UNIT 4: SHLOMITH RIMMON KENAN: CONCEPTS FROM *NARRATIVE FICTION*

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4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- identify the different important aspects of narrative fiction as found in Kenan's book *Narrative Fiction*
- explain the ideas of the story in terms of the events and characters
- explain the idea of time in terms of concepts like Order, Duration and Frequency
- discuss the issues related to focalisation and characterisation
- discuss the role of the reader

4.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of Block 1. In the previous unit on Narratology, we have already discussed some of the important components of

narratives in general. This unit, based on Rimmon Kenan's book *Narrative Fiction*, shall help you to learn about narrative fiction in some detail. Being students of literature, it is very important for you to think what a narrative is or what the term narrative fiction signify. You may tend to ask how does narrative fiction differ from other kinds of narrative? What features turn a discourse into a narrative text? These are some important questions to be explored by the students like you while engaging themselves with the idea of narrative fiction. Widely acknowledged as one of the most significant contribution in its field, Rimmon Kenan's *Narrative Fiction* turns its attention to these questions. You will find that Kenan organises this book around issues—such as events, time, focalization, characterization, narration, the text and its reading—rather than individual theorists or approaches. It is expected that by the time you finish reading the unit, you will be able to examine the important aspects of narrative fiction, which shall further help you to analyse the different fictional aspects of the novels prescribed for your study.

4.3 ABOUT SHLOMITH RIMMON KENAN:

Shlomith Rimmon Kenan is a Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her most recent publications include *A Glance Beyond Doubt: Narration, Representation, Subjectivity* (1996) and *Re-Reading Texts: Re-Thinking Critical Presuppositions* (edited, 1997). Her book *Narrative Fiction* concerns the concept of narrative in different disciplines (psychoanalysis, historiography, legal studies and the medical humanities).

In *Narrative fiction*, Kenan addresses key approaches to narrative fiction, including New Criticism, Formalism, Structuralism and Phenomenology, but also offers views on the modifications to these theories. While presenting an analysis of the system governing all fictional narratives, whether in the form of novel, short story or narrative poem, she also suggests how individual narratives can be studied against the background of this general system. A broad range of literary

examples illustrate key aspects of the study. *Narrative Fiction* remains an ideal starting point for anyone new to narrative theory.

4.4 WHAT IS A NARRATIVE?

In the Introduction to the Book *Narrative Fiction*, Kenan provides an important reference to the idea of a narrative. She writes:

Newspaper reports, history books, novels, films, comic strips, pantomime, dance, gossip, psychoanalytic sessions are only some of the narratives which permeate our lives. One species of narrative will be the subject of this book: the species called 'narrative fiction', whether in the form of novel, short story or narrative poem. However, what is a narrative? What makes the following limerick a narrative?

There was a young lady of Niger
Who smiled as she rode on a tiger
They returned from the ride
With the lady inside
And the smile on the face of the tiger.

How can we differentiate between this limerick and the following discourse?

Roses are red
Violets are blue
Sugar is sweet
And so are you.

Why isn't the latter a narrative?

And, what is narrative fiction? How does it differ from other kinds of narratives? In what sense is a newspaper report, a narrative but not narrative fiction? What are the features that turn a given discourse into a narrative text? What are the basic aspects of narrative fiction and how do they interact with each other? How does one make sense of a specific narrative text, and how can it be described to others?

Poetics is the systematic study of literature as literature. It deals with the question 'What is literature?' What are the forms and kinds of literature? What is the nature of one literary genre or trend? What is the

system of a particular poet's 'art' or 'language'? How is a story made? What are the specific aspects of works of literature? How are they constituted? How do literary texts embody 'non-literary' phenomena? etc.

From this introduction, Renan makes it clear that a narrative fiction must have certain qualities. By 'narrative fiction', Kenan means the narration of a succession of fictional events. She further states that the term *narration* suggests:

(1) A *communication* process in which the narrative as message is transmitted by addresser to addressee, and

(2) The verbal nature of *the medium used* to transmit the message.

It is this that distinguishes narrative fiction from narratives in other media, such as film, dance, or pantomime. The definition further suggests how narrative fiction differs from other literary texts, such as lyrical poetry or expository prose. Unlike the latter, narrative fiction represents a *succession of events.* Kenan believes that the fictional status of events is a pragmatic issue. It is arguable that history books, news reports, autobiography are in some sense no less fictional than what is conventionally classified as such. In fact, some of the procedures used in the analysis of fiction may be applied to texts conventionally defined as 'non-fiction'.

