenience, in this unit, the terms and concepts of Narratology shall be adapted from Gerard Prince's very handy book entitled *A Dictionary of Narratology*.

3.3 NARRATOLOGY: MEANING AND SCOPE

Different critics and theorists have divided the meaning and scope of Narratology differently. M. H. Abram's in his *Glossary,* refers to Narratology denotes recent concerns with the general theory and practice of narrative in all literary forms. It deals especially with types of narrators, the identification of structural elements and their diverse modes of combination, recurrent narrative devices, and the analysis of the kinds of *discourse* by which a narrative gets told, as well as with the narratee—that is, the explicit or implied person or audience to whom the narrator addresses the narrative. In general, Narratology has been seen as the set of general statements on narrative genres, on the systematic of narrating (or telling a story) and on the structure of the plot. For the convenience of our reading, the history of Narratology can be divided into three periods: pre-structuralist (until 1960), structuralist (1960-1980), and post structuralist (recent developments of Narratology into an interdisciplinary pursuit).

Current narratological theory picks up and elaborates upon many topics in traditional treatments of fictional narratives, from Aristotle's *Poetics* in the fourth century BC to Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961); current theory, however, applies to such topics concepts and analytic procedures which derive from recent developments in Russian Formalism and especially in French Structuralism. Narratologists, accordingly, do not treat a 'narrative' in the traditional way, as a fictional representation of life, but as a 'systematic formal construction'.

A primary interest of structural narratologists is in the way that narrative discourse fashions a story—the mere sequence of events in

time—into the organized and meaningful structure of a literary *plot.* (The Russian formalists had made a parallel distinction between the fabula—the

elemental materials of a story—and the syuzhet, the concrete representation used to convey the story.) The general undertaking is to determine the rules, or codes of composition, that are manifested by the diverse forms of plot, and also to formulate the "grammar" of narrative in terms of structures and narrative formulae that recur in many stories, whatever the differences in the narrated subject matters. In *Narrative Discourse* (1980), followed by *Figures of Literary Discourse* (1982), the French structuralist critic Gérard Genette presented influential analyses of the complex interrelations between a story and the types of discourse in which the story is narrated, and greatly subtilised the treatment of *point of view* in narrative fiction.

Hayden White is a historian who, in works like *Metahistory* (1973) and *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (1987) sets out to demonstrate that the narratives written by historians are not simple representations of a sequence of facts, nor the revelation of a design inherent in events. Instead, White analyzes historical narratives as shaped by the imposition on events of cultural patterns similar to the narratological, *archetypal,* and other structural concepts that had been applied in the criticism of literature.

A book, which did much to inaugurate modern narratology, was *The Morphology of the Folktale* by the Russian formalist Vladimir Propp (trans., 1970). For later developments in narrative theory, other than Gerard Genette's book, mention may be made of Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose* (trans., 1977); Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Nanative Structure in Fiction and Film* (1978); Robert Alters, *Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981); Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (1986); Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (1987); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (3 vols., 1984-88); and Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (rev. ed., 1997) and so on.

In recent years, some cognitive psychologists and literary and cultural theorists have proposed that narrative, or the telling of diverse "stories" about how one thing leads to another, is the basic means by which we make sense of the world, provide meaning to our experiences, and organize our lives. See Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (1990), and *Actual Worlds, Possible Minds* (1986); and Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind* (1996).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How has the field of Narratology developed?

Q 2: What is the primary interest of the Structuralist narratologists?

3.4 IMPORTANT CONCEPTS IN NARRATOLOGY

Gerald Prince in his *Dictionary* refers to the different ways the various aspects of narratology need to be understood.

3.4.1 Story and Plot

1. The Story is the *content* plane of a narrative as opposed to its *expression* plane or discourse, the 'what' of a narrative as opposed to its 'how'. The Story is a casual sequence of events pertinent to a character or characters seeking to solve a problem or reach a goal. As such, though every story is a narrative (the recounting of one or more events), not every narrative is necessarily a story.
2. The Story is the "Fabula" (or the basic materials arranged into the plot) as opposed to the "Sjuzet" or plot. The Plot as opposed to Story, refers to the main incidents of a narrative, the outline of situations and events. These situations and events can constitute a structure the main parts of which are chracterisable in terms of Freytag's Pyramid.

