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**Basics of English Studies:  
An introductory course for students of  
literary studies in English.**

Developed at the English departments of the  
Universities of Tübingen, Stuttgart and Freiburg

## **2. Prose**

Table of Contents:

<b>2.1. Story and Discourse</b> .....	42
2.1.1. Story .....	42
2.1.2. Discourse .....	43
<b>2.2. Story and Plot</b> .....	43
SO WHAT? .....	46
<b>2.3. Space</b> .....	47
2.3.1. Space in Discourse and Story .....	47
2.3.2. Fictional Space and Real Space .....	47
2.3.3. Space and Meaning .....	47
<b>2.4. Character</b> .....	49
2.4.1. Techniques of Characterisation .....	49
2.4.1.1. Explicit and Implicit Characterisation .....	49
2.4.1.2. Characterisation by Narrator or Character .....	49
2.4.1.3. Block Characterisation .....	50
2.4.1.4. Reliability .....	51
2.4.1.5. Inner Life of Characters .....	51
2.4.1.6. Contrasts and Correspondences .....	52
2.4.1.7. Summary: Characterisation Techniques (Table) .....	52
2.4.2. Character Functions .....	52
2.4.3. Character Complexity and Development .....	53
SO WHAT? .....	54
<b>2.5. Narrators and Narrative Situation</b> .....	55
2.5.1. Narrative Voices .....	55
2.5.2. Focalisation .....	58
2.5.3. Unreliable Narrators .....	61
SO WHAT? .....	61

<b>2.6. Narrative Modes</b> .....	63
2.6.1. Speech .....	63
2.6.2. Report .....	65
2.6.3. Description .....	65
2.6.4. Comment .....	65
2.6.5. Mixed Narrative Modes .....	66
2.6.6. Historical Change in Narrative Modes .....	67
SO WHAT? .....	67
<b>2.7. Representation of Consciousness</b> .....	68
2.7.1. Interior Monologue .....	69
2.7.2. Psychonarration .....	70
2.7.3. Narrated Monologue .....	71
2.7.4. Summary Representation of Consciousness (Table) .....	73
SO WHAT? .....	73
<b>2.8. Time</b> .....	75
2.8.1. Tense in Narrative .....	76
SO WHAT? .....	76
2.8.2. Time Analysis .....	77
2.8.2.1. Duration .....	77
2.8.2.2. Order .....	78
2.8.2.3. Beginnings and Endings .....	79
SO WHAT? .....	81
2.8.2.4. Frequency .....	81
SO WHAT? .....	81
<b>2.9. Types of Prose Fiction</b> .....	82
 <b>Bibliography: Prose</b> .....	 85

## 2. Prose

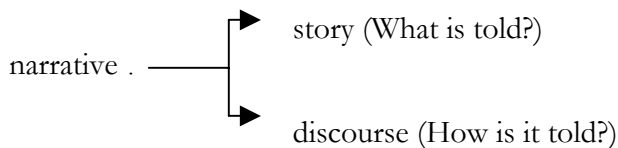
Probably most literature that is read today is written in prose, that is in non-metrical, ‘ordinary’ language. This has not always been the case. It is only with the growing popularity of the novel and a corresponding expansion of the market for literature throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that prose gained this prominent position as a suitable language for literature. In this section the focus will be on narrative prose, that is, prose literature which tells a story.

### 2.1. Story and Discourse

Theorists of narrative have long been in agreement that there are at least two levels in a narrative text: Something happens and this something is related in a certain way. There is, in other words, a **WHAT** (What is told?) to be considered and a **HOW** (How is it told?). These two levels have been given different names by different critics (for an overview of various terminologies see Korte 1985). The distinction made by a theory of criticism called structuralism (see ch. 1.4.3.) has proved one of the most influential ones in recent years. In structuralist terminology the **WHAT** of the narrative is called **story**, the **HOW** is called **discourse** (see Chatman 1978: 19, who follows structuralists like Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov).

*Key terms:*

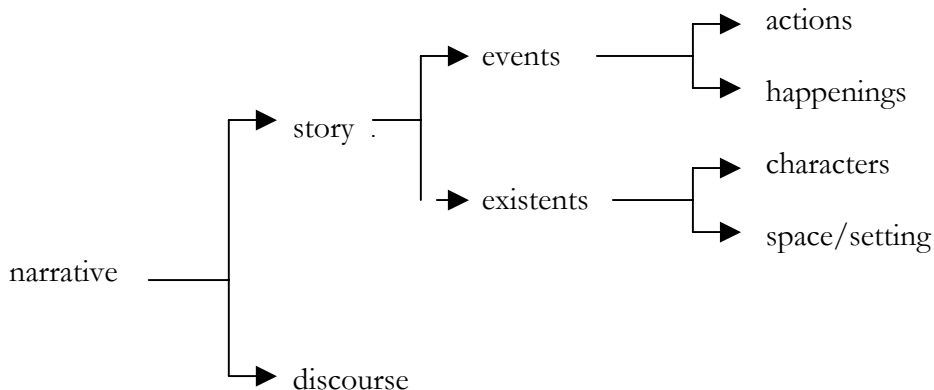
- story
- discourse
- events
- existents



For analysis, these two levels need to be further subdivided.