The definition of narrative fiction also gives rise to a classification of its basic aspects such as –the events, their verbal representation, and the act of telling or writing. In the spirit of Genette's distinction between 'histoire', 'récit' and 'narration', Kenan then labels these aspects 'story', 'text' and 'narration' respectively. 'Story' designates the narrated events, abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in their chronological order, together with the participants in these events. Whereas 'story' is a succession of events, 'text' is a spoken or written discourse which undertakes their telling. Put more simply, the text is what we read. In it, the events do not necessarily appear in chronological order, the characteristics of the participants are dispersed throughout, and all the items of the narrative content are filtered through some prism

or perspective ('focalizer'). Since the text is a spoken or written discourse, it implies someone who speaks or writes it. The act or process of production is the third aspect—'narration'. Narration can be considered as both real and fictional. In the empirical world, the author is the agent responsible for the production of the narrative and for its communication. The empirical process of communication, however, is less relevant to the poetics of narrative fiction than its counterpart within the text. Within the text, communication involves a fictional narrator transmitting a narrative to a fictional narratee. Of the three aspects of narrative fiction, the text is the only one directly available to the reader. It is through the text that he or she acquires knowledge of the story (its object) and of the narration (the process of its production).



You will note that, according to Kenan, the narrative text is itself defined by these two other aspects: unless it told a story it would not be a narrative, and without being narrated or written it would not be a text. Indeed, story and narration may be seen as two metonymies of the text, the first evoking it through its narrative content, the second through its production.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What distinguishes narrative fiction from the narratives in other media, such as film, dance, or pantomime?

Q 2: What is the basic difference between story and text, according to Kenan?

Q 3: How does Kenan take the idea of 'narration'?

4.5 IMPORTANT CONCEPTS OF THE BOOK

4.5.1 Idea of the Story: Events/Character

Events:

Story has been defined as the narrated events. In fact, story is one axis within the larger construct: the axis of temporal organization. Being an abstraction, a construct, the story is not directly available to the reader. Far from seeing story as raw, undifferentiated material, story has structured character, its being made of separable components, and hence having the potential of forming networks of internal relations. Such a view justifies attempts to disengage a form from the substance of the narrated

content, a specific narrative form. The theoretical possibility of abstracting story-form probably corresponds to the intuitive skill of users in processing stories: being able to re-tell them, to recognise variants of the same story, to identify the same story in another medium, and so on. Kenan argues that a story is an abstraction from:

(1) The specific style of the text in question

(2) The language in which the text is written (English, French, Hebrew)

(3) The medium or sign-system (words, cinematic shots, gestures)

Starting with story, rather than with the text from which it is abstracted, the former may be grasped as transferable from medium to medium, from language to language, and within the same language.

Character:

Kenan claims that although the study of the story's events and the links among them has been developed considerably in contemporary poetics, that of character has not. The elaboration of a systematic, non-reductive but also non-impressionistic theory of character remains one of the challenges poetics has not yet met. Virginia Woolf, for example, saw character (and life in general) as a flux and wanted to 'record the atoms as they fall upon the mind.'

The Structuralist critics tend to state that the notion of character is a myth. But, can we suppose that the character as 'dead'? Moreover, even if we grant the 'death' of character in contemporary literature, can we also retrospectively 'kill' him in 19th century fiction? Should a nonhumanist, anti-bourgeois ideology lead us to ignore that which is plainly central in a given corpus of narratives? The development of a theory of character, Kenan believes, has been impeded not only by the ideology of this or that 'school' of poetics, or this or that 'fashion' in literature.

In order to discuss the classification of characters we can refer to E.M. Forster, who in 1927, made a distinction between 'flat' and 'round' characters. Flat characters are analogous to 'humours', caricatures, types: "In their purest form, they are constructed around a single idea or quality" and therefore 'can be expressed in one sentence.' Furthermore, such characters do not develop in the course of the action. As a consequence of the restriction of qualities and the absence of development, flat characters are easily recognised, and easily remembered by the reader. Round characters are defined by contrastive implication, namely those that are not flat. Not being flat involves having more than one quality and developing in the course of the action. Forster's distinction is of pioneering importance.

(1) The term 'flat' suggests something two-dimensional, devoid of depth and 'life', while in fact many flat characters, like those of Dickens, are not only felt as very much 'alive' but also create the impression of depth.