3. The Story is a narrative of events with an emphasis on chronology, as opposed to plot, which is a narrative of events with an emphasis on causality. Gerald Prince here cites the famous example of the distinction between a story and a plot from E M Forster. He viewed that "The king died, and then the queen died" is a story, whereas "The king died and then the queen died of grief" is a plot. Thus, the Plot is the arrangement of incidents, the situations and events as presented to the receiver.

Plot Typology

This refers to the systematic determination of Plot types according to structural or other similarities. Traditional examples of plots are: Euphoric Plot (Things change for the better), Dysphoric Plot (Things change for the worse), External Plot (based on outer events and experiences), Internal Plot (based on inner feelings and transactions), Epic Plot (episodic, loosely woven or episodic) and so on. Among the modern Plot Types, as devised by American critic R. S. Crane, mention may be made of Plots of Action (involving a change in the protagonist's situation: The Brothers Karamazov), Plot of Character (Involving a change in the protagonist's moral character: The Portrait of a Lady), and Plot of Thought (Involving a change in the protagonist's thought and feeling: Marius the Epicurean. However, critic like Norman Friedman proposes an even more detailed and inclusive classification of Plot by making further distinctions as to whether the protagonist succeeds or fails, whether the protagonist is responsible and attractive or not, and as to how this complex of factors is supposed to affect the receiver's feelings.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Explain briefly the basic difference between 'story' and 'plot'?

Q 4: What are the different types of traditional plots?

3.4.2 Narrative, Narrator, Narratee

Narrative:

The Narrative is the representation of one or more real or fictive events communicated by one, two or more narrators to one, two or more narratees. Some narratologists, such as Gerard Genette, have argued that a narrative is essentially a mode of verbal presentation and involves the linguistic *recounting* or *telling* of events, rather than their performance or enactment on stage. Other narratologissts such as William Labov, Gerald Prince, and Shlomith Rimmon Kenan, in order to distinguish narrative from mere event description, have defined it as the representation of at least two real or fictive events neither of which logically presupposes or entails the other. Finally, in order to distinguish it from the representation of a random series of situations and events, narraatologists such as Arthur Danto, A. J. Greimas and Tzvetan Todorov, have also argued that narrative must have a constituent subject and constitute a whole.

Narrative Closure:

A conclusion giving the feeling that a narrative or narrative sequence has come to an end, and providing it with an ultimate unity and coherence, an end creating in the receiver a feeling of appropriate completion and finality.

Narrativity:

A set of properties characterising narrative and distinguishing it from nonnarrative, the formal and contextual features making a (narrative) text more or less narrative, as it were. The degree of narrativity of a narrative depends partly on the extent to which that narrative fulfils a receiver's desire by representing temporal wholes (prospectively from the beginning to the end, and retrospectively from the end to beginning), involving a conflict, consisting of discrete , specific and positive situations and events, and meaningful in terms of a humanised project and world.

Narrator :

The narrator is the one who narrates, as inscribed in the text. There should be at least one narrator in each narrative. In a given narrative however, there may be several different narrators, each addressing in turn a different narratee or the same one. A narrator may be more or less overt, knowledgeable, ubiquitous, self conscious, and reliable, and she/he may be situated a greater or lesser distance from the situation and events narrated, the characters, and/or the narrate. The distance can be temporal (I narrate events that occurred three hours or three years ago), discursive (I narrate in my own words what a character said, or I use his or her words), intellectual (I am intellectually superior to my narratee, or equal or inferior to him or her), moral (I am more or less virtuous than the characters), and so on. It is to be noted that the narrator, who is imminent to the narrative, must be distinguished from the real or concrete author. For examples, Jean Paul Sartre is the author of works like *Nausea,* 'Intimacy', 'The Wall' and 'Erostratus', but the narrators in such works are not Sartre. The narrator must also be distinguished from the 'implied author' who is not supposed to recount situations and events, but is taken to be accountable for their selection, distribution and combination. Moreover, she/he is inferred from the entire text rather than inscribed in it as a teller.