#### 2.1.1. Story

The story consists of **events** (things that happen) and so-called **existents**, the characters that make things happen or have things happen to them and the setting, meaning the place where things happen. Events can be either brought about actively, in which case they are called actions (one character kills another one) or they just happen (someone dies of a heart-attack).

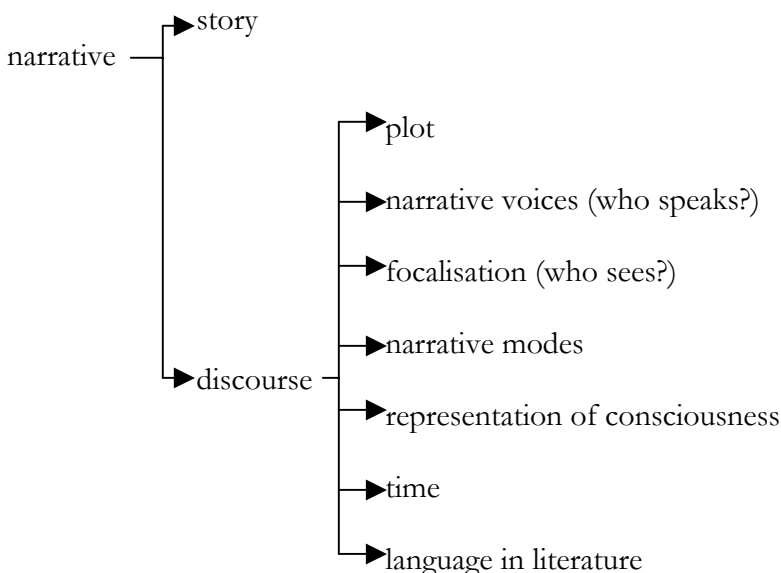


Each of these elements can be approached with different tools of analysis.

### 2.1.2. Discourse

Discourse is the category that comprises various elements of transmission. Strictly speaking, it is only discourse that is directly accessible to us, since we only learn about the story via discourse. Elements of discourse thus determine our perception of the story (what ‘actually’ happened). In the analysis of discourse one tries to determine how certain effects are achieved.

The focus of analysis are questions such as: What is the narrative situation? Whose point of view is presented? Which narrative modes are employed? How are the thoughts of characters transmitted? How is the chronology of events dealt with? How is style used? These elements are always used to certain effects. For instance, how it is that the reader tends to identify with one character and not with another? The analysis of elements of discourse reveals how the reader is ‘manipulated’ into forming certain views about the story.



Each of these elements will be explained in detail under their respective headings.

## 2.2. Story and Plot

Apart from the distinction between the two levels **story** and **discourse**, which is part of structuralist terminology, there is an older tradition which differentiates between **story** and **plot**. These two terms overlap only partly with the terms story and discourse. Since the terms story and plot are still used frequently in English Studies, one needs to be aware of their meaning. The basic difference between story and plot was pointed out by Aristotle, who distinguishes between actions in the real world and units that are selected from these and arranged in what he calls **mythos** (Aristotle 1953: 6.1450a). The

#### *Key terms:*

- story
- plot
- mythos
- plot-line
- single plot
- multiple plot
- tight plot
- closed structure
- poetic justice
- loose/epicodic plot
- open-ended plot

terms story and plot as used in English Studies were introduced and defined by the novelist and critic E.M. Forster in his *Aspects of the Novel* (1927).

Forster defines **story** as the chronological sequence of events and **plot** as the causal and logical structure which connects events (see Forster 1927: 93f). These definitions need some further clarification: A story is only a story if at least one event takes place, that is something changes from state A to state B. Consider the following minimal stories:

The crocodile eats breakfast.  
Fred jumped out of bed.  
The king died.

Compare to this:

The house has blue shutters.

This last example is a description (see ch. 2.6.3.) rather than a story precisely because no event takes place.

Notice also that events in a story involve an animate creature of some sort, i.e. characters (the crocodile, Fred, the king). Most stories involve a **sequence of events** rather than just one event. Manfred Jahn thus gives the following definition of **story**:

A sequence of events and actions involving characters. 'Events' generally include natural and nonnatural happenings like floods or car accidents; 'action' more specifically refers to wilful acts by characters (Jahn 2002: N1, for further references see Pfister 1988).

