

Narratology

Narratology is a fully-fledged discipline in its own right. Narratological approaches to the study of texts have been included in the work of humanities scholars since Russian Formalism took hold of literary studies, although the beginnings of narratology are generally acknowledged to have primarily been informed by the structuralist views of the 1960s. Thus, although not to be classified as a sub-branch of stylistics, this discipline has traditionally offered plenty of working tools to stylisticians, especially to those concerned specifically with narrative fiction.

Herman (2007b) broadly defines the discipline as follows:

An approach to narrative inquiry developed during the heyday of structuralism in France. Instead of working to develop interpretations of individual narratives, narratologists focused on how to describe narrative viewed as a semiotic system – that is, as a system by virtue of which people are able to produce and understand stories. (Herman, 2007b, p. 280)

We would be wrong, however, to assume that narratology can be conceived of as a univocal body of research. Instead, the multifarious interpretations as to how to best describe the boundaries of this scholarly enterprise are sometimes dictated by a definition of the object of study this discipline is interested in, that is, the notion of narrative itself, but such endeavor is not an easy task either: ‘Since narratology is the science of narrative (or a theory of narrative), its very scope depends on the definition of the latter’ (Prince, 2003b, p. 1). As is customary in the humanities and the arts, it seems more profitable to avoid a stern definition of narrative and narratology so that the various trends, subbranches and developments can be accommodated. There seems to be some consensus, though, as far as the various phases that narratological studies have lived through. These delimitations are, once more, made very broadly and with lots of scope for further fine-tuning, but most scholars (for instance,

Cornils and Schernus, 2003; Darby, 2001; Kindt and Müller, 2003) appear to agree on the existence of three major stages in the development of narratology, sometimes re-distributed and amalgamated into two. Herman (2007a) opts for the latter option and distinguishes two main periods which he terms the 'classical' and 'postclassical' (p. 13) approaches to the study of narrative:

I use the term classical approaches to refer to the tradition of research that, rooted in Russian Formalist literary theory, was extended by structuralist narratologists starting in the mid 1960s, and refined and systematized up through the early 1980s by scholars such as Mieke Bal, Seymour Chatman, Wallace Martin, Gerald Prince, and others. I also include under the rubric of classical approaches work in the Anglo-American tradition of scholarship on fictional narrative; some of these scholars were influenced by and in turn influenced the Formalist-structuralist tradition. (Herman, 2007a, p. 12)

In this camp, we find the work of authors such as Tomashevsky, Shklovsky and Propp; Shklovsky's distinction ([1925]1990) between *fabula* and *sjuzhet*, for instance, or Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* ([1928]1968) became some of the referents on which further perspectives on narrative were subsequently built. Kindt and Müller (2003) are among those scholars that prefer to divide the classical stage into two separate phases:

The first phase, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century in Europe and the USA [. . .] took its material from three main sources: the remnants of normative rhetoric and poetics, the practical knowledge of novelists and the observations of literary critics [. . .]. It was only in its second phase that 'narratology' became a distinct subdiscipline of textual studies, after the term first used in 1969 by Tzvetan Todorov in his *Grammaire du Décaméron* found wide international acceptance. Todorov's account of the aims and themes of narratology was heavily influenced by Russian and Czech Formalism and structural linguistics [. . .]. Subsequently, however, the 'high structuralism' of these generative grammarians achieved far less international currency than the 'low structuralism' of Gérard Genette. (Kindt and Müller, 2003, pp. v–vi)

Whether the first stage is divided into two sub-groups or considered as a unified whole does not detract from the fact that the scope of the so-called classical narratology

extends well into the 1980s, when its focus on traditional structuralist methodologies and concerns starts to wane under the influence of new trends emerging from other humanities and social science disciplines such as anthropology, psychoanalysis, cognitive linguistics and cognitive psychology. Irrespective of whether the initial stages are amalgamated or not, most scholars claim that the revival of the discipline took place in the 1990s when the third period of narratology is said to have started:

Narratology, it is argued, is now more alive than ever before, having undergone something of a renaissance since the 1990s after a period of stagnation and crisis during which its demise was repeatedly proclaimed. The 1990s produced such a proliferation of heterogeneous approaches that narratologists such as David Herman find it more appropriate to speak of 'narratologies' in the plural. (Cornils and Schernus, 2003, p. 138)

Whether scholars refer to this new era as the third stage or whether they adopt the 'postclassical' term coined by Herman, most of them convene in acknowledging that the new phase is fraught with influences and interdisciplinary links with cognate areas. This has permitted new forms of inquiry into the nature of narrative forms to be incorporated into the already existing frameworks. Of special interest to stylisticians, in particular to those exploring the cognitive dimensions of literary processing, is the new application of cognitive theories to the study of narratives:

Study of the cognitive dimensions of stories and storytelling has become an important subdomain within the field of narrative analysis. Concerned both with how people understand narratives and with narrative itself as a mode of understanding, cognitive approaches have been brought to bear on stories in a variety of media [. . .]. Equally various are the disciplinary traditions from which cognitive approaches borrow descriptive and explanatory tools. Source disciplines include cognitive linguistics; pragmatics; discourse analysis; narratology; communication theory; anthropology; stylistics; cognitive, evolutionary, and social psychology; rhetoric; computer science; literary theory; and philosophy. (Herman, 2006a, p. 452)