LET US KNOW

We ordinarily accept that what a narrator tells us is authoritative. The **fallible** or **unreliable narrator,** on the other hand, is one whose perception, interpretation, and evaluation of the matters he or she narrates do not coincide with the opinions and norms implied by the author, which the author expects the alert reader to share. (read about reliable and unreliable narrators in Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction,* 1961.)

While discussing the idea of the narrator, you should note that the narrator is the speaking 'voice', which takes responsibility over the act of narration or telling the story as 'true fact.' In case of non-fictional narration, the narrator is the actual speaker who physically produces the narrative. In case of fiction however, things are different. The actual sender—or the author—is located in the actual world and transmits a fiction to another member of the actual world— the reader. The narrator is part of the textual world and communicates a narrative to another member of the textual world, who is known as the narrate. Therefore, you should remember that the communicative pairs formed by author/reader and narrator/ narrate are located in separate systems of reality.

Narratee:

The concept of the narratee was first proposed by Gerard Genette, but was further developed by Gerald Prince. As you have already read, the narratee is the communicative partner of the narrator, or the filler of the receiver position in a narrative. As is the case with narrators, narratees are actual individuals in non-fictional narratives, but textual constructs in fictional narratives.

So, the narratee is the one who is narrated to, as inscribed in the text. In each narrative, there is at least one (more or less overtly represented) narratee. In a given narrative, there may be several different narratees, each addressed in turn by the same narrator or by a different one. Like in case of the narrator, the narratee may be represented as a character, playing a more or less important role in the situation and events recounted (as one can see in case of works like *Heart of Darkness* or *The Immoralist*). Very often however, the narratee is not represented as a character (as in case of *Tom Jone*s, *Crime and Punishment*). Here, another point that you all must keep in mind is that the narratee is purely a textual construct and should not be confused with the real reader or receiver. Because, the same real reader can read different narratives (each having different narratees), and the same

narrative (which always has the same set of narratees) may have an indefinitely varying set of real readers. The narratee must also be distinguished from the 'Implied Reader': the former constituting the narrator's audience and is inscribed as such in the text; the latter constitutes the implied author's audience (and is inferable from the text).

As discussed by David Macey, a narratee may be 'extraddiegetic' or outside the story, and is then addresses directly by the narrator. This can be explained in terms of a few examples, such as the Sultan who is told stories by Scheherazade in the *Arabian Nights,* but who never appears in the stories, or the sailors who listen to Marlowe's story in Conrad's famous novel *Heart of Darkness.*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What is known as the narrative?

Q 6: Mention the different types of 'distance' that a narrator needs to maintain in a narrative?

Q 7: How would you explain the idea of a narratee?

3.4.3 Point of View

It refers to the perceptual or conceptual position in terms of which the narrated situations and events are presented. The viewpoint adopted may be that of an omniscient narrator whose position varies and is sometimes unlocatable and who is, by and large, not subject to perceptual restrictions (as in case of the omniscient point of view in *Vanity Fair, Adam Bede*). Or, it may be situated in a character (Internal Point of View: everything is presented strictly in terms of the knowledge, feelings, and perceptions of the same character or different ones). Thus, according to M. H. Abram, Point of View signifies the way a story gets told—the mode (or modes) established by an author by

means of which the reader is presented with the characters, dialogue, actions, setting, and events which constitute the *narrative* in a work of fiction. The question of point of view has always been a practical concern of the novelist, and there have been scattered observations on the matter in critical writings since the emergence of the modern novel in the 18th century. Henry James' prefaces to his various novels, however—collected as *The Art of the Novel* in 1934—and Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* (1926), which codified and expanded upon James comments, made point of view one of the most prominent and persistent concerns in modern treatments of the art of prose fiction.

