

NARRATIVE TEXTS

Lecture 1

1) What Is Narrative and Why Is It Important to Study It?

- a) Definitions of Narrative
- b) An Example
- c) The Importance of Narrative

2) Narrative as Communication

- a) Factual vs. Fictional Narrative
- b) Levels of Narratological Investigation

3) The Beginnings of Modern Fiction: Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)

1) What Is Narrative and Why Is It Important to Study It?

a) Definitions of Narrative

Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*. Lincoln & London: U of Nebraska P, 1987.

narrative. The recounting (as product and process, object and art, structure and structuration) of one or more real or fictitious events communicated by one, two, or several (more or less overt) NARRATORS to one, two, or several (more or less overt) NARRATEES.

Such (possibly interesting) texts as “Electrons are constituents of atoms,” “Mary is tall and Peter is small,” “All men are mortal; Socrates is a man; Socrates is mortal,” and “Roses are red / Violets are blue / Sugar is sweet / And so are you” do not constitute narratives, since they do not represent any event. Moreover, a dramatic performance representing (many fascinating) events does not constitute a narrative either, since these events, rather than being recounted, occur directly on stage.

On the other hand, even such possibly uninteresting texts as “The man opened the door,” “The goldfish died,” and “The glass fell on the floor” are narratives, according to this definition.

In order to distinguish narrative from mere event description, some narratologists [...] have defined it as the recounting of at least two real or fictive events (or one situation and one event) neither of which logically presupposes or entails the other [...] [N]arratologists [...] have also argued that narrative must have a continuant subject and constitute a whole.

Narrative Media of Representation:

- **verbal narrative (oral and/or written)**
- **sign language/gestures**
- **still or moving pictures**
- **music**

or any ordered combination thereof.

b) An Example

Nancy Wilson (Collingswood, New Jersey):

The summer before my senior year of college, I rented a place at the Jersey shore with some friends. One Tuesday night at about 9:30, I walked out of the house and went down to the beach. No one was around, so I pulled off my clothes, left them in a pile, and drove into the surf. I swam around for twenty minutes and then rode a wave back to the shore.

When I came out of the water, my clothes were missing. As I stood there pondering what to do, I heard the sound of voices. It was a group of people walking along the beach – and all of them were walking in my direction. I decided to make a dash for it and run back to the house, which was fifty or sixty yards away. I could see that the door was open, or at least that light was coming out of the doorway. But as I ran closer, I realized at the very last second that there was a screen. I ran right through it. Now I'm standing in the middle of a living room. There's a father and two little kids sitting on a couch watching TV, and I'm in the middle of the room without a stitch on. I turned around and ran through the busted-up screen door and tore back down to the beach. I went right and kept on running and eventually found my pile of clothes. I didn't know that there was an undertow. It had carried me about four blocks from where I had gone into the water.

The next morning, I walked the beach looking for the house with the broken screen door. I find the house, and as I'm walking up to knock on what's left of the door, I see the father inside, walking towards me. I start stammering, and finally manage to say, "You know, I feel really bad about what happened, and I want to give you some money for the screen door."

The father cuts me off and very dramatically throws up his hands and says – "Honey, I can't take anything from you. That's more entertainment than we've had all week."

Nancy Wilson, “That’s Entertainment.”

In: Paul Auster (ed.), *True Tales of American Life*. London: Faber&Faber, 2001: 128.

[Book based on the *National Story Project* of National Public Radio’s *Weekend All Things Considered* programme in 1999/2000, which collected some 4000 true stories from its listeners, 180 of which were then published in book form]

Auster: “If I had to define what these stories were, I would call them dispatches, reports from the front lines of personal experience” (xx)

c) The Importance of Narrative

Philip Pullman, acceptance speech for Carnegie Medal 1996

All stories teach, whether the storyteller intends them to or not. They teach the world we create. They teach the morality we live by. They teach it much more effectively than moral precepts and instructions. [...]

We don’t need lists of rights and wrongs, tables of do’s and don’ts: we need books, time, and silence. Thou shalt not is soon forgotten, but Once upon a time lasts forever.

