

Introduction to Narratology and the craft of George Orwell

¹Shruti Singh & ²Dr Suniti Ahuja

¹Research Scholar, Singhania University, District Jhunjhunu, Pacheri Bari, Rajasthan (India)

²Associate Professor English, D A V College, Faridabad (India)

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ABSTRACT

Many students of literature go through the study of literary theory without studying about one of the recent developments of the concept of narratology. The paper aims at acquainting literature students with the concept of narratology in simplified form. One aims to start with the basic definitions, introduce major contributors to the theory and gently touch upon the writing style of George Orwell. One shall also discuss the origins of the theory of narratology and how it can be put to use in trying to analyse the works of any traditional or modern author. One also will be shedding some light on the latest critics of narratology such as Monika Fludernik, an Austrian professor, who is one of the foremost experts in recent times on narratology.

1. Introduction

The Concept of Narratology

Narratology is one of the most recent developments in the field of English literature. Also it is one of the most untouched tools put to use due to the widely believed fact that, it is too technical in its approach. But what is also true is that once we gain an understanding of its concepts, we find that a key has been provided by Narratology, which helps unlock all the secrets of a writer's mind. Narratology is a fairly recent development in the field of literary criticism. This stream of literary criticism deals with the movement of the narrative through a novel and how this narrative technique varies from one writer to another.

In principle, the term refers to any systematic study of narrative. It is an anglicisation of the French word *Narratologie*, coined by Tzvetan Todorov in his *Grammaire du Décomron* (1969). Although the lineage of the term may be traced back to Aristotle's *Poetics*, modern narratology is, most typically said to begin with the Russian formalists, and in particular to Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928). Percy Lubbock's ground breaking work on 'the point of view' in his book *The Craft of Fiction* (1921) has also been elementary. Another development in this field came up after the publishing of *Aspects of a Novel* by E.M. Forster. Forster for the first time, distinguished between story and plot. The concept gained further ground on the publication of *Rhetoric of Fiction* by Wyne C. Booth. In his most-recognized book, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, he argued that all narrative is a form of rhetoric. The book can be seen as his critique of those he viewed as mainstream critics. Booth argues that, beginning roughly with Henry James, critics began to emphasize the difference between showing and telling in fiction and have placed more and more of a dogmatic premium on showing. Booth argues that authors invariably both show and tell.

He observed that they appear to choose between the techniques based upon decisions about how to convey their various "commitments" along various "lines of interest."

The well-known narratologist Jonathan Culler argues that the many threads of narratology are all united by the recognition that "the theory of narrative requires a distinction between story – as a sequence of action or events conceived independent of their manifestation in discourse and discourse as a discursive presentation of narration of events."

This distinction between story and narrative was originally proposed by the Russian Formalists who were active in the 1920s and 30s, used the term *fibula* and *sijuzhet* for story and plot respectively. Subsequently, however, numerous other terminological pairs have constantly been coming up. The German studies focused on *Erzähler* (narrator) and *Erzählung* (narration). There are many other narratologists worth mentioning such as Seymour Chatman, writer of *Story and Discourse* (1978), Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (1987), and many more.

The latest scholar to join the ranks of narratologists is ;Monika Fludernik. Born in 1957, a native Austrian, and professor of English literature and culture at the Albert Ludwigs University of Freiburg, Germany, Fludernik earned her doctorate at the University of Graz, Austria, where she studied with professor Franz Karl Stanzel. In 1992, she took up an associate professorship at the University of Vienna, and since 1994 she has been a full professor at Freiburg. Fludernik has held several temporary fellowships, at the Universities of Oxford, and Harvard, among other places, and she is a corresponding member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Fludernik is renowned for her contribution to the field of literary theory, particularly that of narratology.

In her book *Introduction To Narratology*, Dr Fludernik describes the narrative as "a representation of a possible world in a linguistic and/ or visual medium, at whose center there are one or several protagonists of an anthropomorphic nature who are existentially anchored in a temporal and spatial sense and who (mostly) perform goal oriented actions. It is the experience of these protagonists that narratives focus on, allowing readers to immerse themselves in a different world."

