PGEG S2 01

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

SEMESTER 2

ENGLISH

BLOCK 1: THEORIES OF FICTION

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

SEMESTER 2
MA IN ENGLISH
COURSE 1: 18TH AND 19TH CENTURY NOVELS
BLOCK 1: THEORIES OF FICTION

DETAILED SYLLABUS

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COURSE INTRODUCTION:

This is the first Course of Semester 2. In this Course, the learners are taken through the brief study of the theories of fiction and aspects of fiction writing, as well as six representative novels roughly covering the period stretching from the 18th century to the 19th. The learners are supposed to read and study these representative texts of English fiction in order that they comprehend the issues addressed and learn the proper modes of analysing the works of fiction from the perspectives of various critical approaches. Thus, this course is intended not just to introduce the learners to the various theoretical premises of narratives, but also to the contextual relations of the texts to the age out of which they actually emerged.

UNIT 1: MILAN KUNDERA: *ART OF THE NOVEL* ("THE DEPRECIATED LEGACY OF CERVANTES")

UNIT STRUCTURE:

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 Milan Kundera: Life and Works

1.4 Reading the Text

1.5 Important Ideas in the Text

1.6 Reception of Kundera's Ideas

1.7 Let us Sum up

1.8 Further Reading

1.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

1.10 Possible Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- *discuss* the life and works of Milan Kundera
- *explain* the main issues and ideas regarding fiction as discussed by Kundera in the chapter prescribed from his *Art of the Novel*
- *elaborate* Kundera's contributions to the writing
- *assess* Kundera's reception as a theorist of fiction

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of Block 1 of the Course on 18th and 19th Century Fiction. The entire first Block of this course is dedicated to the theories of fiction. In this unit, we shall try to discuss some aspects of the art of fiction writing as understood by Milan Kundera. You will note that Kundera's *The Art of the Novel* is the most important nonfictional work, other than his novels. Published in 1988, this book outlines Kundera's theories of the novel. The book consists of three short essays, two interviews, a list of sixty-three words and their definitions, and the text of

European countries to reject Soviet control were violently squashed. During the so-called "Prague Spring", the Czechoslovakian government allowed writers and other artists a level of freedom of expression that the communist country had previously not permitted. However, the reprieve from oppression was short-lived. Soviet tanks rolled into the city and the old "order" was restored. Kundera found himself in the same position as many of the other leaders of the reform movement. His books disappeared from libraries and bookstores; he lost his job at the academy, and his right to continue writing and publishing in his native country.

Though initially, he was not allowed to travel to the West, Kundera finally secured a teaching position in France. He served as an invited professor of comparative literature at the Universite´ de Rennes from 1975 to 1979. In 1980, he took a professorship at the 'E´cole des hautes e´tudes en sciences sociales' (School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences) in Paris. The following year, he became a naturalized citizen of France.

Life Is Elsewhere (1974) is his first major work and it was published in the United States. He took revolutionary romanticism, and the volatility of the marriage among other things, as the subject matters of the book. His next book *The Farewell Party* (1976) was also published in the United States. This book satirizes a government-run health spa for women with fertility problems while simultaneously addressing serious ethical questions. *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1980) was republished a year later with an interview Kundera gave to American novelist Philip Roth. This book illustrates the need for memory to overcome forgetting in order for an individual to achieve self-preservation.

Kundera's most famous novel till date is *The Unbearable Lightness of Being,* which was published in 1984. In this book, he touched upon his experiences after the "Prague Spring." This novel delves deeper into the greatest existential problems that people are faced with: love, death, transcendence, the sense of continuity or "heaviness" provided by memory, and the contrasting sense of "lightness" that is brought about by forgetting. The book was adapted as a movie in 1988.

In a 1984 interview with the British writer Ian McEwan, Kundera stated:

"We constantly rewrite our own biographies and continually give matters new meanings. To rewrite history in this sense—indeed, in an Orwellian sense—is not at all inhuman. On the contrary, it is very human."

He also asserts his right as an author to exclude from his body of work "immature" and "unsuccessful" works. In his mature fiction, he creates a self-contained world that he constantly analyzes and questions, opening up a multitude of ways of interpreting the incidents he depicts. Kundera's style of fiction, interlaced with philosophical digression, is greatly inspired by the novels of Robert Musil and the philosophy of Nietzsche. He takes his inspiration, as he notes often enough, not only from the Renaissance authors such as Giovanni Boccaccio and Rabelais, but also from Laurence Sterne, Henry Fielding, Denis Diderot, Hermann Broch, Franz Kafka, Martin Heidegger and most significantly, Miguel de Cervantes, to whose legacy he considers himself most committed.