Forster's examples to illustrate the difference between story and plot are:

The king died and then the queen died (story).  
The king died and then the queen died of grief (plot).

Plot can be considered as part of discourse, since it is part of HOW the story is presented. Consider the following basic sequence of events (i.e. the story):

girl marries young – husband treats her badly – husband dies –  
girl marries man who has loved her for a long time

There are no doubt countless novels, plays and romances which develop this basic story. Just two examples would be George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Despite the similarities of the basic story, the causal and logical connections between events, i.e. the plots of those two novels, are quite different. In *Middlemarch* Dorothea Brooke marries the ugly, elderly and dry scholar Casaubon because she hopes to share in his intellectual pursuits. Dorothea is unhappy because Casaubon neither shares his scholarly interests with her nor does he treat her with any affection. Casaubon dies of a weak heart and out of a sense of intellectual failure. Dorothea, despite protests from her friends, marries the penniless Will Ladislaw because he responds to her emotional and intellectual needs. In contrast, Helen in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, marries Arthur Huntingdon because she is attracted by his charm and good looks. Helen is unhappy because her husband turns out to be a vulgar

drunkard who ill-treats her. She leaves him in order to protect their son from his influence and only returns to him in his final illness. Huntingdon dies of his excesses. Helen marries the farmer Markham with the approval of her friends because she feels she can rely on his virtue and good sense.

Forster's terms have often been criticised. It has been argued that in a story like 'the king died and then the queen died' we automatically assume that the two events are connected simply because they are told one after the other (see Chatman 1978: 45f). Some critics even claim that the distinction between plot and story is artificial and of no practical use in the analysis of literature (Wenzel 1998: 175). There is no question that the distinction is artificial. In fact, the story itself, the mere sequence of events, is an abstract entity, a construct that exists only in our heads after we have read the narrative as presented in the text (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 6).

Nonetheless, the distinction between story and plot is still widely (though not always consistently) used to differentiate degrees of connectivity between events in a narrative. And indeed, the story 'the king died and then the queen died' allows for a number of plots apart from 'the king died and then the queen died of grief'. It could also be: 'The king died and then the queen died because she ate of the same poisoned cake' or 'the king died and then the queen died of sheer irritation because he hadn't left her any money in his will'.

A narrative can have one or more **plot-lines** (see also space and meaning ch. 2.3.3.), that is, events can centre around one or more groups of characters. In Dickens' *Bleak House* for instance, there is the plot-line which centers around Lady Dedlock and the discovery of her guilty past and there is the plot-line which centres around Esther Summerson and her growth to maturity. At certain points these two plot lines merge, as it is discovered that Esther is Lady Dedlock's illegitimate daughter (see also plot-lines in drama ch. 3.3.1.). **Single plot novels** are comparatively rare, most novels develop **multiple plots**. These multiple plot lines are not necessarily all of the same importance, there can be a **main plot-line** and one or more **subplot-lines**. Such sub-plots can serve as a contrast to the main plot when, for instance, there is the same constellation of events in a higher and a lower social sphere (see also contrasts and correspondences in characterisation chs. 2.4.1.6. and 3.6.4.; for a detailed discussion of single and multiple plot-lines see Nischik 1981).

Some narratives are very **tightly plotted**, everything happens for a reason or a purpose and one event is the consequence of another. Quest-stories or fairy tales are usually tightly plotted (see the example in Jahn 2002: D7.2). When each plot-line is brought to a satisfactory ending one also talks of a **closed structure** (for example the death or marriage of the protagonist or the final defeat of an evil force). This is often the case in Victorian novels where there is frequently an entire chapter at the end, tying up all the loose ends of the plot and giving a short glimpse of the characters' future (see for example George Eliot, *Middlemarch* or Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*). In a closed plot structure earthly rewards and punishments are often distributed in proportion to the virtue or vice of the various characters at the end. This is called **poetic justice**.

A **tight plot** generally contributes to an increase in **suspense**. Conversely, lack of suspense or tension in a narrative can in part be explained by the absence of a tight plot. There is very little tension, for instance, in Virginia Woolf's short story *Kew Gardens*, mostly because practically nothing happens: A person sits down on a park bench, watches people go by, gets up

again. There is a similar lack of events in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (see the discussion in Drama 3.3.4.). Many modern and postmodern writers deliberately try to eschew event-dominated stories and tight plots because they feel it is not an accurate rendering of reality and they claim to be more interested in character than in plot. Plot and character depend on each other of course. No plot or story can develop without characters and characters are frequently, though not always, developed through plots. As the novelist Henry James remarked in a much quoted phrase: "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" (James 1948: 13).