(2) The dichotomy is highly reductive, obliterating the degrees and nuances found in actual works of narrative fiction.

(3) Forster seems to confuse two criteria which do not always overlap. According to him, a flat character is both simple and undeveloping, whereas a round character is both complex and developing. Although these criteria often co-exist, there are fictional characters which are complex but undeveloping (e.g. Joyce's Bloom) and others which are simple but developing (e.g. the allegorical Everyman). Moreover, the lack of development can be presented as arrested development resulting from some psychic trauma, as in the case of Miss Havisham in Dicken's *Great Expectations* (1860/61), thus endowing a static



character with complexity.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What is the idea of a story?

Q 5: How did E. M. Forster make a distinction between 'flat' and 'round' characters?

4.5.2 Idea of Time (Order, Duration, Frequency)

Time is one of the most basic categories of human experience. The validity of considering time to be a constituent of the physical world is open for discussions. But, individuals and societies continue to experience time and to regulate their lives by it. Some of our notions of time, Kenan observes, are derived from natural processes: day and night, a solar year with its four seasons (but not in the arctic zone), etc. A person shut off from all perception of the outside world would still presumably continue to experience the succession of his own thoughts and feelings. In between these two extremes—the natural and the personal—is the mainstream of temporal experience: time as an intersubjective, public, social convention which we establish in order to facilitate our living together.

Then she states that our civilization tends to think of time as uni-directional and irreversible flow, a sort of one-way street. Such a conception was given metaphoric shape by Heraclitus early in western history: 'You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters and yet other waters go ever flowing on.' Today we might add that not only the object of experience but also the experiencing subject is in a constant flux. To become socialised, the flux must be made measurable. It can become measurable only when a repetitive pattern is discerned within it (e.g. the solar year) or imposed upon it by machines constructed too this end (calendar, clock, metronome-time). Time 'is', paradoxically, repetition within irreversible change. The repetitive aspect of time is sometimes taken one step further and seen as a refutation of Heraclitan unidirectionality, as in Nietzsche's and Borges's concepts of 'circular time'.

Like any other aspect of the world, the experience of time may be represented in a narrative text, as (for example) in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927). However, time is not only a recurrent theme in a great deal of narrative fiction, it is also a constituent factor of both story and text. The peculiarity of verbal narrative is that in it time is constitutive both of the means of representation (language) and of the object represented (the incidents of the story). Thus time in narrative fiction can be defined as the relations of chronology between story and text. Story-time, conceived of as a linear succession of events, is no more than a conventional, pragmatically convenient construct. Text-time is equally problematic. Strictly speaking, it is a spatial, not a temporal, dimension. The narrative text as text has no other temporality than the one it metonymically derives from the process of its reading. What discussions of text-time actually refer to is the linear (spatial) disposition of linguistic segments in the continuum of the text. Thus, both story-time and text-time may in fact be no more than pseudo temporal. Nevertheless, as long as we remember their 'pseudo' nature they remain useful constructs for the study of an important facet of the story-text relations.

The disposition of elements in the text, conventionally called text time, is bound to be one-directional and irreversible, because language prescribes a linear figuration of signs and hence a linear presentation of information about things. We read letter after letter, word after word, sentence after sentence, chapter after chapter, and so on. There are some modern attempts to liberate narrative fiction from these constraints, but the liberation is never complete because a complete one, if possible, will destroy intelligibility. Thus, in Beckett's *Watt* there are a few sections where Watt, at least partly demented, reverses the order of words in the sentence, letters in the word, sentences in the paragraph, etc. However, the narrator explains these inversions to the reader before reproducing them, thus making it possible for him to recuperate the original order. Similarly, in *Hopscotch* the Argentine writer Julio Cortázar defies linearity by

making the order of the *chapters* variable. In a 'Table of Instructions' preceding the novel, he writes: "In its own way this book consists of many books, but two books above all. The first can be read in a normal fashion and ends with chapter 56….The second should be read by beginning with chapter 73 and then following the sequence indicated at the end of each chapter…"

In the discussion of narrative fiction, time in general may be viewed in three respects: **order, duration and frequency**. Statements about *order* would answer the question 'when?' in terms like: first, second, last; before, after, etc. Statements about duration would answer the question 'how long?' in terms like: an hour, a year; long, short; from x till y, etc. Statements about *frequency* would answer the question 'how often?' in terms like: x times a minute, a month, a page. Kenan refers to Gerard Genette who set out to examine the relations between story-time and text-time. Under *order* Genette discusses the relations between the succession of events in the story and their linear disposition in the text. Under *duration* he examines the relations between the time the events are supposed to have taken to occur and the amount of text devoted to their narration. Under *frequency* he looks at the relations between the number of times an event appears in the story and the number of times it is narrated in the text.

