



ISSN Print: 2664-8717
ISSN Online: 2664-8725
Impact Factor: RJIF 8.00
IJRE 2023; 5(1): 40-43
www.englishjournal.net
Received: 02-12-2022
Accepted: 05-01-2023

Dr. Priyanka Batra
Assistant Professor (English),
Government College Jatauli,
Hailey Mandi, Gurugram,
Haryana, India

Narrative discourse in postmodern fiction

Dr. Priyanka Batra

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26648717.2023.v5.i1a.73>

Abstract

Narrative and language are closely related so much that theorists have played their interdependence. Postmodern fiction has achieved a pure spatiality by eliminating time and sequence from narrative, that is, the representation of time in narrative. The reader is forced to concentrate on the stylistic devices that retard the narrative progression such as, the amalgamation of different genres, parody, irony self-reflexivity and historiographic metafiction. Although postmodern fiction eschews historical time and treats history as a text, it retrieves the various styles of the past and represents them, yet postmodern historiography records the history as a text since it is a human construct and uses this realization to displace the forms and contents of the past concurrently. Postmodernism is a continuous literary theory in which the study of narrative discourse is transcendental to life and to the different approaches of literature. What is inherent in postmodernism is the augmentation of the different historical, psychoanalytical metaphysical, structural and deco structural approaches that dominate the narrative structure of postmodernity. All these critical theories have pursued their own parameters and devices towards the representation of artifacts in general.

Keywords: Structuralism, deconstruction, metafiction, transcendental, psychoanalytical

Introduction

Wherever there are human beings, there appear to be stories. It is obvious that people tell their stories from the moment they begin putting words together, but when the subject starts being conjoined to a predicate, we are thrust into narrative discourse and we make narratives many times a day. Thus, narrative and language are closely related so much that theorists have played their interdependence. Fredrick Jameson describes the “all informing process of narratives as the central function of the human mind,” whereas Jean Francois Lyotard regards narratives as “the quintessential form of customary knowledge.” It is obvious that we engage in narrative so often and through narratives we present ourselves, our experiences and the experiences of others. Perhaps the largest assertion regarding the quintessential nature of narratives is contained in Roland Barthes’ article on narrative.

He writes the narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances as though any material were fit to receive man’s stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures and the ordered mixture of all these substances, narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting... Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives... narrative is international, trans historical, transcultural; it is simply there, like life itself.

Thus, narrative is a vital human activity that gives shape to history, sociology and literature. Peter Brooks has stated that narrative “is very much bound up with the stories we tell about our own lives and the world in which we live. We cannot in our dreams, our daydreams, our ambitious fantasies, avoid the imaginative imposition of form on life.” This is the universal and transcendental feature of narrative, which generates meaning from the imaginative as well as the lived nature of its application. In other words, the association of narrative with humanity can be found not only inside the walls of our own individual consciousness and unconsciousness as well.

Onega and Linda have defined narrative as “the semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and casual way.” The most interesting part of the definition of narrative is the difference between events and the representation of these events.

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Priyanka Batra
Assistant Professor (English),
Government College Jatauli,
Hailey Mandi, Gurugram,
Haryana, India

In other words, the difference between the story (the event of sequence of events) and the narrative discourse (how the story is conveyed). They are alternative terms which refers to the story and narrative discourse, for instance, 'Tabula' and 'Suzette', where Tabula refers to the way the events are ordered in the narrative, and Suzette is Aristotle's *muthos* or 'mythos' as well as the familiar plot. The distinction between story and narrative discourse is between two types of time, the time of narrative discourse is the duration of the presentation of the novel and the time of the story is the duration of the sequence of events that composes the plot.

Quite similar to the difference between the story and the narrative discourse in the representation of the events is the difference between characters and events in narrative. A character is one of the two principal components in stories, the other being the action. H. Porter Abbott argues that "it is only through narrative that we know ourselves as active entities that operate through time." Aristotle has given priority to one over the other and has placed the action over character. Henry James says "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" In this regard, the character causes the action to happen and they drive the action to reveal the values of life and who they are in terms of their motives, their affections, mysticism, weakness and so on.

