



ESSE-8: LONDON 2006

29 August – 2 September 2006

S7. Narrative at the Crossroads: New Developments in Narrative Study

Thursday 31 August: 9.30-11.30am

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Narrative Studies is currently experiencing a pronounced boom. In this climate of fast change and new interdisciplinary topics (narrative in drama, film and interactive computer games, narrative in music and painting, narrative in legal texts, in medicine and therapeutic discourse), exchange on a wide range of topics is necessary. This seminar seeks to bring together work from different areas of narrative study, particularly work discussing transdisciplinary perspectives on narrative.

Voice beyond Words: The Rhetoric of Representation and Narrative Voice

Richard Walsh (University of York)

This paper distributes the concept of voice between three senses, as “instance,” as “idiom,” and as “interpellation.” These correspond to an emphasis, respectively, upon the representational act, an object of representation, and a representational subject position. Hence I contrast the order of mimesis, or second-degree narration, as idiom and therefore a rhetorical effect, with that of diegesis as unrepresented instance, and a rhetorical means; I further discriminate between the inference of a subject and of a subject position, and so characterize focalization as a form of interpellation, in which the rhetorical effect is one of alignment with a subject position.

An Ethical Narratology

Wolfgang G. Müller (University of Jena)

This paper is grounded on the hypothesis that narrative technique and point-of-view can have profound ethical implications. Strategies of mediating moral values and alerting readers to moral issues and problems will be related to basic modes of narration such as (1) authorial narration which provides a moral orientation for the reader through comment and reflection, (2) point-of-view narration which makes it the reader's task to decode the moral qualities of characters and actions, and (3) I-narration which, depending on the text's subject-matter, confronts the reader with a narrator's attitude to the moral quality of characters and deeds committed or witnessed.

Narratology and the Social Sciences

Jarmila Mildorf (University of Stuttgart)

Social science disciplines have long had an interest in narrative as a human cognitive and discursive device and have consequently developed their own methodological tools for qualitative and quantitative narrative research. At the same time, narratology has branched out into “post-classical” narratologies that have borrowed concepts from psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, cognitive science, artificial intelligence, discourse linguistics, etc. Can studies of oral narratives benefit from the results and discussions in narratology? I explore this question by analysing oral narratives. I contend that concepts such as “social positioning”, “identity” and the marking of “ingroup” and “outgroup” relations, for example, can be further illuminated if one applies narratological terms such as “experiencing/narrating I”, “focalization” and “double deixis” in you-narratives.

Universal Minds

Alan Palmer (independent scholar)

I suggest that the following fourteen narrative universals relating to fictional minds recur in all or nearly all novels: at least one mind; at least two minds; a continuing consciousness; emotions; language; causation; action; embodied consciousness; aspectuality; theory of mind; intermental thought; the role of the reader; the plot; and access to thought. After arguing that these generalisations are not invalidated by a few counterexamples, I point out that some, particularly postmodern, novels gain their power precisely from their attempts to undermine the default assumptions behind the fourteen features. I then draw attention to the length of the list.

The Cinematic Narrator and the Narrativity of Film Reconsidered

Jan Alber (University of Freiburg)

This paper seeks to shed new light on cinematic narration and discriminates between the abstract realm of film theory and the actual experience of films by ordinary filmgoers. From a film-theoretical perspective, it makes sense to assume an entity like the cinematic narrator because this construct solves a number of film-theoretical problems. On the other hand, ordinary filmgoers do not normally imagine that they are being shown a film by an entity like the film narrator. In a second step, this paper uses the framework of Monika Fludernik’s “natural” narratology to demonstrate that viewers narrativise films by applying “real-world” cognitive parameters.