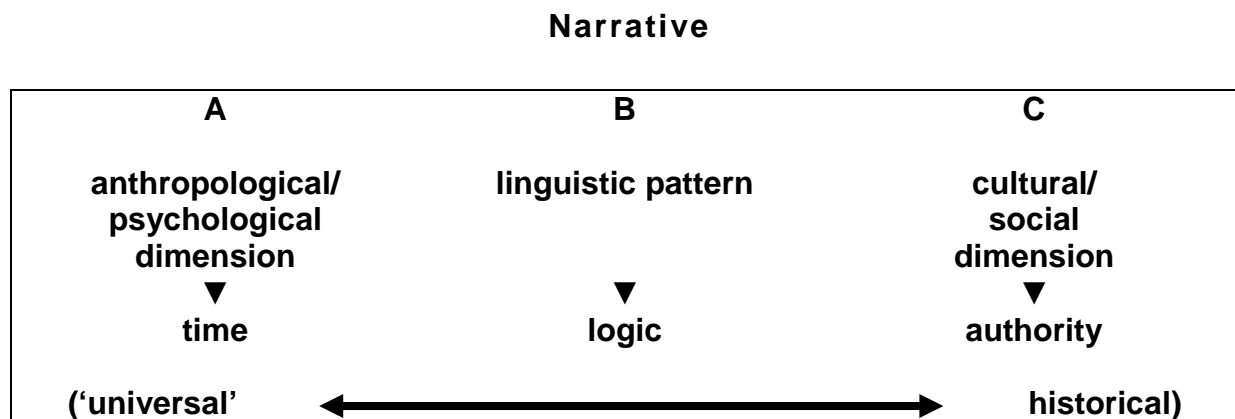
(quoted in Clare Squires, *Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials Trilogy: A Reader’s Guide*. New York: Continuum, 2003: 63.)

J. Hillis Miller: Narrative

Nothing seems more natural and universal to human beings than telling stories. Surely there is no human culture, however “primitive,” without its stories and habits of storytelling, its myth of the origin of the world, its legends of the tribe or groups of stories about folk heroes. Linguists use the ability to narrate as a measure of advanced language competence. An example is the story my two-year old granddaughter echoed from her mother, speaking of herself in the third person as the heroine of her own story: “Mama will carry baby up and down, and then baby will feel *much* better.” As adults, we hear, read, see, and tell stories all day long – for example, in the newspaper, on television, in encounters with co-workers or family members. In a continuous silent internal activity, we tell stories to ourselves all day long. Jokes are one form of narration. Advertising is another: “Use this product, and then you will feel *much* better.”

Narration [...] is so natural, so universal, and so easily mastered as hardly to seem a problematic region for literary theory. [...] A moment's reflection, however, will show that things are not quite so simple. For example, *why* is it that narration is so universal, present in all human beings everywhere? The fact that narrative is so universal, so "natural," may hide what is strange and problematic about it. Exactly what psychological or social functions do stories serve? Just why do we need stories, lots of them, all the time? The answers to those questions are not so easy to reach.

J. Hillis Miller, "Narrative." In: Frank Lentricchia, Thomas McLaughlin (eds.), *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. 2nd ed. Chicago/London: U of Chicago P, 1995: 66-79, 66-67.



Fields of Narratological Research:

- A:** psychoanalytical approaches
 reception theory/reader response narratology
 cognitive narratology
 'natural' narratology
- B:** linguistic approaches
 structuralist narratology
- C:** contextualist narratology
 marxist/feminist/postcolonial narratology
 cultural and historical narratology

2) Narrative as Communication

a) Factual into Fictional Narrative:

basic strategy:

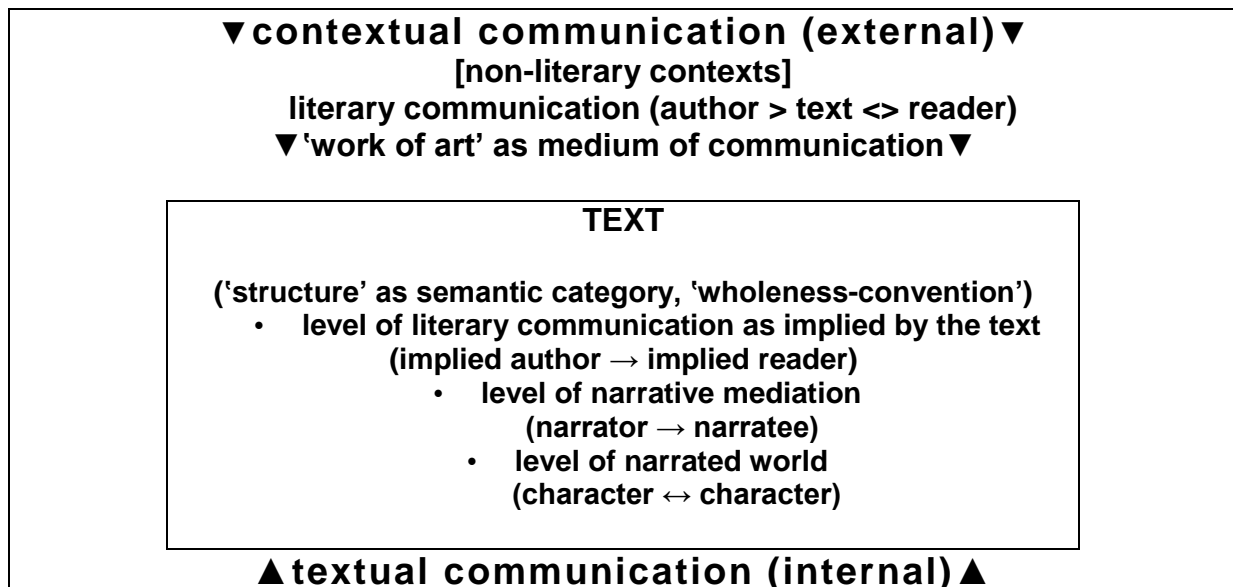
the doubling of the narrative instance into author and narrator

- freedom from referential constraints
- the convention of narratorial omniscience
which opens up possibilities for the presentation
of consciousness
- the tradition of realism as the mainstream of
modern novel writing
- author/narrator → story → listener



author → **TEXT** ↔ reader

b) Levels of Narratological Investigation



How is the story related?