Order

The main types of discrepancy between story-order and text-order ('anachronies' in Genette's terms) are traditionally known as 'flashback' or 'retrospection' on the one hand and 'foreshadowing' or 'anticipation' on the other. Here, Kenan follows Genette in renaming them 'analepsis' and 'prolepsis' respectively. An *analepsis* is a narration of a story-event at a point in the text after later events have been told. The narration returns, as it were, to a past point in the story. Conversely, a *prolepsis* is a narration of a story-event at a point before earlier events have been mentioned. The narration, as it were, takes an excursion into the future of the story. If events a, b, c figure in the text in the order b, c, a then 'a' is analeptic. If on the other hand, they appear in the order c, a, b then 'c' would be proleptic. Both analepsis and prolepsis constitute a temporally second narrative in relation to

the narrative onto which they are incorporated and which Genette calls 'first narrative'. Analepses provide past information either about the character, event, or story-line mentioned at that point in the text, or about another character, event, or storyline.

But, I would like to stress, prolepsis can also be effectively used in so called omniscient narration, as the following example from Muriel Spark's The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie shows:

'Speech is silver but silence is golden. Mary, are you listening?

What was I saying?'

Mary Macgregor, lumpy, with merely two eyes, a nose and a mouth like a snowman, who was later famous for being stupid and always to blame and who, at the age of twenty-three, lost her life in a hotel fire, ventured, 'Golden'. (1971, pp. 14–15. Orig. publ. 1961)

Duration

As Genette points out, the difficulty inherent in the notion of text-time is perhaps more disturbing in connection with duration than it is in connection with order and frequency. The last two can be quite easily transposed from the *time* of the story, regardless of the conventional nature of this time, to the linearity *(space)* of the text. It is not awkward to say that episode A comes after episode B in the linear disposition of the text or that episode C is told twice in the text; and such statements are quite similar to those we can make about the story: event A precedes event B in the chronology of the story; event C happens only once, etc. But it is much more difficult to describe in parallel terms the *duration* of the text and that of the story, for the simple reason that there is no way of measuring text-duration. The only truly temporal measure available is the time of reading and this varies from reader to reader, providing no objective standard. For this reason, it is also more difficult to find a 'norm' against which to describe changes of duration than it was to find such a point of reference for order.

Since it is impossible to describe the varieties of duration on the basis of an inaccessible 'norm' of identity between story

and text, it is advisable to attempt a re-definition of the relations between the two 'durations' and posit a different type of 'norm' accordingly. The relations in question are, in fact, not between two 'durations' but between duration in the story (measnred in minutes, hours, days, months, years) and the length of text devoted to it (in lines and pages), i.e. a temporal/spatial relationship. The measure yielded by this relation in general is pace (or speed). Genette therefore proposes to use constancy of pace, rather than adequation of story and text, as the 'norm' against which to examine degrees of duration. Constancy of pace in narrative is the unchanged ratio between story-duration and textual length, e.g. when each year in the life of a character is treated in one page throughout the text.

Taking constant pace as a 'norm', we can discern two forms of modification: acceleration and deceleration. The effect of acceleration is produced by devoting a short segment of the text to a long period of the story, relative to the 'norm' established for this text. The effect of deceleration is produced by the opposite procedure, namely devoting a long segment of the text to a short period of the story. The maximum speed is ellipsis (omission), where zero textual space corresponds to some story duration. In Fielding's *Tom Jones,* for example, the narrator makes a point of giving the reader 'an opportunity of employing the wonderful sagacity, of which he is master, by filling up these vacant spaces of time with his own conjectures' and then leave him 'a space of twelve years' in which to exercise his talents On the other hand, the minimum speed is manifested as a *descriptive pause,* where some segment of the text corresponds to zero story duration.