Some narratives place less emphasis on the causal connection between events, though there are still plenty of events and action. Instead, episodes might be linked by a common character, such as Moll Flanders in Daniel Defoe's novel *Moll Flanders* or Sam Pickwick in Charles Dickens' *Pickwick Papers*, or a common theme. Such narratives are described as **loosely plotted** or **episodic**. Plots that are not brought to a final or preliminary conclusion are called **open-ended** plots or just open plots (see also plot in drama ch.3.3.1. and Beginnings and Endings ch. 2.8.2.3.). J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* for instance is much more open-ended than the previous Harry Potter volumes. While volumes one to three end with a fairly definite preliminary defeat of the evil force, in *The Goblet of Fire* Voldemort has clearly returned to power and a massive attack on the good powers is imminent at the end of the volume.

## SO WHAT?

The concept of plot is particularly useful to distinguish between tightly and loosely plotted narratives. In many cases a carefully constructed plot is more satisfying or more convincing than a plot that has to rely on coincidences, i.e. where things do not happen for a reason but by entirely fantastic accidents. Romance plots, for example, often rely heavily on coincidence: the hero, who has just escaped a band of soldiers, happens to meet, as he is walking along a lonely highland path in the middle of the night whistling a cheerful tune, both his long-lost lady-love and, a little later, the hunted highland-outlaw who, also just escaped from the soldiers, is going home for his supper on the same lonely highland path. (This happens in Walter Scott's *Rob Roy*). It is, however, important to note that certain types of plots are characteristic for certain genres (see Poetics and Genre ch. 1.4.2.). Romances, such as Scott's *Rob Roy*, are not normally interested in realistic plotting. Instead they focus on fantastic events and their effects on various characters. To criticise such plots as unrealistic is to misunderstand the genre conventions; it is rather like criticising tomato sauce for not being cheese sauce.

But compare the loose plotting of *Rob Roy* for example to J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. Though basically the Harry Potter narratives are rather more fantastic than Scott's romance of the noble highlander, in Rowling things usually happen for a perfectly plausible reason: Ron's wand backfires at the crucial moment and causes Gilderoy Lockhart to lose his memory **because** it has been faulty ever since Ron broke it in the car crash and he had to fix it with spellotape **because** he cannot afford a new wand. Paradoxically, it is thus easier to find Rowling's plot convincing than Scott's even though magic wands and wizard children are outside most

people's everyday experience. But once we have accepted the basic system of the magic world, events in Rowling's plot are convincingly motivated.

## 2.3. Space

### 2.3.1. Space in Discourse and Story

On the level of **discourse** the category of **space** comprises the spatial dimensions of the medium: the length of the book, the size of the pages, amount of empty space on a page and so on. These aspects are very rarely considered in traditional literary analysis though recent criticism has argued that the spatial and material conditions of a text influences the way this text is read (see for example McGann 1991).

On the level of **story** the category of **space** or **setting** forms an important component in the creation and communication of meaning.

*Key terms:*

- space
- setting
- atmosphere
- space and character
- milieu
- space and plot
- symbolic space

### 2.3.2. Fictional Space and Real Space

In narrative, unlike in drama, film or picture stories, space has to be presented verbally. It thus exists, ultimately, only in the reader's imagination. On the other hand, the description of space in narrative tends to be more detailed than it is possible in a drama's primary text. Readers create their notions of fictional space from their own experience in the real world (see Fielitz 2001: 115). That is to say, a person's ideas of how houses, gardens, parks, streets, etc. look, is dependent on that person's actual experience of houses, gardens, parks and streets. In turn, convincing descriptions of spatial dimensions in a narrative serve to increase the narrative's authenticity, it provides a link to the reader's reality. Readers tend to imagine the characters moving through 'real' space, as they do themselves.

### 2.3.3. Space and Meaning

Space and setting in narrative is not merely a space for characters to move in – since they have to be somewhere –, it usually contributes additional meaning to a narrative by providing either correspondences or contrasts to the plot or the characters. Three aspects in particular should be noted:

- atmosphere
- space and character
- space and plot
- symbolic space

Setting can provide a certain **atmosphere**. Darkness and narrow spaces, for instance, are commonly associated with threatening or restrictive atmospheres. Wide open or sunlit spaces create an atmosphere of freedom. Such atmospheres can then be used to provide a characteristic background for a character.



The environment in which a character moves can function as a means of **characterisation** as it does in the following example:

Like as he is to look at, so is his apartment in the dusk of the present afternoon. Rusty, out of date, withdrawing from attention, able to afford it. Heavy broad-backed old-fashioned mahogany and horsehair chairs, not easily lifted, obsolete tables with spindle-legs and dusty baize covers, presentation prints of the holders of great titles in the last generation, or the last but one, environ him. A thick and dingy Turkey-carpet muffles the floor where he sits, attended by two candles in old-fashioned silver candlesticks, that give a very insufficient light to his large room. The titles on the backs of his books have retired into the binding; everything that can have a lock has got one; no key is visible. (Dickens, *Bleak House*, ch. 10).