To sum up, however, it can be said that narratology is basically also the study of the narrative and narrative style of a specific writer. For example, journalistic description is an identifying feature of Bhishm Sahni's *Tamas*. The use of wit and satire entwined with the use of letters is the style of Jane Austen. Orwell's works (especially *Animal Farm*), at first appear to be stories or fables meant for children, but, on a deeper level one finds out the meaning, purpose and philosophy behind this sort of adjective-less writing. The novels written by Albert Camus or John Paul Sartre in the nineteen forties represent the state of mind of the thinking urban man of Europe after the second world war. Certain novels like "The kite runner" by Khaled Hussein have become the voice of refugees fleeing Afghanistan. So we can see that writing a novel or any piece of literature, becomes a highly individual and personal account of a writer's style and attitude.

Here one would like to focus on narratology in the novels of George Orwell.

One of the concepts of Narratology is the Movement of the narrative. The narrative has two main movement linear and non-linear. A linear narrative is one that proceeds in a straight line, i.e. there are no deviations from the basic story line in either the plot or time frame. On reading the novels of Orwell, one finds that all of his novels have a linear movement.

Orwell uses the first person narrative at first in the beginning of his literary career in *Down and out in Paris and London* and later on in *Coming up for air*. Both these novels come across as PEN narratives i.e. Personal Experience Narratives. In *Coming up for Air* we find that Gordon Comstock (not the author) and all the characters belong to a fictional world and the narrative is about somebody telling the story of personal experiences.

Right from *Burmese Days* his first novel published in 1934 to *Nineteen Eighty-four*, his last; once Orwell takes up his pen, he writes continuously in one direction i.e. his narrative never deviates from the basic story line.

Narrative theorists often use the oppositional pair overt and covert to clarify the narrative. A narrator who wishes to stay covert will avoid talking about himself and would also avoid a very loud and striking voice. He will often hide behind a character or the protagonist's conscience.

An overt narrative on the contrary, would be where the narrator or the author is clearly on the narrative scene and may also be one of the main characters of the novel.

George Orwell writings fall on the covert side. Be it *1984*, *Burmese Days*, *The Clergyman's Daughter*, *Keep the Aspidochelone flying*, or the famous fable, *Animal Farm*. In all of these works Orwell has very strong protagonists who are, all of them,

thinking intellectuals with clear understanding of the world around them.

So we see, Orwell does not rely on pomp and show of words but the very basic concept of getting the idea across. George Orwell's life and works have been the source of inspiration for many other authors. *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying*, *Animal Farm*, and *1984* have inspired numerous television and film adaptations. He has also contributed numerous concepts, words, and phrases to present day language including;

*Newspeak,

*doublethink

*the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously,

and accepting both of them

*thought crime

*four legs good, two legs bad;

all animals are created equal, but some animals are more equal than others;

*He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past;

and *War is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength.

Among the ranks of other such acclaimed literary giants as Jonathan Swift and Aldous Huxley; George Orwell is a master of wit and satire, critically observing the politics of his time and prophetically envisioning the future. He devoted much of his life to various causes critical of capitalism, imperialism, fascism, and Stalinism, but in the end what he "most wanted to do is to make political writing into an art."

Orwell foresaw the role of technology in enabling oppressive governments to monitor and control their citizens. For example, In *1984*, Orwell portrays the perfect totalitarian society, the most extreme realization imaginable of a modern-day government with absolute power. The title of the novel was meant to indicate to its readers in 1949 that the story represented a real possibility for the near future. Orwell portrays a state in which government monitors and controls every aspect of human life to the extent that even having a disloyal thought is against the law.

Thus, we see that even though Orwell's work seems to be focused on the common man and his struggle for a better life, and all George Orwell's works have been studied again and again for their socio political outlook yet, it is equally interesting to study them from the point of view of narratology.

Most of the works, that one comes across, on Orwell, concentrate either on his life, or more often, on his socio-political ideology. But, upon reading his novels, the craft of Orwell's writings and his effort to get to the reader's heart with the least resistance from the reader's mind, comes across as an interesting study in narratology.

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