Authors have developed many different ways to present a story, and many single works exhibit a diversity of methods. However, First Person and Third-person point of view are the most common modes. In a **Third person narrative,** the **narrator** is someone outside the story proper who refers to all the characters in the story by name, or as 'he', 'she', 'they'. Thus, Jane Austen's *Emma* begins: "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her." In a **first person narrative,** the narrator speaks as "I", and is, to a greater or lesser degree, a participant in the story.

The **Omniscient Point of View** is a common term in the discussion of the works of fiction that follows the *convention* that the narrator knows everything that needs to be known about the agents, actions, and events, and has privileged access to the characters' thoughts, feelings, and motives. Also that such a narrator is free to move at will in time and place, to shift from character to character, and to report (or conceal) their speech, doings, and states of consciousness. Within this mode, the

intrusive narrator is one who not only reports, but also comments on and evaluates the actions and motives of the characters, and sometimes expresses personal views about human life in general.

You will find that most works are written according to the convention that the omniscient narrator's reports and judgments are to be taken as **authoritative** by the reader, and so serve to establish what counts as the true facts and values within the fictional world. This is the fashion in which many of the greatest novelists have authored their novels including Fielding (*Tom Jones*), Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Leo Tolstoy. On the other hand, the omniscient narrator may choose to be unintrusive (alternative terms are impersonal or objective).

The **limited point of view** is one when the narrator tells the story in the third person, but stays inside the confines of what is perceived, thought, remembered and felt by a single character (or at most by very few characters) within the story. Henry James, who refined this narrative mode, described such a selected character as his 'focus', or 'mirror', or 'center of consciousness.' In a number of James' later works, all the events and actions are represented as they unfold before, and filter to the reader through, the particular perceptions, awareness, and responses of only one character. Later writers developed this technique into *stream-of-consciousness* narration, in which we are presented with outer observations only as they impinge on the continuous current of thought, memory, feelings, and associations, which constitute a particular observer's total awareness. The limitation of point of view represented both by James' "center of consciousness" narration and by the "stream-of-consciousness" narration used by James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, and others, is

often said to exemplify the "self-effacing author," or "objective narration," more effectively than does the use of an unintrusive but omniscient narrator.

First-person points of view limits the matter of the narrative to what the first-person narrator knows, experiences, infers, or can find out by talking to other characters. We distinguish between the narrative "I" who is only a fortuitous witness and auditor of the matters he relates (Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* and other works by Joseph Conrad); or who is a participant, but only a minor or peripheral one, in the story (Ishmael in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick,* Nick in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby);* or who is himself or herself the central character in the story (Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders,* Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and *Villette,* Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations,* Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye).*

In Second-person points of view, the story is told solely, or at least primarily, as an address by the narrator to someone he calls by the second-person pronoun "you." This form of narration occurred in occasional passages of traditional fiction, but has been exploited in a sustained way only during the latter part of the 20th century and then only rarely; the effect is of a virtuoso performance. This second person may turn out to be a specific fictional character, or the reader of the story, or even the narrator himself or herself, or not clearly or consistently the one or the other; and the story may unfold by shifting between telling the narratee what he or she is now doing, has done in the past, or will or is commanded to do in the future. Italo Calvino uses the form to achieve a complex and comic form of *involuted fiction,* by involving 'you', the reader, in the fabrication of the narrative itself. His novel opens: "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's novel, *If on a winter's night a traveller."*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What is usually known as the 'point of view'?

Q 9: State briefly the meaning of Omniscient Point of View.

Q 10: What kind of a narrator is found in a first person narrative?



3.5 LET US SUM UP

You have learnt from this unit that Narratology can be broadly defined as the study of a narrative. However, it is sometimes described as the structuralist study of narrative plots. Narratology denotes recent concerns with the general theory and practice of narrative in all literary forms. You have learnt that a Narrative is the representation of one or more real or fictive events communicated by one, two or more narrators to one, two or more narratees. The narrator is the one who narrates, as inscribed in the text. There should be at least one narrator in each narrative. The narratee, on the other hand, is the one who is narrated to, as inscribed in the text. Discussions on the distinction between the story and plot as well as of Point of View constitute an integral part of Narratology.