This excerpt describes Mr Tulkinghorn's room. Like his room (the narrator points this out), Mr Tulkinghorn is extremely secretive (dark, muffled, retired, locked), nobody knows how much he knows, he is closely associated with members of the nobility ("holders of great titles") and he knows their secrets past and present. Tulkinghorn does not arouse much sympathy in the reader mainly because he is not accessible to any emotional appeal. His room also expresses this immovability: It is out-of date, "rusty" and "dusty", "not easily lifted", all epithets which suggest that there has not been any movement for some time.

Theories of sociology in the last 150 or so years have suggested that character is determined by social background, by **milieu**. Novel writers since the later nineteenth century have taken up this concept and have presented characters whose personality is completely formed by their milieu.

Apart from character, setting can also help to define **plot-lines**. Especially in narratives with several subplots, a characteristic setting for each subplot can serve as a means of orientation for the reader. In *Bleak House*, the Dedlock-plot develops at the country house Chesney Wold and in the Dedlock's town house in London, the plot of the street-sweep Joe is set mainly in the poorer streets of London. These two plot-lines merge when Lady Dedlock asks Joe to show her the grave of her former lover. It is the first indication the reader gets that Lady Dedlock will eventually lose her status (she literally loses her 'place'); she dies, having fled from her town house, at Joe's crossing where her lover is buried.

In this sense space can also serve as a symbol. In our example the poor streets of London are a **symbolic space** indicating a lower social status. The symbolic quality of space is to a large extent culturally determined. In our culture, for instance, a stereotypical association with cities is fashion, a fast and exciting life, but also depravity. In contrast, we often associate country spaces with backwardness, calm life but also with innocence (for a more detailed exploration and list of symbolic spaces see Lotman 1972: 313).

## 2.4. Character

The people in a narrative are called **characters** rather than persons to emphasise the fact that they are only representations of people, constructed by an author to fulfil a certain function in a certain context. We form a mental construct of characters from the information we are given but also add some ideas from our own experience and imagination (for a discussion of these processes of mental construction see Schneider 2001). Thus, even though we judge characters in literature according to our experience of 'real' people, unlike 'real' people they do not exist independently of their narrative context and little or no benefit is to be gained from speculating on the psychological make-up of a character for which we are not given any indication in the text (see Pfister 1988: 221).

The main questions for an analysis of character are 1) Techniques of characterisation: HOW does the text inform us about characters and 2) Character functions: WHAT FUNCTION do characters have in the narrative.

### 2.4.1. Techniques of Characterisation

Techniques of characterisation are used in texts to enable readers to form a mental construct of a character. There are six main aspects to be considered (see Jahn 2002: N7 and further references there): How is the character described, by whom is the character described, how is the characterisation distributed throughout the text, how reliable is the source of information, what do we learn about a character's inner life and in which arrangements of contrasts and correspondences is the character depicted. (Most of the following is based on Pfister 1988).

#### 2.4.1.1. Explicit and Implicit Characterisation

The most obvious technique of characterisation is when someone (in the following excerpt: the narrator) tells us **explicitly** what a character is like:

Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her. (Austen, *Emma*, ch.1)

A character is sometimes also characterised explicitly through a **telling name**, as for instance Squire Allworthy, who is a worthy gentleman in all respects, in Fielding's *Tom Jones*. But we also deduce character-traits that are given **implicitly** through the character's actions, other characters' attitudes to him or her, etc.

#### 2.4.1.2. Characterisation by Narrator or Character

Characters can be described, implicitly as well as explicitly, either **by the narrator** (sometimes, somewhat misleadingly, called authorial characterisation)

#### Key terms:

- character
- explicit characterisation
- implicit characterisation
- telling names
- characterisation by the narrator / authorial characterisation
- characterisation by another character / figural characterisation
- self-characterisation
- block characterisation
- mind style
- unreliable narration
- penetration of inner life
- contrasts and correspondences
- major character
- minor character
- protagonist
- antagonist
- witness
- foil
- confidant
- mono-dimensional character
- static character
- type
- flat character
- multi-dimensional character
- dynamic character
- round character

or **by another character** in the narrative (also called figural characterisation) or even by the characters themselves (**self-characterisation**).