In 1990, Kundera published another book called *Immortality*. The novel, his last in Czech, was more cosmopolitan than its predecessors, and more explicitly philosophical and less political. It would set the tone for his later novels. His most recent novel is *The Festival of Insignificance* (originally published in 2013) that focuses on the musings of four male friends living in Paris.

Kundera continues to live and work in Paris.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is known as the Prague Spring? How was Kundera associated with what is known as the 'Prague Spring'?

Q 2: Mention the themes of Kundera's famous work *Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

Q 3: Why did Kundera write his novels following a musical pattern?

two great philosophers—Heidegger and Husserl laid bare the ambiguity of this epoch, which is decline and progress at the same time and which, like all that is human, carries the seed of its end in its beginning. According to Kundera, this ambiguity does not diminish the last four centuries of European culture, to which he feels attached. There he boldly asserted that '**the founder of the Modern Era is not only Descartes but also Cervantes.'** Perhaps, it is Cervantes whom the two phenomenologists neglected to take into consideration in their judgment of the Modern Era. By that, Kundera means: "If it is true that philosophy and science have forgotten about man's being, it emerges all the more plainly that with Cervantes a great European art took shape that is nothing other than the investigation of this 'forgotten being.'"

Kundera feels that the existentialist philosopher Heidegger in his book *Being and Time* unveiled, displayed, and illuminated all the great philosophical themes in four centuries of the European reincarnation of the novel. As in case of philosophy, the novel too, in its own way, discovered the various dimensions of existence one by one. He states that with Cervantes and his contemporaries, the novel inquired into the nature of adventure; with Richardson, it begins to examine "what happens inside," to unmask the secret life of the feelings; with Balzac, it discovers man's rootedness in history; with Flaubert, it explored the previously unknown territories of the everyday life; with Tolstoy, it focused on the intrusion of the irrational in human behaviour and decisions. The novel probed time: the elusive past with Proust, the elusive present with Joyce. With Thomas Mann, it examined the role of the myths from the remote past that control our present actions.

The novel has accompanied man uninterruptedly and faithfully since the beginning of the Modern Era. It was then that the 'passion to know,' which Husserl considered the essence of European spirituality, seized the novel and led it to scrutinize man's concrete life and protect it against 'the forgetting of being.' That is the sense in which Kundera wants to understand and share Hermann Broch's insistence on the point that "The sole *raison d'etre* of a novel is to discover what only the novel

However, it is not at all fearsome yet, it even has its appeal; it promises adventure to every passenger and with it fame and fortune.

Kundera states that the path of the novel emerges as a parallel history of the Modern Era. Isn't that Don Quixote himself, after a three-hundred-year journey, returning to the village disguised as a land-surveyor? Once he had set out to seek adventures of his own choosing, but now in the village below the Castle he has no choice, the adventure is *imposed on him:* a petty squabble with the administration over a mistake in his file. So what, after three centuries, has happened to adventure, the first great theme of the novel? Has it become its own parody? What does that mean? That the path of the novel winds up in a paradox? Kundera then provides the example of another novel.

The Good Soldier Schweik by Jaroslav Hašek is perhaps the last great popular novel. Isn't it astonishing that this comic novel is also a war novel, whose action unfolds in the army and at the front? What has happened to war and its horrors if they have become laughing matters? In Homer and in Tolstoy, war had a perfectly comprehensible meaning: people fought for Helen or for Russia. Schweik and his companions go to the front without knowing why and, what is even more shocking, without caring to know.

What, then, as Kundera wants to explore, is the motor of war if not Helen or country? Sheer 'force' that wills to assert itself as force? Yet hasn't that been behind all wars since the beginning of time? Yes, of course. However, this time, in Hasek, it is stripped of any rational argument. No one believes in the nonsense of the propaganda, not even those who manufacture it. Force is naked here, as naked as in Kafka's novels. Indeed, the Court has nothing to gain from executing K. Why did Germany, why does Russia today want to dominate the world? To be richer? Happier? Not at all. The aggressivity of force is thoroughly disinterested; unmotivated; it wills only its own will; it is pure irrationality.

Thus, according to Kundera, Kafka and Hasek help us confront an enormous paradox that is in the course of the Modern Era, Cartesian rationality has corroded all the values inherited from the Middle Ages. However, just when reason wins a total victory, pure irrationality seizes

a supremely precious value in the process of being crushed by the ubiquitous collectivity?