3.6 FURTHER READING

Abrams, M. H. (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. United States: Thomson Learning.

Bartens, Hans. (2001). *Literary Theory: The Basics*. London: Routledge.

Macey, David. (2000). *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*. Penguin Books.

Makaryk, Irena R. (1993). Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholar and Terms. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Prince, Gerald. (2003). *A Dictionary of Narratology*. London: University of Nabraska Press.



3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: Narratology has been seen as the set of general statements on narrative genres, on the systematic of narrating (or telling a story) and on the structure of the plot… …the history of Narratology can be divided into three periods: pre-structuralist (until 1960), structuralist (1960-1980), and post structuralist (recent developments of Narratology into an interdisciplinary pursuit).

Ans to Q No 2: The structural narratologists make a distinctions between the story—the mere sequence of events in time—and plot—the organized and meaningful structure… … The same has been viewed by the Russian formalists as fibula and syuzhet… …the general undertaking is to determine the rules, or codes of composition… …formulation of the "grammar" of narrative in terms of structures.

Ans to Q No 3: The story is the *content* plane of a narrative as opposed to its *expression* plane or discourse, the 'what' of a narrative as opposed to its 'how'… …the Story is the "Fabula" or the basic materials arranged into the plot, as opposed to the "Sjuzet" or plot which refers to the main incidents of a narrative, the outline of situations and events… …the Story is a narrative of events with an emphasis on chronology, as opposed to plot, which is a narrative of events with an emphasis on causality.

Ans to Q No 4: Euphoric Plot (Things change for the better), Dysphoric Plot (Things change for the worse), External Plot (based on outer events and experiences), Internal Plot (based on inner feelings and transactions), Epic Plot (episodic, loosely woven or episodic) and so on.

Ans to Q No 5: The Narrative is the representation of one or more real or fictive events communicated by one, two or more narrators to one, two or more narratees… …narrative is a mode of verbal presentation and involves the linguistic *recounting* or *telling* of events, rather than their performance or enactment on stage.

Ans to Q No 6: The distance can be temporal (I narrate events that occurred three hours or three years ago), discursive (I narrate in my own words what a character said, or I use his or her words), intellectual (I am intellectually superior to my narratee, or equal or inferior to him or her), moral (I am more or less virtuous than the characters), and so on.

Ans to Q No 7: The narratee is the communicative partner of the narrator, the receiver position in a narrative… …narratees are actual individuals in non-fictional narratives, but textual constructs in fictional narratives… …the narratee is the one who is narrated to, as inscribed in the text… …in each narrative, there is at least one narratee… …in a given narrative, there may be several different narratees.

Ans to Q No 8: It refers to the perceptual or conceptual position in terms of which the narrated situations and events are presented… ...the viewpoint may be that of an omniscient narrator whose position varies, unlocatable and is not subject to perceptual restrictions.

Ans to Q No 9: A common term in the discussion of the works of fiction… …it is the viewpoint of a narrator who is free to move at will in time and place, to shift from character to character, and to report (or conceal) their speech, doings, and states of consciousness… … example is that of an intrusive narrator who not only reports, but also comments on and evaluates the actions and motives of the characters… …sometimes also expresses personal views about human life in general.

Ans to Q No 10: First-person narratives refer to what the first-person narrator knows, experiences, infers, or can find out by talking to other characters… …distinguished by the "I" who is only a fortuitous witness and auditor of the matters he relates (Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* and other works by Joseph Conrad)… … may be one who is a participant in the story (Ishmael in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*)… …the central character in the story (Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders,* Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre.*



3.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Explain the meaning and scope of Narratology.

Q 2: Discuss the idea of a narrative with reference to the various components under encompassed by the field of Narratology.

Q 3: Write a detailed note on narrative point of view with examples. How do you think 3rd person narrative is different from 1st and 2nd person narrative.

Q 4: In what ways, do the narrator and the narratee get involved in the act of communication? Discuss in detail.

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