The following gives an example for a characterisation by narrator combined with the narrator's representation of other characters' views (see also section 2.6.4. on narrator comment for evaluative language). Explicitly, Mr Snagsby is characterised as a shy, retiring man. It is also implied that his wife is neither shy nor retiring and that he is rather tyrannised by Mrs Snagsby:

Mr and Mrs Snagsby are not only one bone and one flesh but, to the neighbours' thinking, one voice too. That voice, appearing to proceed from Mrs Snagsby alone, is heard in Cook's Court very often. Mr Snagsby, otherwise than as he finds expression through these dulcet tones, is rarely heard. He is a mild, bald, timid man, with a shining head, and a scrubby clump of black hair sticking out at the back. He tends to meekness and obesity. [...] He is emphatically a retiring and unassuming man. (Dickens, *Bleak House*, ch. 10).

A further example: Miss Clack, the poor, religious cousin in *The Moonstone* introduces herself (self-characterisation) to the reader in the following terms:

I am indebted to my dear parents (both now in heaven) for having had habits of order and regularity instilled into me at a very early age. In that happy bygone time, I was taught to keep my hair tidy at all hours of the day and night, and to fold up every article of my clothing carefully, in the same order, on the same chair, in the same place at the foot of the bed, before retiring to rest. An entry of the day's events in my little diary invariably preceded the folding up. The 'Evening Hymn' (repeated in bed) invariably followed the folding up. And the sweet sleep of childhood invariably followed the 'Evening Hymn'. (Collins, *Moonstone*, Second Period, First narrative, ch. 1)

A little further, Miss Clack characterises herself as:

[...] one long accustomed to arouse, convince, prepare, enlighten, and fortify others [...]. (ibid., ch. 8)

With these self-descriptions Miss Clack characterises herself explicitly as a dutiful, orderly and religious person. Implicitly, she is depicted as rather obnoxious, one who always knows how other people should reform their lives and who is willing to say so. It is thus not surprising when Mr Ablewhite calls Miss Clack "this impudent fanatic" (ibid.).

#### 2.4.1.3. Block Characterisation

We can be given crucial information all at once about a character in a **block characterisation**:

Thomas Gradgrind, sir. A man of realities. A man of fact and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over. Thomas Gradgrind, sir – peremptorily Thomas –

Thomas Gradgrind. With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic. (Dickens, *Hard Times*, ch. 2)

Again, this characterisation, provided by the narrator, imparts information about Thomas Gradgrind both in explicit description and implicitly, reproducing Thomas Gradgrind's **mind style**, the way he thinks about the world in his own mind (for the term mind style see for example Nischik 1991). Block characterisations are usually given when a character is first introduced. Alternatively, the reader receives information piecemeal throughout the narrative. This is usually the case for complex and dynamic characters.

#### 2.4.1.4. Reliability

One needs to take the reliability of the source of the characterisation into consideration when assessing the information one receives about a character. A characterisation given by a character whose reliability the reader has cause to question, will not be accepted at face value, it becomes an **unreliable narration**. When for instance the fanatically religious and officious Miss Clack (see her self-characterisation above) characterises Rachel, the lively and beautiful heroine of *The Moonstone* as “insignificant-looking” and with “an absence of all lady-like restraint in her language and manner” (Collins, *Moonstone*, Second period, first narrative, ch.1), one is inclined to interpret this in Rachel's favour rather than to her disadvantage. As in this case, a character's explicit characterisation of other characters functions as implicit self-characterisation, since it expresses a character's attitudes and often reveals a character's weaknesses. In this case, Miss Clack's harsh judgment of Rachel and her conduct is no doubt influenced by the difference in looks and social standing between her and Rachel. To make matters worse, Rachel has attracted the amorous attentions of Godfrey Ablewhite, for whom Miss Clack herself harbours an unlimited adoration.

Generally, a reader will treat self-characterisation with care, since a character's self-proclaimed opinion of him- or herself can be distorted or given for purposes other than honest self-characterisation. When Uriah Heep in Dickens' *David Copperfield* assures everyone repeatedly that he is so very “humble”, the reader's distrust is awakened even before Uriah is disclosed as a hypocritical villain.

In contrast to self-characterisations and characterisation by other characters, those character descriptions given by the narrator, unless there are indications to the contrary, are usually assumed to be reliable and the reader tends to believe the narrator's characterisations more readily than others.

#### 2.4.1.5. Inner Life of Character

Depending on what sort of information is given about a character, readers will feel to a larger or smaller degree acquainted with a character. To a large extent this depends on the **penetration of inner life** (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 42). The more one knows about a character's thoughts and emotional responses (see

also Representation of Consciousness ch. 2.7), the more complex the character will appear and the more ready the reader is to empathise with the character.

