

REVIEW

Susana Onega and José Ángel García Landa, eds.
Narratology: An Introduction.
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Narratology: An Introduction, edited by Susana Onega and José Ángel García Landa is the latest title in the Longman Critical Readers Series. Like the other volumes in this collection, Onega and García Landa's book constitutes an authoritative and stimulating guide to some of the most representative work on a subject which will surely be of interest for both students and professionals in the field of literary criticism.

Narratology has proved to be the source of many key concepts and analytical tools which have increasingly been applied to the study of a wide variety of texts, in the general sense of the word. One of the aims of this reader is, in fact, to call attention to the way in which narratology has evolved into a multi-disciplinary study of narrative. It is this ability to negotiate and incorporate the insights of other critical discourses that has made it applicable to the analysis of both literary and non-literary genres, as well as of texts which need not be defined as strictly narrative.

The work provides an Introduction with a rather detailed overview of the subject. It begins with a definition of narratology both in its wider and narrower senses, a distinction which is kept in the selection and arrangement of the texts to follow. Even if narratology is, etymologically, the science of narrative, the term as such became popular under the auspices of structuralist criticism. It is mainly for this reason that narratological analyses were associated with strictly formalist approaches until the 1980s and 1990s, when the post-structuralists' reaction against the taxonomic and scientific pretensions of their predecessors progressively led to the proliferation of new lines of development in such areas as gender studies, psychoanalysis, reader-response criticism, etc. In an attempt to present narratology as a rapidly growing field without neglecting its original structuralist core, the Introduction promises a selection of texts aimed at providing the reader with as complete a perspective as possible. Before reaching that selection, though, the editors have felt it necessary to define some key terms, as is the case, for instance, with Mieke Bal's three basic levels of narrative analysis—fabula, story and text. Other central terms are explained as this initial scheme is re-drawn from different angles. A narrative text, we are told, is not only a compound of elements that can be analysed horizontally and/or vertically, it is also an instance of discourse. Accordingly, if enunciative structures can be exploited aesthetically in literature, discursive schemata open new possibilities for the critical study of texts. Charts and graphics are included at this stage to clarify the meaning of and the relationship between different concepts.

The last section of the introduction is devoted to an historical overview which sketches the development of the discipline from the early prescriptive poetics of specific genres, through formal and structural analysis, to recent trends which propose the study of narrative forms in relation to the culture that generates them. Beginning with the classics, this historical overview points out a black spot in narrative theory—the lack of an interdisciplinary approach to narrative genres and structure—and counterbalances, in so far as it is possible to do so in a few pages, the basically synchronic stand adopted by most work on narratology.

The essays that follow this introduction—none of them dated before 1950—are grouped in five sections. The first three are devoted to

structuralist narratology; the remaining two are meant to be an illustration of some of the most influential alternative approaches to the discipline, now understood in the wider sense of the term. They are all prefaced by individual forewords, which anticipate the contents of each essay and help the reader to place it in context.

The overall framework used in Parts One, Two and Three recalls Mieke Bal's tripartite scheme of analysis, already explained in the introduction. Accordingly, the texts in Part One have to do with narrative structure and, specifically, with the most abstract of all narrative levels: the fabula. There we find a selection from seminal works by Roland Barthes, Claude Bremond and A.-J. Greimas, all names associated with the pathbreaking research carried out by the French structuralist school under the assumption, central for the later development of narratology, that all narratives share a basic structure which can be isolated and analysed. The first three essays are, therefore, proposals for the analysis of that basic structure underlying all kinds of fabulas.

In Part Two, we move to Bal's second level of analysis: the level of the story. Working as a kind of bridge between the first two parts of the book, Jonathan Culler's article questions the view of the fabula proposed by French narratologists, that is, the fabula as the true or natural sequence of events which the narrative presupposes and modifies in a greater or lesser degree. For him, the fabula is, instead, a tropological construct, the product of, rather than the reality reported by discourse.

The other essays in Part Two focus on concrete aspects of the relationship between story and fabula. In Bal's terms, a story is a fabula which has been given a representational form by introducing a specific point of view and temporal scheme. Following these premises, focalization is discussed in a chapter selected from Mieke Bal's *Narratology*. Meir Sternberg's essay deals with the distinction between represented and representational time, and Paul Ricoeur's develops a study of fictional time at three levels: the time of the act of narrating, the time that is narrated and the time of life.

Part Three opens with Wayne Booth's analysis of the different types of narration theoretically available. Some key concepts, such as "implied author", "unreliable narrator" and "distance", are explained in these pages, which prepare the reader for the more systematic typologies proposed by F. K. Stanzel and Gérard Genette, both of them included in this section.

The applicability of narratological tools to the analysis of experimental fiction in the second half of the century and, specifically, to the study of metafictional texts, is illustrated in the reader by Linda Hutcheon's taxonomy of what she terms "narcissistic" narratives. This chapter gives way to Parts Four and Five, devoted, respectively, to narratology and film, and post-structuralist narratology.

As the editors stress in the Introduction, present-day narratology studies the narrative aspects of texts in general. The conviction that narratology works when applied to languages other than the novel, as is the case with film, constitutes a necessary presupposition, as well as the basic point of departure of Deleuze's pathbreaking attempt, in chapter 14, to adapt Genette's and Bal's concept of "focalization" to the specific analysis of film narrative. The same can be said of the selection from Edward Branigan's *Narrative Comprehension and Film*, which illustrates, in addition, the productivity of the alliance of narratology with cognitive psychology in film studies.

Widening the scope of the relationships between narratology and other disciplines, Hayden White's essay studies the techniques of historical writing as versions of literary or mythical plots. Likewise, Peter Brooks's chapter constitutes an example of the convergence of post-structuralist reader-response criticism and psychoanalysis, an approach also used by Teresa de Lauretis (chapter 17) in her discussion of the desire of the woman spectator in film.

After such an input of narratological concepts as well as a suggestive illustration of extrinsic approaches to narrative, the book ends by making a

wink to the reader as it closes, in a clearly post-structuralist tone, with Hillis Miller's ambitious attempt in "Line" to trace the aporia underlying any use of narratological terminology.

With *Narratology: An Introduction*, Onega and García Landa have collected and organised for us some of the most interesting contributions to the study of a discipline whose field of application is growing day by day. I think this book will be a useful and unavoidable source of knowledge for those interested in literary criticism in general and narratological approaches, in particular. The clear framework and gradual development of the subject—from structuralist narratology to more recent works that assess the mutual influence of narratology and other areas of study—help the reader to assimilate concepts without getting lost in a path that widens—and winds—more and more as the book advances. Those who approach the work with a relatively solid background may find that the chapters intended to illustrate the interdisciplinary possibilities of the critical method under consideration are too few, in comparison with those devoted to structuralist narratology (double in number). All in all, I think that the texts selected for the last two sections make for a wide understanding of narratology in themselves, while simultaneously suggesting some of the directions that further reading may take. In view of what has been said, we can conclude, then, that Onega and García Landa's work constitutes a good, varied and stimulating selection, as well as an interesting and definitely rewarding reading.