Then Kundera ponders over the issue of death of the novel as discussed for a long time: notably by the Futurists, by the Surrealists, by nearly all the avant-gardes. They saw the novel dropping off the road of progress, yielding to a radically new future and an art bearing no resemblance to what had existed before. The novel was to be buried in the name of historical justice, like poverty, the ruling classes, obsolete cars, or top hats. However, if Cervantes were the founder of the Modern Era, then the end of his legacy ought to signify more than a mere stage in the history of literary forms; it would herald the end of the Modern Era. That is why the blissful smile that accompanies those obituaries of the novel strikes me as frivolous. Frivolous because Kundera himself lived through the death of the novel, a violent death (inflicted by bans, censorship, and ideological pressure), in the world where he spent much of his life and which is usually called totalitarian. At that time, it became utterly clear that the novel was mortal; as mortal as the West of the Modern Era. As a model of this Western world, grounded in the relativity and ambiguity of things human, the novel is incompatible with the totalitarian universe. This incompatibility is deeper than the one that separates a dissident from an apparatchik, or a human-rights campaigner from a torturer, because it is not only political or moral but also *ontological.* By this, Kundera means—”The world of one single Truth and the relative, ambiguous world of the novel are molded of entirely different substances. Totalitarian Truth excludes relativity, doubt, questioning; it can never accommodate what I would call the *spirit of the novel.*”

Kundera then, by referring to an experience of reading the Russian novels, asks why hundreds and thousands of novels are still being published in huge editions and widely read in Communist Russia. Certainly; but these novels add nothing to the conquest of being. They discover no new segment of existence; they only confirm what has already been said; furthermore: in confirming what everyone says (what everyone must say), they fulfil their purpose, their glory, their usefulness

The appeal of thought: Musil and Broch brought a sovereign and radiant intelligence to bear on the novel. Not to transform the novel into philosophy, but to marshal around the story all the means—rational and irrational, narrative and contemplative—that could illuminate man's being; could make of the novel the supreme intellectual synthesis. Is their achievement the completion of the novel's history, or is it instead the invitation to a long journey?

The appeal of time: The period of *terminal paradoxes* incites the novelist to broaden the time issue beyond the Proustian problem of personal memory to the enigma of collective time, the time of Europe, Europe looking back on its own past, weighing up its history like an old man seeing his whole life in a single moment. Whence the desire to overstep the temporal limits of an individual life, to which the novel had hitherto been confined, and to insert in its space several historical periods (Aragon and Fuentes have already tried this). But, I don't want to predict the future paths of the novel, which I cannot know; all I mean to say is this: If the novel should really disappear, it will do so not because it has exhausted its powers but because it exists in a world grown alien to it.

There he asks if the novel's *raison d'etre* is to keep "the world of life" under a permanent light and to protect us from "the forgetting of being," is it not more than ever necessary today that the novel should exist? Kundera's answer is positive. But, the point is that the idea of the novels has faced a kind of reduction not only in terms of the meaning of the world but also in terms of the meaning of works of art. Like all of culture, the novel is more and more in the hands of the mass media; as agents of the unification of the planet's history, the media amplify and channel the reduction process; they distribute throughout the world the same simplifications and stereotypes easily acceptable by the greatest number, by everyone, by all mankind. This common spirit of the mass media, camouflaged by political diversity, is the spirit of our time. And this spirit seems to me contrary to the spirit of the novel, which is the spirit of complexity as well as of continuity. Every novel says to the reader: "Things are not as simple as you think." That is the novel's eternal truth.

1.5 IMPORTANT IDEAS IN THE CHAPTER

In the chapter "The Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes", Kundera is found to have traced the adaptations that the novel has made over the four centuries, and different changes were enabled by an ever-evolving society. Paraphrasing Edmund Husserl, Kundera tries to argue that the modern age began when Galileo Galilei and René Descartes elevated the importance of that which can be measured, resulting in a degradation of those things that were not scientific or technical. With the sciences becoming more and more concentrated, specialised and exclusive, the world too became more and more fragmented. As men failed to comprehend the world, they failed to comprehend themselves. In *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, Miguel de Cervantes opposed this trend, as he gave due emphasis on the forgotten self of man. Kundera's argument is that it is the novel, which illuminates various aspects of man's existence.

In Kundera's view, the great novelists throughout history have modified the novel to accommodate the changes in society. Cervantes encountered a world that had lost its sense of certainty as God failed to retain the supreme position He had held in the Middle Ages. Consequently, focussing on the ambiguity confronting man, Cervantes realized that there are no absolutes, and therefore, he found himself faced with unrestrained freedom. Thus, the world of Don Quixote is one of adventure where anything was possible. A hundred years later, Samuel Richardson examined the interior life of the individual. In the 19th century, Gustave Flaubert faced a world bounded by institutions and government; he chronicled the trivial events of daily existence. In the 20th century, Marcel Proust explored the effect of the past on the individual, and James Joyce questioned the ability to know the present. Kundera's argument is that soon all accepted value systems will be discredited and abolished, resulting in a total dominance of irrationality. In addition, he asserts his views by referring to modern novelists, including Franz Kafka, Robert Musil, and Hermann Broch. Of all the genres, Kundera states, only the novel has been able to reflect the changes accompanying the emergence of modern man.

the existential questions that never change but need to be asked anew." However, not all reviewers were enchanted with the book. Christopher Hawtree, for example, in the *Spectator*, raised some reservations against Kundera's titles and finds problems with the "elliptical structure" of the work. Thus, scholarly interest in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* continues unabated.