#### 2.4.1.6. Contrasts and Correspondences

Characters are also defined in comparison to other characters. It might be, for instance, that two characters are confronted with the same difficulty and react differently. Such contrasts and correspondences give the reader additional information about the character. In Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* for instance, a number of characters can be assessed according to their reaction to the influence of the ring: While some characters succumb immediately to the ring's evil power (like Gollum), others imagine they can use the ring's power to good purpose (like Boromir), yet others are hardly affected by the pressure the ring exerts (like Sam or Bilbo Baggins). Through contrasts and correspondences characters act as **foil** (see character functions ch. 2.4.2.) to each other.

#### 2.4.1.7. Summary: Characterisation Techniques

by the <b>narrator</b>	<b>explicit:</b> character description or comment	
	<b>implicit:</b> report of character's actions and/or thought, description of outward appearance and circumstances, contrasts and correspondences	
by a <b>character</b>	<b>by another character</b>	<b>explicit:</b> description or comment; simultaneously implicit self-characterisation
		<b>implicit:</b> as implied by choice of expression and description of appearance and circumstances
	<b>self-characterisation</b>	<b>explicit:</b> description or comment
		<b>implicit:</b> use of language or gesture, expression, attitudes unconsciously expressed, characteristic props

#### 2.4.2. Character Functions

For the purposes of analysis it is essential not simply to describe a character but above all to look at a character's function in the narrative and that usually means considering a character in relation to other characters.

Plot- or character-oriented narratives usually have one or more **major** (also main) **characters** and any number of **minor characters**. The main character, especially when there is only one, is also called **protagonist**. The term protagonist has the advantage that it implies no value-judgement and can include heroes or heroines (i.e. positive main characters) as well as anti-heroes and anti-heroines (i.e. negative main characters).

The **protagonist** is the character who dominates the narrative. Moll Flanders is the protagonist of Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, Stephen Daedalus is the protagonist in Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In some narratives the protagonist has an influential opponent, the **antagonist**, such as Voldemort in the *Harry Potter* novels, Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings* or Moriarty in *Sherlock Holmes*.

Minor characters can serve as **witnesses**, i.e. someone reporting on the events though not directly involved thus achieving something of an objective report. This would be the case for Nick in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, where the protagonists are Gatsby and Daisy, but Nick observes the developments and acts as **I-as-witness** narrator.

An important function of minor characters is to serve as **foil-characters**. A foil is a piece of shiny metal put under gemstones to increase their brightness. A foil-character thus provides a contrast to highlight the features of the main character. Maybe the most famous example of a foil character is Watson in the Sherlock Holmes stories, whose ordinary perceptiveness serves to highlight Holmes' genius. Another example would be the sensible and restrained Elinor and her emotional sister Marianne in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. The sisters serve as a foils for each other.

Another function of a minor character can be that of **confidant**, i.e. a close friend of the protagonist to whom he or she can confide in and thus disclose his or her innermost thoughts. The housekeeper in Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* for instance functions as confidant for the governess. This way the reader is always confronted with the contrast between the governess' perceptions and visions and the housekeeper's slightly helpless and unimaginative common sense.

### 2.4.3. Character Complexity and Development

Minor characters, not surprisingly, often remain **mono-dimensional** and/or **static**. This means that the narrative text presents only few or even just one characteristic of such characters (mono-dimensional) and that there is little or no development throughout the narrative (static). Such mono-dimensional characters can often be reduced to **types**, representatives of a single and stereotyped character category: the wicked step-mother, faithful servant, miserly old man, profligate youth, etc. **Allegorical characters** might be classed in this category as well (i.e. Hopeful in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* or Despair in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*) since the function of such characters is precisely to represent this one characteristic. E.M. Forster's term **flat** comprises both the aspect of mono-dimensional and static. In consequence the term has been criticised as too reductive (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 40f) since it is quite possible for a character to be multi-dimensional yet entirely static, as for example Heathcliff in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, who remains obsessed by his love for Cathy and his hatred for everyone else from early childhood to his death.

Major characters are more frequently **multi-dimensional** and **dynamic**, though not as a rule. One might argue, for instance, that Oliver in *Oliver Twist* is decidedly mono-dimensional (i.e. 'good') as well as static. A multi-dimensional (or **round**, as Forster calls it) character, as the word suggests, has a number of defining characteristics, sometimes conflicting ones and such characters often undergo a development throughout the narrative (dynamic). Louisa Gradgrind in Dickens' *Hard Times*, for example, is both multi-dimensional and dynamic. The cold, ungraceful daughter of the fact-loving Thomas Gradgrind arouses the reader's compassion despite these unattractive features because she evidently struggles to suppress her more affectionate and imaginative qualities. Luckily for her, her struggles prove unsuccessful and the reader witnesses her breakdown under the fact-system and her eventual breakthrough to a more balanced emotional life. The development of characters is particularly pronounced in the bildungsroman tradition (see ch. 2.9.). Classic examples are Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* or Dickens' *David Copperfield*.