Frequency

Frequency, was not treated as a component of narrative theory before Genette. It is the relation between the number of times an event appears in the story and the number of times it is narrated (or mentioned) in the text. Frequency, then, involves repetition, which is a mental construct attained by an elimination

of the specific qualities of each occurrence and a preservation of only those qualities which it shares with similar occurrences. Strictly speaking, no event is repeatable in all respects, nor is a repeated segment of the text quite the same, since its new location puts it in a different context which necessarily changes its meaning. This paradox is developed by Borges in 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*' (1974. Orig. publ. in Spanish 1956). In this text, ostensibly an obituary article on a little known French symbolist writer, we are informed that his most ambitious literary project consisted in writing again *Don Quixote*. Before his untimely death, Pierre Menard managed to produce only Chapters 9, 38 and a fragment of Chapter 22, all identical in every word to the corresponding portions of Cervantes's text (orig. publ. in Spanish 1605–1616). As the fictional narrator comments, the very same text coming from a French Decadent esthete and from a retired Spanish soldier takes a completely different sense, the former gaining in richness from the intervening changes in history and culture. Considered as mental constructs, repetition-relations between story events and their narration in the text can take the following forms:

Singulative*,* i.e. telling once what 'happened' once. This is the most common narrative form. To the same category belongs the less common phenomenon of narrating n times what 'happened' n times, since here too each mention in the text corresponds to one occurrence in the story. This practice is parodied in *Don Quixote* when Sancho tells the story of a fisherman who had to transport three hundred goats in a boat that had room only for one. As Sancho narrates, it becomes clear that he intends to tell the event three hundred times, corresponding to the number of journeys the fisherman undertook. Quixote impatiently comments:

Repetitive, i.e. telling n times what 'happened' once. Thus, the main event in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*! (1936), the murder of Charles Bon by Henry Sutpen, is narrated thirty-nine times, sometimes with, sometimes without changes of narrator, focalizer, duration, narrative subject, style, etc.

***Iterative**,* i.e. telling once what 'happened' n times. Such is the opening of Lawrence's *The Rainbow,* narrating in one time the recurrent activities of the Brangwen men over the years: Their life and interrelations were such, feeling the pulse and the body of the soil, that opened to their furrow for the grain, and became smooth and supple after their ploughing, and clung to their feet with a weight that pulled like desire, lying and responsive when the crops were shorn away…. They took the udder of the cows, the cows yielded milk and pulse against the hands of the men, the pulse of the blood of the teats of the cows beat into the pulse of the hands of the men. The passage is clearly iterative, prefiguring thereby the cyclic nature of the relationship between the generations and within each generation.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

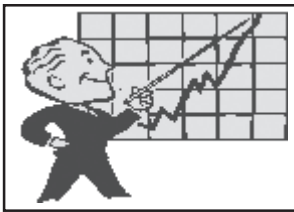
Q 6: Explain briefly the main role of time in a narrative fiction?

Q 7: In which respects, may we discuss the idea of time in a narrative fiction?

4.5.3 Characterisation

Character, as one construct within the abstracted story, can be described in terms of a network of character-traits. These traits, however, may or may not appear as such in the text. How, then, is the construct arrived at? By assembling various character-indicators distributed along the text-continuum and, when necessary, inferring the traits from them. It is these indicators that Kenan seeks to define under the heading of 'characterization'. In principle, any element in the text may serve as an indicator of character and, conversely, character-indicators may serve other purposes as well. But, there are elements which are most frequently, though not exclusively, associated with characterisation. In the study of particular texts, it should be remembered that the same means of characterization may be used differently by different authors or in different works by the

same author and sometimes even within the same work. However, in this general presentation of characterization such differences cannot be explored. There are two basic types of textual indicators of character: direct definition and indirect presentation. The first type names the trait by an adjective (e.g. 'he was goodhearted'), an abstract noun ('his goodness knew no bounds'), or possibly some other kind of noun ('she was a real bitch') or part of speech ('he loves only himself'). The second type, on the other hand, does not mention the trait but displays and exemplifies it in various ways, leaving to the reader the task of inferring the quality they imply. You are advised to think about characterisation in the novels that you are to study as part of your course.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: Which are the two types of textual indicators of character?