1.7 LET US SUM UP

Milan Kundera is one of the few Czech writers who have achieved wide international recognition. In his native Czechoslovakia and the present-day Czech Republic and Slovakia, Kundera has been regarded as an important author and intellectual since his early 20s. Each of his creative works and contributions to the public political and cultural discourse has provoked a lively debate in the context of its time. In his *Art of Fiction*, Kundera dispassionately explains how novels are made and why. For this, he starts with Cervantes, passes through Richardson Honore´ de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, Leo Tolstoy, Marcel Proust, and ends with Ftantz Kafka, James Joyce and Hermann Broch. In the chapter prescribed, Kundera mostly reiterates that the novel and its history constitute a specific form of knowledge not to be confused with philosophy, politics or psychology.



1.8 FURTHER READING

Kundera, Milan. (1988). *The Art of the Novel.* (*Trans from the French by Linda Asher*). Grove Press, Inc.

Milne, Ira Mark. *Gale Contextual Encyclopaedia of World Literature. Vol III.*

Web Resource:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milan_Kundera

https://www.enotes.com/topics/art-novel-milan-kundera

Ans to Q 6: Don Quixote set forth into a world he could no longer recognise… the world suddenly appeared in its fearsome ambiguity… …the single divine Truth decomposed into myriad relative truths parcelled out by men… …thus, was born the world of the Modern Era, and with it the novel, the image and model of that world.

Ans to Q 7: Kundera's discussions on fiction in *Art of the Novel* starts with a reference to a world of unlimited potential, the beginning of history, the shrinking of possibilities in the outside world, the search for infinity in the human soul, the futility of this search… ..he ends with a reference to history, which he terms a 'monster' that can offer nothing helpful.

Ans to Q 8: In the chapter Kundera traces the adaptations and changes that the novel has made over the four centuries… …with the sciences becoming more and more concentrated, specialised and exclusive, the world too became more and more fragmented… …in *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, Cervantes opposed this trend giving due emphasis on the forgotten self of man… …Kundera states that the novel illuminates various aspects of man's existence.



1.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: In what ways, does Milan Kundera, discuss the state of fiction in the chapter "The Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes" from his *Art of the Novel*.

Q 2: How does Kundera address the broader questions concerning fiction, such as its uniqueness of form, its vitality, and future in his *Art of Fiction.*

Q 3: "Kundera almost asserts that the future of the novel lies in its continuing ability to evolve." Justify your views.

Q 4: How does Kundera outline the history of the European novels? Discuss the ways in which Kundera acknowledges the contributions of the novelists starting with Cervantes with their

UNIT 2: WAYNE C. BOOTH: *"TELLING AND SHOWING"* FROM *THE RHETORIC OF FICTION*

UNIT STRUCTURE:

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Wayne C. Booth: Life and Works

2.4 About the Book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*

2.5 Some Excerpts from the text of "Telling and Showing"

2.6 Reading the Text

2.7 Let us Sum up

2.8 Further Reading

2.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

2.10 Possible Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss W. C. Booth's contributions to narrative fiction
- explain the important concepts of narrative fiction mentioned by Booth in the chapter prescribed
- identify the important ideas contained in the text(s) selected
- use some of these ideas in your own interpretation of narrative texts that you are required to study

2.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit provides a discussion on Wayne C. Booth and the chapter entitled "Telling and Showing" from his much acclaimed book *The Rhetoric of Fiction.* Wayne Clayson Booth (1921- 2005) was an American literary critic based in Chicago, Illinois. He was the George M Pullman Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus in English Language & Literature at the Chicago University. His work followed largely from the Chicago School of Literary Criticism. Divided into three sections,

problems. As a result, he wrote *Now Don't Try to Reason with Me: Essays and Ironies for a Credulous Age* (1970) and *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (1974), arguing that understanding texts, or people, on their own terms in the first instance is the only respectable intellectual position to adopt. This is also very much the informing principle of both *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1974) and *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (1988).

