

Narratology: Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (after Gérard Genette)

“**Story** designates the narrated events, abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in their chronological order, together with the participants in these events. Whereas **story** is a succession of events, **text** is a spoken or written discourse which undertakes their telling. Put more simply, the text is what we read. In it the events do not necessarily appear in chronological order, the **characteristics of the participants** are dispersed throughout, and all the items of the narrative content are filtered through some prism or perspective (**focalizer**). Since the text is a spoken or written discourse, it implies someone who speaks or writes it [...] – **narration**. In the empirical world, the author is the agent responsible for the production of the narrative and for its communication. [...] Within the text, communication involves a fictional narrator transmitting a narrative to a fictional narratee. Of the[se] aspects of narrative fiction, **the text is the only one directly available to the reader.**” (Rimmon-Kenan 3-4)

1. STORY

Story: the chronological succession of events in the sequence of their occurrence, abstracted from the text. In order to describe the structure of a text,

- distinguish and reconstruct the various storylines which may exist
- describe the relationship and the connections between the different storylines
- distinguish between the order in which the events occur and the order in which they are narrated and analyse each.

2. FOCALIZATION: WHO SEES?

Position of the **focalizer** relative to the story:

- External focalization (Narrator focalizer; Narrating Self)
vs. Internal focalization (Character focalizer; Experiencing Self)

Who or what is **focalized** by the focalizer?

- View of the focalized from outside (physical appearance, behaviour, etc.)
vs. View of the focalized from within (feelings, thoughts, etc.)

3. NARRATION: WHO SPEAKS?

Temporal relations between narration and story:

- 'ulterior narration' [after the events]
- 'anterior narration' [before the events]
- 'simultaneous narration' [during the events]
- 'intercalated narration' [narration and events alternate, e.g. in epistolary novels]

Narrative Levels:

- diegetic level: "the events themselves" [diegesis = story]
- hypodiegetic level: "stories told by fictional characters [...] a second degree narrative"

"The diegetic level is narrated by an extradiegetic narrator, the hypodiegetic level by a diegetic (intradiegetic) one" (92)

Functions of hypodiegetic narratives:

- Actional function: the hypodiegetic narrative contributes to the development of the plot
- Explicative function: the hypodiegetic level offers an explanation of the diegetic level
- Thematic function: the hypodiegetic narrative is in analogy to main narrative

A TYPOLOGY OF NARRATORS

Narrators may be distinguished in the following respects:

By Narrative Level: extradiegetic narrators, intradiegetic narrators, hypo- and hypohypodiegetic narrators.

By the Extent of Participation in the Story: Homodiegetic narrators are involved in the story, heterodiegetic narrators are not.

By their Degree of Perceptibility:

- Description of setting.
- Identification of characters.
- Temporal summary.
- Definition of character.
- Reports of what characters did not think or say.
- Commentary.

By Reliability: Signs of unreliability are:

- the narrator has limited knowledge;
- is personally involved;
- represents a problematic value-scheme.

4. CHARACTERIZATION

[= the modes by which information about individual characters is conveyed]

4.1. Direct definition of character

- Who defines? (narrator, characters, about self or others?)
- In what situation is the definition stated?

4.2. Indirect presentation

- Actions (commission / omission / contemplated action)
- Characteristics of Speech
- External appearance
- Environment
physical: room, house, street, town.
human: family, social connections.

4.3. Reinforcement of Characterization by Analogy

- Names (telling names, symbolic names, etc.)
- Landscape.
- Contrasts and similarities between characters.

Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction. Contemporary Poetics*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994. 59–105.

Note on Alternative Terminologies

Some of you may be familiar with the terms first-person narration (Ich-Erzählsituation), authorial narration (Auktoriale Erzählsituation) and figural narration (Personale Erzählsituation) We do not use this terminology in this module, as it is less precise, because it does not systematically distinguish between narration and focalization.

(cf. Stanzel, Franz. *Die typischen Erzählsituationen im Roman*. Wien and Stuttgart: Braumüller, 1955.)