What is being told?

Discourse:

who narrates?
from whose perspective?

Story:

existents (setting +
characters)
events (in chronological
order)

Plot:

the way the story is shaped by discourse
(plot = story-as-discoursed)
> existents acquire meaning by being given a
function in the unfolding narrative
> events are ordered and linked in a specific way

3) The Beginnings of Modern Fiction

Early Examples of the Novel

- **Cervantes**, *Don Quixote* (1605/15)
- **Aphra Behn**, *Oroonoco, or the Royal Slave* (1688)
- **Daniel Defoe**, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719),
Moll Flanders (1722)
- **Samuel Richardson**, *Pamela* (1740),
Clarissa (1747/51)
- **Henry Fielding**, *Joseph Andrews* (1742),
Jonathan Wild (1743),
Tom Jones (1749)
Amelia (1752)
- **Laurence Sterne**, *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67)

Daniel Defoe

The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner

Who lived eight and twenty years, all alone in an un-inhabited island on the coast of America, near the mouth of the great river of Oroonoke, having been cast on shore by shipwreck, wherein all the men perished but himself. With an account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by pyrates, written by himself

The Preface

If ever the Story of any private Man's Adventures in the World were worth making Publick, and were acceptable when Publish'd, the Editor of this Account thinks this will be so.

The Wonders of this Man's Life exceed all that (he thinks) is to be found extant; the Life of one Man being scarce capable of a greater Variety.

The Story is told with Modesty, with Seriousness, and with a religious Application of Events to the Uses to which wise Men always apply them (viz.) to the Instruction of others by this Example, and to justify and honour the Wisdom of Providence in all the Variety of our Circumstances, let them happen how they will.

The Editor believes the thing to be a just History of Fact; neither is there any Appearance of Fiction in it: And however thinks, because all such things are dispatch'd, that the Improvement of it, as well to the Diversion, as to the Instruction of the Reader, will be the same; and as such, he thinks, without farther Compliment to the World, he does them a great Service in the Publication.

I was born in the Year 1632, in the City of York, of a good Family, tho' not of that Country, my Father being a Foreigner of Bremen, who settled first at Hull: He got a good Estate by Merchandise, and leaving off his Trade, lived afterward at York, from whence he had married my Mother, whose Relations were named Robinson, a very good Family in that Country, and from whom I was called Robinson Kreutznaer; but by the usual Corruption of Words in England, we are now called, nay we call our selves, and write our Name Crusoe, and so my Companions always call'd me.

I had two elder Brothers, one of which was Lieutenant Collonel to an English Regiment of Foot in Flanders, formerly commanded by the famous Coll. Lockhart, and was killed at the Battle near Dunkirk against the Spaniards: What became of my second Brother I never knew any more than my Father or Mother did know what was become of me.

Being the third Son of the Family, and not bred to any Trade, my Head began to be fill'd very early with rambling Thoughts: My Father, who was very ancient, had given me a competent Share of Learning, as far as House-Education, and a Country Free-School generally goes, and design'd me for the Law; but I would be satisfied with nothing but going to Sea, and my Inclination to this led me so strongly against the Will, nay, the Commands of my Father, and against all the Entreaties and Perswasions of my Mother, and other Friends, that there seem'd to be something fatal in that Propension of Nature tending directly to the Life of Misery which was to befall me.

Typical Examples of Narrator's Discourse in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*:

- "I observed in this last Part of [my father's] discourse, which was truly Prophetick, tho' I suppose my Father did not know it to be so himself; I say, I observed [...]" (p.7)
- "But I was to have another Trial for it still; and Providence, as in such cases generally it does, resolved to leave me entirely without Excuse." (p.13)
- "Any one may judge what a Condition I must be in at all this, who was but a young Sailor, and who had been in such a fright before at but a little." (p.16)
- "As for me, having some Money in my Pocket, I travelled to *London* by Land; and there, as well as on the Road, had many Struggles with my self, what course of Life I should take, and whether I should go Home, or go to Sea." (p.22)

First-Person Narrator

a) **Stanzel:** First-Person Narrative Situation

- explicit narrator as protagonist or witness
- continuity between level of discourse and level of story
- shifting relationship between narrating self (I) and experiencing self (I)
- perspective is limited to the narrator's individual consciousness and feelings *and* to the narrator's position in the world.

b) **Genette:** homodiegetic narration (fixed) internal focalization

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