Booth's graduate work at Chicago took place mostly under the supervision of the critic R. S. Crane (1886–1967). Like the New Critics, the Chicago School critics emphasised the need to focus on the text, and to move away from context (history and biography, for example). But whereas the concentration in New Criticism was on language, and hence mostly on poetry, critics such as Crane were equally, if not more, interested in the text as a system of communication in which plot, characterisation, and overall structure played a part. Members of the Chicago School were often referred to as Neo-Aristotelians because, under the influence of Aristotle, they saw every element of the text, and the text as a whole, as mimetic, as an enactment of the experience or reality being represented. Above all, advocating a "Pluralist approach" Crane and his fellow critics argued that there could be no single way of approaching a literary text.

In his influential first book, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961; rev. ed., 1983), Booth presented a detailed examination of narrative technique and introduced such terms as "implied author" and "reliable narrator." In 1974, he produced *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, a plea for reasoned assent in the educational community that was prompted by events on the Chicago campus. *The Company We Keep* (1988), offers a discussion of the place of ethics in literary criticism. In addition to writing further works of criticism, Booth cofounded (1974) and co-edited from 1974 to 1985 the quarterly *Critical Inquiry*. His other books include *Now Don't Try to Reason with Me: Essays and Ironies for a Credulous Age* (1970), *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1974), *Critical Understanding:*

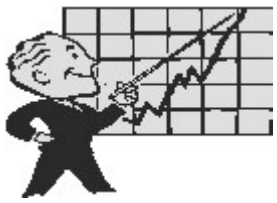
Booth's criticism can be viewed as distinct from traditional biographical criticism, and the new criticism that argued that one can talk only about what the text says, and the modern criticism that argues for the "eradication" of authorial presence. Booth claimed that it is impossible to talk about a text without talking about an author, because the existence of the text implies the existence of an author. He also argued that it does not matter whether an author—as distinct from the narrator—intrudes directly in a work, since readers will always infer the existence of an author, behind any text they encounter. Besides, the readers will always draw conclusions about the beliefs and judgments (and conclusions about the skills and "success") of a text's implied author, along the text's various lines of interest, as he states:

"However impersonal he may try to be, his readers will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe who writes in this manner—and of course that official scribe will never be neutral toward all values. Our reaction to his various commitments, secret or overt, will help to determine our response to the work."

This implied author, as Booth would like to use (whom he also called an author's "second self") is the one who "chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices." In this book, Booth also coined the term "unreliable narrator"—a narrator whose credibility has been seriously compromised.

In *Rhetoric of Fiction,* Booth spent several chapters using a series of illustrations that include numerous references to and citations from widely recognised works of fiction, and describing the various effects that implied authors achieve along the various lines of interest that he identifies, depending upon whether the implied author provides commentary, and upon the degree to which a story's narrator is reliable or unreliable, personal or impersonal. He detailed three "Types of Literary Interest" that are "available for technical manipulation in fiction:"

Intellectual or Cognitive: One may have, or can be made to have,



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What does Booth state about the concepts of Telling and Showing in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*?

Q 4: How is Booth's criticism distinct from traditional biographical criticism and New Criticism?

Q 5: What are the three different types of literary interests as Booth stated?

2.5 SOME EXCERPTS FROM THE TEXT OF "TELLING AND SHOWING"

In his 1979 study, *Critical Understanding: the Powers and Limits of Pluralism*, Booth argues that there are five ways of approaching novels, or literary texts. The critic James Phelan summarizes these as follows: as an imitation of the world external to it (the mimetic approach), as an event in time (the historical approach), as an autotelic object (the objective), as an expression – and revelation – of its author's psychology or experience (the expressive or biographical), as a communication to an audience (rhetorical or reader-response). (Phelan 1988: 63) The next chapter will concentrate on the first, the mimetic. The New Critics saw the text as autotelic, as a structure of words independent of its context, but Booth's emphasis is on a textual environment of communication and reception. In his 'Afterword' to the second edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne C. Booth makes it clear that (unlike Trilling's) his project is trans-historical and non-political: 'studying the rhetoric of fiction is one thing and studying the political history of novels…is another' (Booth 1983a: 413). Whether such a project is possible, productive, or welcome is another matter. Booth's entire approach to the novel is determined by his conviction that '[t]he novel comes into existence as something communicable' (1961: 397). It is, or rather should be, an 'essentially public' form (1961: 395). Throughout *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and *The Company We Keep*, the focus is on fiction 'viewed as the art of communicating with readers' (1961: xiii). In terms of our communication