One important point that the difference between story and narrative discourse raises is that the story is conveyed through the narrative discourse by a voice in which the story is told. The narrative voice is a crucial element in the construction of a story, and it is necessary to classify the kind of persons we have for a narrator, not only grammatically but also denotatively. The story is told in the first person 'I', the second person 'you' or the person 'he', but how the functions of the narrator relate to the story, and whether the traits of the narrator are participated by the author, and whether we should believe the details we are getting. Definitely, the narrator is a 'focalizer', and we often see the action through the narrator and just as the narrator can be either a character in the narrative or a narrator outside the narrative, so also the 'focalizer' can be a character within or a narrator without. However, the involvement of the narrator in the story varies through the narratorial distance, for instance, the narrator tells the story of the lives of others as in *Wuthering Heights* or tells the story of his own life as in Dickens's *Great Expectations*. Gerard Genette argued that the distinction between homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrators is more adequate than between the first and third person narrators for specifying whether a narrator is inside or outside of the world of the story. Thus, if a character that also plays a role in the diegesis narrates it is called homodiegetic narration. If a voice situated outside the action narrates, it is called heterodiegetic narration- according to Genette.

When Booth introduces the concepts of reliable narrators and unreliable narrators, he refers to what extent the narrator speaks or acts in accordance with the facts of the work. Booth points out that the unreliable narrators differ markedly depending on how far and in what direction they depart from their author's norms. Certainly, the reliable narrators are in tandem with the 'implied authors' norms. Abbott has defined the 'implied authors' as "that sensibility (that combination of feeling, intelligence, knowledge and opinion) that accounts for the narrative. It accounts for the narrative in the sense that the implied authorial views that

we find emerging in the narrative are consistent with all the elements of the narrative discourse that we are aware of. But the difficulty with the 'unreliable narrators' is in the sense of being untrustworthy and deceptive narrator. Although intentional obscurity results in the narrators' unreliability, it has become part of some modern novelists to subvert one's own interests and interpretations. At the other side of this spectrum, the character's voice temporarily flows over the narrative voice, this kind of shift can be done indirectly by using a character's voice through the third person narrators early in the twentieth century. Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, William Faulkner and others began experimenting with stream of consciousness novels in which the flow of consciousness of one or more characters was the principal focus. They used interior monologue to represent that subject.

In the context of the rhetorical effects of a narrative that the novelist cannot ignore, the elements of the text affect the evaluation of the reader by the combination of feeling and thought. These elements result through the choice of the narrative manner in which everything in the text contributes to its effect and our interpretation of it.

Since Aristotle, theorists have redefined the traditional concept of plot. E.M. Forster has argued "A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality," Narrative itself distributes events in orderly, consecutive manner, bound together by a clear sequence of cause and effect, thus, the arrangement of events requires order and succession. The story and the plot are interchangeable, the story consists of events which the plot modulates these events into a story. The plot thus structures the events that develop through succession and time. Obviously, the study of narrative has a wide compass, where the analysis of narrative identifies modes of mechanism which are integral embodiments of the narrative text, yet narrative analysis is not without its problems, one of the chief ones arising from the fact that narrative is used to organize the understanding of time and space. The bearing of linguistic and structural considerations is inevitably nexus of words, sentences and large units in narrative discourse.

The structuralists' preoccupation with the idea of the system is in line with their concept of language as a mere tool used to express the experience of the unique individual. Vernon W. Gras has claimed that "Language is an autonomous system whose signs derive their meaning from inner relationships and not by designating things: intelligibility is a function of the relationships and oppositions of terms in a system," that is, the literary system is composed within the language itself and is divorced of the historical and social context. Richard and Fernand De George have pointed out, "the system within the work (the words, syntax, ideas, plot, etc.) which together help produce a given aesthetic effect and make an integral whole..., work itself is to be studied as a totality or system before it is to be related to other systems. Historical, social, biographical, or other." Structuralism, then, insists on the forms and genres rather than the close reading of the texts and has indeed differentiated the form of the content, in other words, the signifier of the signified. This is infact what led the narratologies to move away from earlier Aristotelian disposition which is based on the structure of incidents towards the analysis of problems of Vertical' direction which led the sign to its signification, that is, the idea of discourse, and what we get in a narrative discourse is not an