4.5.4 Focalisation

The story is presented in the text through the mediation of some 'prism', 'perspective', 'angle of vision', verbalised by the narrator though not necessarily his. However, many Anglo-American critics are likely to associate 'prism', 'perspective', or 'angle of vision' with the more common term 'point of view'. But, that the term 'focalization' is not free of optical-photographic connotations, and—like 'point of view'—its purely visual sense has to be broadened to include cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation. Most studies of point of view treat two related but different questions as if they were interchangeable: 'who sees?' and 'who speaks?' Obviously, a person (and, by analogy, a narrative agent) is capable of both speaking and seeing, and even of doing both things at the same time—a state of affairs which facilitates the confusion between the two activities. Moreover, it is almost impossible to speak without betraying some personal 'point of view', if only through the very language used. But, a person (and, by analogy, a narrative agent) is also capable of

undertaking to tell what another person sees or has seen. Thus, speaking and seeing, narration and focalization, may, but need not, be attributed to the same agent. The distinction between the two activities is a theoretical necessity, and only on its basis can the interrelations between them be studied with precision.

Kenan cites an example from James Joyce's novel *A Portrait* to clarify both the reasons for the confusion and the implications of the distinction. In Joyce's novel, almost everything is seen through Stephen's eyes. According to Booth, 'any sustained inside view, of whatever depth, temporarily turns the character whose mind is shown into a narrator'. If this is accepted, Stephen becomes not only a vehicle of focalization (a 'focalizer') but also a narrator. However, even in passages where the language gets as close as possible to a 'translation' of Stephen's perceptions, verbal communication and non-verbal focalization remain separate. Take, for example, the opening of the novel:

"Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo…His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face. He was baby tuckoo. The moocow came down the road where Betty Byrne lived: she sold lemon platt."

The language not only conveys the perceptions of the child, it also contains childish expressions. Yet it is not Stephen's language, nor is Stephen the narrator in this passage. For one thing, a baby who still wets the bed (see the next paragraph in the novel) is incapable of formulating complete sentences like those quoted above. For another, in this passage, Stephen is referred to in the third person ('he', 'him'), an unlikely procedure if he himself were the narrator of his story (although one could perhaps argue that children often do this). Similarly, focalization and narration are separate in so-called first person retrospective narratives, although this is usually ignored by studies of point of view. Pip, in Dickens's *Great Expectations,* narrates events that happened to him in the past:

'You are to wait here, you boy', said Estella and disappeared and closed the door. I took the opportunity of being

alone in the court-yard, to look at my coarse hands and my common boots. My opinion of those accessories was not favourable. They had never troubled me before, but they troubled me now, as vulgar appendages. Although this is a record of things as the child saw, felt, understood them, words like 'accessories' and 'appendages' are clearly not within a child's vocabulary. The narrator is Pip, the adult, while the focalizer is Pip, the child.

From the above discussion, the following may be seen as the distinction between narration and focalisation, in Kenan's view.

1. In principle, focalization and narration are distinct activities.
2. In so-called 'third-person centre of consciousness' (James's *The Ambassadors,* Joyce's *Portrait*), the centre of consciousness (or 'reflector') is the focalizer, while the user of the third person is the narrator.
3. Focalization and narration are also separate in first-person retrospective narratives.
4. As far as focalization is concerned, there is no difference between third-person centre of consciousness and first-person retrospective narration. In both, the focalizer is a character within the represented world. The only difference between the two is the identity of the narrator.
5. However, focalization and narration may sometimes be combined, as will be shown in the next section.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What is meant by the term 'focalisation'? Give an example.

4.5.5 The Role of the Reader

The Anglo-American New Critics and the French Structuralists treated the text as a more or less autonomous object. However, a new orientation, according to Kenan, stresses the reciprocal relations between text and reader: a text can only come to life when it is read, and if it is to be examined, it must therefore be studied through the eyes of the reader. The written

text is conceived of as having a virtual dimension which calls for the reader's construction of the unwritten text. This virtuality contributes to the dynamic character of the reading process and gives the reader a certain degree of freedom (but only a certain degree, since the written text does exercise some control over the process). Just as the reader participates in the production of the text's meaning, so the text shapes the reader. On the one hand, it 'selects' its appropriate reader, projects an image of such a reader, through its specific linguistic code, its style, the 'encyclopedia' it implicitly presupposes. On the other hand, just as the text pre- shapes a certain competence to be brought by the reader from the outside, so in the course of reading, it develops in the reader a specific competence needed to come to grips with it, often inducing him to change his previous conceptions and modify his outlook. The reader is thus both an image of a certain competence brought to the text and a structuring of such a competence within the text.