Booth also criticizes James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) for its muddled and muddling narrative and absence of any clear moral position. It will become clear as the book proceeds, however, that Booth's enduring legacy is less his rather inflexible views on morality, and much more the vocabulary and concepts he developed in order to explore what he sees as the gains and losses of impersonal narration. For Booth, the main tool for the writer and critic of the novel is rhetoric, the means by which a particular author's fictional world. The French novelist Gustave Flaubert (1821–80) is identified by Booth as an initiator of the fashion in the later 19th century for less intrusive narrators in fiction, and for novels (to use Booth's terms) that 'show' rather than 'tell' (Booth 1961: 3–20); a distinction Booth rejects. This is sometimes referred to as a 'dramatic' method because the emphasis is often on scene (or dialogue) and panoramic summary, or pictorial presentation, rather than on narrative commentary and explanation. This fashion hardened into dogma after Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* (1921), a book that teased out of Henry James's prefaces (mistakenly, as we shall see in Chapter 4) a systematic theory of impersonal narration. Its moral norms are communicated to the reader. Booth sets out to consider 'whether rhetoric is compatible with art' (1961: xiv) and ends up concluding that every move a writer makes is rhetorical: fiction is rhetoric. Booth demonstrates that despite the claims of the purists, each element of a novel (including dialogue, setting, symbolism, and so on) is part of its system of persuasion. As we have seen, there are two extremes in the spectrum of rhetoric available to the novelist: the use of garrulous narrators who obstruct at every opportunity the reader's own access to the fictional world; and the elimination of such narrators to the point where the reader is left drifting. An example of the former would be the narrator in Henry Fielding's (1707–54) novel, *Tom Jones* (1749), and the French writer Alain Robbe-Grillet's (1922–) *Jealousy* (1957) is offered by Booth as an example of the latter (1961: 62). Although Booth feels able (grudgingly) to 'endure' its 'unmediated, mindless sensation or emotion' because it is 'less than 35,000 words long' (1961: 63), he was generally repelled by the development in the 1950s of the nouveau roman in France. By the mid

predetermining ways of writing the novel, and Trilling repudiates Parrington's insistence on political and social relevance, Booth argues that only the novel's purpose within the context of its specific conception can define and shape its form and content. This sense of the limitless possibilities of novels restricted only by their initial choice of subject seems to correspond with Trilling's celebration of the variety to which the form gives rise. However, Booth sees Trilling's recommendation of the 'novel of ideas' in The Liberal Imagination as an example of exactly the kind of extraneous constriction, or 'normative' approach, he wants to resist in favour of being 'descriptive'. There is an incoherence here, however, that comes close to wrecking the whole edifice of The Rhetoric of Fiction, and to which we shall return at the end of the book. Booth is close to rejecting rules established elsewhere in order to smuggle in his own. 'The ultimate problem in the rhetoric of fiction', he asserts, is 'that of deciding for whom the author should write'. But regardless of whether he writes for his peers, or fellow-novelists, 'himself as imagined reader', or his wider audience, he is involved in an act of communication that cannot be other than moral because, again, the human activity of communication can only ever be a moral act; one available, that is, for approval or condemnation. Towards the end of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, the approach hardens into the normative view that technical innovation should always be subordinate to the 'obligation to be as clear about' the 'moral position' as possible. It seems at this point as if Booth is much more interested in a 'conscious moral purpose' for the novel than either James or Trilling. Booth is certainly a long way here from Trilling's commitment to the liberating potential of ambiguity. Although he shared a belief in the need for novels to conduct a complex investigation of the disparities between illusion and reality, he had a firm view of the moral certainties such an investigation ought to yield. 'Pure' narration has 'fouled' our 'lines of communication': 'we have looked for so long at foggy landscapes reflected in misty mirrors that we have come to like fog'. The task of the novel, as Booth insists on it, is not to create the fog but to issue fog warnings. The 'deliberate confusion' of 'fundamental truths' ought not to be the purpose of the novel.

We move immediately in Job to two scenes presented with no privileged information whatever: Satan's temptation of God and Job's first losses and lamentations. However, we conclude the first section with another judgment, which no real event could provide for any observer: "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." How do we know that Job sinned not? Who is to pronounce on such a question? Only God himself could know with certainty whether Job charged God foolishly. Yet the author pronounces judgment, and we accept his judgment without question.

It might at first appear that the author does not require us to rely on his unsupported word, since he gives us the testimonial of God himself, conversing with Satan, to confirm his view of Job's moral perfection. In addition, after Job has been pestered by his three friends and has given his own opinion about his experience, God is brought on stage again to confirm the truth of Job's view. However, clearly, the reliability of God's statements ultimately depends on the author himself; it is he who names God and assures us that this voice is truly His.