event, but sign, the succession of elements. As Jean Piaget has pointed out “a relational perspective, according to which it is neither the elements nor a whole that comes about in a manner one knows not how, but the relations among elements that count. In other words, the logical procedures or natural processes by which the whole is formed are primary, not the whole, which is consequent on the system’s laws of composition, or the elements.” Thus, the linguistic explanation provides various assumptions and suggestions for an analysis of narrative discourse that expand from the level of the sentence to that of discourse in which the system of the discourse succumbs to a duality of person and non-person.

The continual analysis of narratology has been shifted from discovery to invention, from stability to instability and complexity. This shift has inaugurated a period of radical change in the role of the reader in constructing the meaning. The reader interprets the text from a finite viewpoint conditioned by personal, social and historical circumstances. With the detached shift away from the scientific assumption narratology was seen as on objective narratives. All these reductions have been exposed by post structuralism. Mark Currie points out “poststructuralism narratology moved away from the assumed transparency of the narratological analysis towards a recognition that the reading, however, objective and scientific, constructed its object. Structure became something that was projected onto the work by a reading than a property of a narrative discovered by the reading.” At a specific level, post structuralism has not differentiated between the signifier and signified, quite the contrary of what Saussure argued, ‘The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name but a concept and a sound image...the two elements are intimately united, and each recalls the other.’ He adds “Language is radically powerless to defend itself against the forces which from one moment to the next are shifting the relationship between the signified and signifier. This is one of the consequences of the arbitrary nature of the sign.”

In effect, what is proposed by Saussure that the sign is made up of the signifier and the signified is confined to the determinate of the language itself and, as such, the relationship between them is fixed and arbitrary. But the preoccupation of post-structuralism in questioning the relationship is further oriented. It attempts to define the meaning by opening multiple meaning areas and the process of grasping the meaning which does not end in a circularity of signifiers. In other words, there is mobility, elusion and undecidability about meaning. So, in the critical quest for unity, the post-structuralist critic has widened the scope of reading the text and sought a ‘hermeneutic’ direction in narrative analysis.

The radical shift of the stability of narrative structure is a starting point for a set of concerns that have become a part of the post-structuralist treatise. In this mode of theorizing, Jacques Derrida is perhaps the best known for inaugurating Reconstruction’. The ‘deconstruction’ of narratology implies the deconstruction of its scientific implication or the stability and coherence of the language system. Deconstruction has appeared not as a constrained gauge of metalanguage, but more as a process of implosion of the textual codes which allowed for the convergence of various critical approaches to analyze and interpret the direction of the narrative.

However, deconstruction did not break from the history of the past but modified past history to meet new requirements, therefore, it is a displacement of one kind of criticism by another. Post-structuralism has been related to psychoanalysis and linguistics, to fragment the self and to disrupt the view of man of the world. It argues that the subject is constructed in language and discourse rather than being stable and fixed. Psychoanalytic criticism originated and was used by the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, who pioneered the technique of psychoanalysis. Freud developed a language that described, a model that explained, and a theory that encompassed human psychology. His theories are direct and indirectly concerned with the nature of the unconscious mind. They argue that literary texts, like dreams, express the secret unconscious desires and anxieties of the author, that a literary work is a manifestation of the author’s own neuroses.

Poststructuralists had already undermined the concept of grand and metanarrative, the unity and autonomy of the subject and the ability of the discourses to stabilize and contain cultural meanings. Postmodernism is a ‘mood’ expressed theoretically across a diverse range of theoretical discourses and involving a focus on the collapse of grand narratives into local incommensurable language games of ‘little narratives.’ Postmodernism has displaced the modes of critical thought and raised interconnected issues of knowledge and experience within the cultural context. It has disavowed the total truth and stripped the absolute systems of knowledge. Furthermore, it has moved away from the centrality of narrative and imposed a multiplicity of styles, looking beyond the aesthetic parameters of a text which constitute the social, historical, psychological, political and cultural factors that determine the art of writing.