So, in Kenan's deliberations on a narrative, the 'reader' is seen as a construct, a 'metonymic characterization of the text', an 'it' rather than a personified 'he' or 'she'. Such a reader is 'implied' or 'encoded' in the text 'in the very rhetoric through which he is required to "make sense of the content" or reconstruct it "as a world." Consequently, the relevance of the psychology of readers is limited, but a few psychological observations which bear directly on the dynamics of reading inscribed in the text will be included in the next section. The advantage of talking of an implied reader rather than of 'textual strategies' pure and simple is that it implies a view of the text as a system of reconstruction inviting structures rather than as an autonomous object. Thus, analepses are often used to provide information necessary to the reader, and prolepses to arouse the reader's expectations, the story is abstracted by the reader, and characters are constructed by the reader from various indications dispersed along the text-continuum.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: How does Kenan consider the role of the readers?



4.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have tried to reflect on the different internal aspects of fiction as discussed by Rimmon Kenan in her book *Narrative Fiction*. You have, by this time, found that Kenan organises her discussions on fictional narratives around issues like events, time, focalization, characterization, narration, the text and the reader—which are some of the fundamental aspects in any fictional narratives. As you finish reading the unit, it is expected that you will now be able to examine the important aspects of narrative fiction, especially those prescribed for your study.



4.7 FURTHER READING

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

Rimmon Kenan, Shlomith. (2005). *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. Routledge.



4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: According to Renan a narrative fiction must have certain qualities… …unlike other narratives, the *narration* in narrative fiction is a communication process where a message is transmitted by the addresser to addressee… …besides, the verbal nature of the medium used to transmit the message is also taken into account.

Ans to Q No 2: Story' designates the narrated events reconstructed in their chronological order, together with the participants in these events… …story is a succession of events, text is a spoken or

written discourse which undertakes their telling… …the text is what we read.

Ans to Q No 3: Narration can be both real and fictional… …the author is the agent responsible for the production of the narrative… …the author is also responsible for the communication as part of the narration… …communication involves a fictional narrator transmitting a narrative to a fictional narratee.

Ans to Q No 4: A story has been defined as the narrated events… …because a story is a construct, it is not directly available to the reader… …a story has a structured character, as it is made of separable components.

Ans to Q No 5: Flat characters are 'humours' or caricatures, types… …such characters do not develop in the course of the action… …flat characters are easily recognised, and easily remembered by the reader… …round characters are defined by contrastive implication, namely those that are not flat… …they have more than one quality and are developing in the course of the action.

Ans to Q No 6: Time is not only a recurrent theme in a great deal of narrative fiction, it is also a constituent factor of both story and text. The peculiarity of verbal narrative is that in it time is constitutive both of the means of representation (language) and of the object represented (the incidents of the story).

Ans to Q No 7: Order, duration and frequency… …*order* would answer the question 'when?' in terms like: first, second, last; before, after, etc.… ….duration would answer the question 'how long?' in terms like: an hour, a year; long, short; from x till y, etc… … *frequency* would answer the question 'how often?' in terms like: x times a minute, a month, a page… ...*frequency* also encompasses the relations between the number of times an event appears in the story and the number of times it is narrated in the text.

Ans to Q No 8: Direct definition and indirect presentation… …the first type names the trait by an adjective—'he was goodhearted', by an abstract noun—'his goodness knew no bounds', some other kind of noun—'she was a real bitch', or part of speech—'he loves only

himself'…. …the second type, instead of mentioning the traits displays and exemplifies it in various ways.

Ans to Q No 9: Focalisation is often discussed as the 'point of view'… …point of view treat two related but different questions—'who sees?' and 'who speaks?'… …but a person is capable of both speaking and seeing, and even of doing both things at the same time… …but a person is also capable of undertaking to tell what another person sees or has seen… …so speaking and seeing, narration and focalization, may not be attributed to the same agent.

Ans to Q No 10: Kenan in his deliberations on a narrative, considers the 'reader' to be a construct, a 'metonymic characterization of the text', an 'it' rather than a personified 'he' or 'she'… …such a reader is 'implied' or 'encoded' in the text according to Kenan.



4.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What according to Rimmon Kenan is or is not a narrative? How does Kenan view the act of narration in the context of narrative fiction? Discuss.

Q 2: What distinguishes a narrative fiction from other literary texts and other types of narratives such as a film or pantomime? Discuss.

Q 3: Why is time so important in narrative fiction? Discuss in detail with reference to 'order', 'duration' and 'frequency'?

Q 4: What is understood by the term focalisation? Why is it that focalising and narrating are two different activities?

Q 5: Discuss the role of a reader as viewed by Rimmon Kenan.

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Web Resource:

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