This form of artificial authority has been present in most narrative until recent times. Though Aristotle praises Homer for speaking in his own voice less than other poets, even Homer writes scarcely a page without some kind of direct clarification of motives, of expectations, and of the relative importance of events. Though the gods themselves are often unreliable, Homer—the Homer we know—is not. What he tells us usually goes deeper and is more accurate than anything we are likely to learn about real people and events. In the opening lines of the Iliad, for example, we are told, under the half-pretence of an invocation, precisely what the tale is to be about "the anger of Peleus' son Achilleus and its devastation." We are told directly that we are to care more about the Greeks than the Trojans. We are told that they were "heroes" with L Trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago, 1951). All quotations are from this translation. "strong souls." We are told that it was the will of Zeus that they should be "the delicate feasting of dogs." And we learn that the particular conflict between Agamemnon, "the lord of men," and "brilliant"

on his own direct judgments with bright colors. The "insolent," "swaggering," and "ruffianly" suitors are contrasted to the "wise" (though almost helplessly young) Telemachus and the "good" Mentor. "Telemachus now showed his good judgment." Mentor "showed his good will now by rising to admonish his compatriots." We seldom encounter the suitors without some explicit attack by the poet: "This was their boastful way, though it was they who little guessed how matters really stood." And whenever there might be some doubt about where a character stands, Homer sets us straight: " 'My Queen,' replied Medon, who was by no means a villain . . . ." Hundreds of pages later, when Medon is spared from Odysseus' slaughter, we can hardly be surprised.

The result of all this direct guidance, when it is joined with Athene's divine attestation that the gods "have no quarrel" with Telemachus and have settled that he "shall come home safe," is to leave us, as we enter upon Odysseus' first adventure in Book Five, perfectly clear about what we should hope for and what fear; we are unambiguously sympathetic toward the heroes and contemptuous of the suitors. It need hardly be said that another poet, working with the same episodes but treating them from the suitors' point of view, could easily have led us into the same adventures with radically different hopes and fears.

Direct and authoritative rhetoric of the kind we have seen in Job and in Homer's works has never completely disappeared from fiction. But as we all know, it is not what we are likely to find if we turn to a typical modern novel or short story.

Jim had a great trick that he used to play w'ile he-was travelin'. For instance, he'd be ridin' on a train and they'd come to some little town like, well, like, we'll say, like Benton. Jim would look out of the train window and read the signs on the stores.

For instance, they'd be a sign, "Henry Smith, Dry Goods." Well, Jim would write down the name and the name of the town and when he got to wherever he was goin' he'd mail back a postal card to Henry Smith at Benton and not sign no name to it, but he'd write on the card, well, somethin' like "Ask your wife about that book agent that spent the

naturally superior to any mode that allows for direct appearances by the author or his reliable spokesman. Sometimes, as we shall see in the next three chapters, the complex issues involved in this shift have been reduced to a convenient distinction between "showing," which is artistic, and telling, "which is inartistic." "I shall not *tell* you anything," says a fine young novelist in defence of his art. "I shall allow you to eavesdrop on my people, and sometimes they will tell the truth and sometimes they will lie, and you must determine for yourself when they are doing which. You do this every day. Your butcher says, 'This is the best,' and you reply, 'That's you saying it/ Shall my people be less the captive of their desires than your butcher? I can show much, but show only…You will no more expect the novelist to tell you precisely *how* something is said then you will expect him to stand by your chair and hold your book."

However, the changed attitudes toward the author's voice in fiction raise problems that go far deeper than this simplified version of point of view would suggest. Percy Lubbock taught us forty years ago to believe that "the art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be *shownf* to be so exhibited that it will tell itself." He may have been in some sense right—but to say so raises more questions than it answers.

Why is it that an episode "told" by Fielding can strike us as more fully realized than many of the scenes scrupulously "shown" by imitators of James or Hemingway? Why does some authorial commentary ruin the work in which it occurs, while the prolonged commentary of Tristram Shandy can still enthral us? What, after all, does an author do when he "intrudes" to "tell" us something about his story? Such questions force us to consider closely what happens when an author engages a reader fully with a work of fiction; they lead us to a view of fictional technique which necessarily Mark Harris, goes far beyond the reductions that we have sometimes accepted under the concept of "point of view."

2.6 READING THE TEXT

The chapter called "Telling and Showing" in W C Booth's book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* is divided into three sections. In these sections, Booth

read two or more novels by the same writer, how the story is told (what kind of narrator or narrative method is used), any characters who may 'listen' to or 'read' the story in the text (the 'narratees'), and the type of reader constructed or implied in the text, as distinct from any actual reader. Framing all this are the societies inhabited by author and reader. After *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Booth calls the real author and the real reader the 'flesh-and-blood author' and the 'flesh-and-blood reader' in order to detach them even more emphatically from their 'career' and 'implied' versions. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and, later, in *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, Booth makes explicit many of the elements involved in the production and reception of fiction implicit in the criticism of James and Trilling.