Postmodern fiction has achieved a pure spatiality by eliminating time and sequence from narrative, that is, the representation of time in narrative. The reader is forced to concentrate on the stylistic devices that retard the narrative progression such as, the amalgamation of different genres, parody, irony self-reflexivity and historiographic metafiction. Although postmodern fiction eschews historical time and treats history as a text, it retrieves the various styles of the past and represents them, yet postmodern historiography records the history as a text since it is a human construct and uses this realization to displace the forms and contents of the past concurrently. On the other hand, myth is used as a means of transforming the historical nostalgia into myth as an imagination in so doing, it transmutes the historical past of myth into historical referent. For the achievement of spatialization and abolition of time, thus, the reader is compelled to juxtapose disparate images of the past and unify them in present in a moment of time, that is, to say ‘space’.

In postmodern fiction, the past pervades the present and shapes it, just as the present shapes the interpretation of the past in a critical way rather than a nostalgic way. It looks back to the past of art or to the build-up of the discourse, however, it represents the actual lived past with irony. Consequently, the actual lived past dissolves in self-reflexive textuality that is, turning and seeks self-consciousness in the act of writing in lieu of the objectifiable world, in other words, from realist fiction. Postmodern fiction generates its reality out of its fiction, that the reality is demonstrated through the companion of the author as well as the reader, hence, metafiction allows the

reader to indulge in the act of narration and experience the authenticity of the narrative.

Scholars have argued that spatial form, despite appearing to eliminate time, is a vehicle of representing the past, but in what terms, or in what justification is open to analysis. Postmodern fiction reveals a desire for knowledge of the past, a desire to understand the styles and aesthetics of the past, not to rearrange these devices and parameters, but rather to find alternate tunnels that the archival materials and documented history might have taken. What this means is that postmodern fiction has displaced and replaced the knowledge of the past and paved the way by offering a fictional world in which history is accessible and meaningful. Thus, the past is a perpetual thriller that permeates itself into a series of texts which surround us and interact with it creating continuity between past and present through narrative discourses.

However, as it has been demonstrated earlier that, the narrative is considered as an intrinsic pillar for the representation of identity whether it is a personal or collective identity. The representation of identity in the various forms of literary theories can be resolved into a view of postmodernism that recognizes the heterogeneous, the difference and the deconstructing notion of analysis. Thus, postmodernism is a continuous literary theory in which the study of narrative discourse is transcendental to life and to the different approaches of literature. What is inherent in postmodernism is the augmentation of the different historical, psychoanalytical metaphysical, structural and deconstructive approaches that dominate the narrative structure of postmodernity. All these critical theories have pursued their own parameters and devices towards the representation of artifacts in general.

References

1. Aristotle, trans. Ingram Bywater, *Poetics* in Richard McKeon (ed.) *Introduction to Aristotle*, New York: Random House; c1947.
2. Abbott, Porter H. *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; c2002.
3. Barthes, Roland. *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives* in Susan Sontag (ed.) *A Barthes Reader*, New York: Hill and Wang; c1966.
4. Currie, Mark. *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, New York: St. Martin's Press; c1998.
5. Genette, Gerard, trans. Jane E. Lewin, *Narrative Discourse: an Essay in Method*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press; c1980.
6. Gras, Vernon W. *European Literary Theory and Practice from existential phenomenology to structuralism*, ed. Gras, New York: Dell; c1973.
7. Freud, Sigmund. *Collected Papers*, Ed. J Strachey, London: The Hogarth Press, 1957, 5.
8. Onega Susana, Linda GA. Jose, *Narratology: An Introduction* New York: Longman; c1996.
9. Saussure de Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*, London: Fontana; c1974.
10. Scholes Robert. *Structuralism in Literature: An introduction*, New Haven: Yale University Press; c1974.