Significance of Booth's Ideas

Peter Rawling, in his book *American Theorists of The novel: Henry James, Lionel Trilling*. Wayne C. Booth provides important readings of three American theorists from which we can find access to the some larger issues of narratives. Rawling's book is anchored in Henry James's *The Art of Fiction* (1884) and his prefaces to the New York Edition of his *Novels and Tales* (1907–9), in Lionel Trilling's *The Liberal Imagination* (1950), *The Opposing Self* (1955), *Beyond Culture* (1965), and *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972), and Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) and *The Company We Keep.* A reading of this book may provide a comprehensive understanding of concepts of these three critics, which shall help you to understand the aspects of narrative fiction in a far better way.

The following reference to the chapters of Rawling's book shall help us to discuss the contributions of Booth to the discussions of narrative fiction.

Chapter 1 "Three Perspectives on the Novel" make a survey of the ways in which James, Trilling, and Booth define the novel and its purpose, and on how all three attempt to rescue the form from its compromising popularity by elevating it to the level of an art.

Chapter 2 "Realism and Representation" makes a reference to Booth who wanted to ask a few important questions:

anarchy? James and Trilling seem to argue that the best guarantee of responsible behaviour lies in the cultivation of individual intelligence, of flexible thinking, whereas Booth is often more interested in advocating a much less flimsy framework of clear moral principles in which communication and consensus are among the controlling elements. Is a resolution of these conflicts between Booth on the one hand, and James and Trilling on the other, desirable, or even possible?



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: How does Booth make a distinction between 'showing' and 'telling'?

Q 11: What are the questions that should occur to us 'when an author engages a reader fully with a work of fiction'?



2.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt that with *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Booth became established as a "Chicago Critic". The neo-Aristotelian critics such as R S Crane and Booth himself believed that art must contribute something to life beyond immediate pleasure. Art has a function to both instruct and entertain. *The Rhetoric of Fiction* finally discusses the way in which the author's meaning in a narrative fiction is expressed and conveyed to the reader. You have learnt that in this influential book, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* Booth presented a detailed examination of narrative technique and introduced such terms as "implied author" and "reliable narrator."



2.8 FURTHER READING

Booth Waine C. (1983). *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. (2nd Edition). University of Chicago Press.

Choudhury, Bibhash. (Ed). (2010). *Different Strokes: A Prose Selection.* Papyrus.

Ans to Q 5: Intellectual or Cognitive… …Qualitative… …Practical.

Ans to Q 6: Novel is the art of communicating with readers… …novel is 'essentially public'… …novel comes into existence as something communicable.

Ans to Q 7: Booth sees the author's central task as that of transmitting to the reader a clear sense of a fictional world and its moral problems. Crucial to this act of communication is the extent to which the forms of rhetoric it adopts are effective to its purpose.

Ans to Q 8: For Booth, the main tool for the writer and critic of the novel is rhetoric, the means by which a particular author's fictional world. The French novelist Gustave Flaubert (1821–80) is identified by Booth as an initiator of the fashion in the later 19th century for less intrusive narrators in fiction.

Ans to Q 9: For Booth, ultimately, distinctions between 'pure form', 'moral content', and the 'rhetorical means of realizing for the reader the union of form and matter' are arbitrary because novels are 'human actions', and 'moral judgments…are implicit whenever human beings act.'

Ans to Q 10: Booth states that **'**Showing' is artistic, and 'Telling' is inartistic

Ans to Q 11: According to Booth, the way things are narrated in creative texts, often hides the processes through which the author creates the effect. Thus, the attention of the reales is fixed on the story element, theme and content. The author creates this effect through different elements of artifice which are at work. This means that there is always a method involved in the process of writing a fiction.



2.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: In the chapter "Telling and Showing" Booth brings to our notice some of the fundamental conditions of fiction writing. Discuss.

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

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.

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?

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.

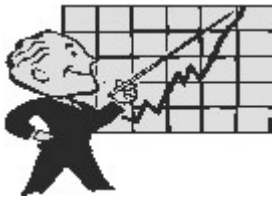


LET US KNOW

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.)

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

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



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.

Ans to Q 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 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 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 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 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.*

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

UNIT STRUCTURE:

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 About Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan:

4.4 What is a Narrative?

4.5 Important Concept of the Book

- 4.5.1 Idea of the Story: Events/Character
- 4.5.2 Idea of Time (Order, Duration, Frequency)
- 4.5.3 Characterisation
- 4.5.4 Focalisation
- 4.5.5 The Role of the Reader

4.6 Let us Sum up

4.7 Further Reading

4.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

4.9 Possible Questions

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

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

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

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.

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

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

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.

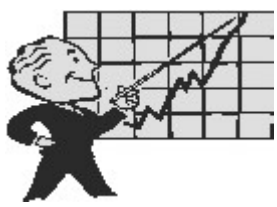
Frequency

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

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?

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.

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?

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 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 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 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 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 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.

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