## SO WHAT?

Take, for example, the character James Steerforth in Charles Dickens' novel *David Copperfield*. The name Steerforth is not quite a telling name but it suggests a positive, forthright leader figure, someone who likes to 'steer'. *David Copperfield* is told by a homodiegetic-autodiegetic narrator and largely internal focaliser (see ch. 2.5.), David Copperfield himself, as he experiences events at the time of their taking place. We thus hear about Steerforth from the point of view of the schoolboy and young adult Copperfield (experiencing I) who idolises and adores the older, richer and more experienced friend. The older Copperfield who narrates the story (narrating I) praises Steerforth eloquently in a number of block characterisations, as for instance the following:

There was an ease in his manner – a gay and light manner it was, but not swaggering – which I still believe to have been borne a kind of enchantment with it. I still believe him, in virtue of his carriage, his animal spirits, his delightful voice, his handsome face and figure, and, for aught I know, of some inborn power of attraction besides [...] to have carried a spell with him [...]. (Dickens, *David Copperfield*, ch. 7)

It seems at first as if Steerforth deserved this praise. Steerforth takes the little Copperfield under his wing and helps him especially in the first, very difficult weeks at Salem House, he makes sure Copperfield gets a nicer room in the hotel, he makes friends with the fishermen and boatpeople at Yarmouth without regarding the difference in social status between them and himself, he is a dutiful son whose mother dotes on him and he takes care of Copperfield when he gets roaring drunk at his first bachelor's revel. The narrator's explicit characterisation of Steerforth is enthusiastically positive and he contrives to put almost every one of Steerforth's actions in the rosiest light.

Despite all this, the reader is led very early to question the reliability of the youthful Copperfield's perceptions and to entertain some doubts about the purity of Steerforth's intentions and character. A definite tension exists between the explicit narrator-characterisation on the one hand and figural characterisation, implicit characterisation, even self-characterisation and

occasional prolepses of the narrator. The reader is thus less surprised than Copperfield himself, when Steerforth destroys the happiness of the Peggotty family and his own because he seduces little Emily.

Let us consider each aspect of characterisation in turn. Steerforth's actions characterise him implicitly and, despite Copperfield's positive assessment of them, often reveal a proud, selfish and, though charming when he feels so inclined, cruel character. He disfigures his play-mate Rosa in a fit of temper. He causes Mr Mell to be dismissed from his teaching post. He introduces Copperfield to heavy drinking. When the boy Traddles is beaten because Steerforth laughs in church, Steerforth does not step forward to help him. Traddles is, in fact, far less taken in by Steerforth's charms than Copperfield is. He recognises and condemns Steerforth's haughty pride in his behaviour to Mr Mell and accordingly, Steerforth hardly acknowledges him as a former school fellow. Agnes, also, is not deceived by Steerforth's glamour and warns Copperfield of his influence. Both implicit characterisation and explicit characterisation through other characters encourage the reader to form an opinion of Steerforth which is different from that of the narrator's explicit praise. This is supported by occasional prolepses, when the narrator uses his knowledge of later events to indicate that what the young Copperfield (as experiencing I) takes as genuine virtue is in fact only a passing entertainment for Steerforth, a game to test the powers of his charm and to see innocence gaining experience. Steerforth himself recognises the flaws in his character when he momentarily laments the lack of a strong father's guidance in a very brief and almost accidental self-characterisation.

To a large extent, Copperfield's view of Steerforth thus serves less to characterise Steerforth but to implicitly characterise Copperfield himself in his youthful misapprehensions. But it would be a mistake to reduce Steerforth to this function. His is the story of superior talent and resources which are not utilized to any beneficial purpose and which are eventually turned to ill usage. Though the seduction of Emily is condemned by everyone, even Copperfield, his character remains ambivalent; the tension that was created by the different modes of characterisation does not simply dissolve when Copperfield recognises the base aspects of Steerforth's nature. The contradictory responses his character inspires are epitomised in Rosa Dartle's passionate love-hate of him and his mother. And eventually his almost heroic death in the storm, he is waving his cap to the helpless onlookers before the ship goes down, and the boylike posture of his drowned body, "lying with his head upon his arm, as I had often seen him lie at school" (ch. 55), recall Steerforth's charms: fearless, dare-devil, trusting in the benevolence of others. He elicits grand responses in others, nowhere more so than when Ham, Emily's wronged fiancé, risks his life in the desperate attempt to save Steerforth from the foundering boat and goes to death with him.



## 2.5. Narrators and Narrative Situation

While other categories of analysis, such as characterisation, plot or space are useful both for the analysis of narrative and drama, the category of narrator is unique to the more diegetic genres (narrative prose and narrative poetry).

Two aspects are considered: narrative voice (who speaks?) and focalisation (who sees?). These two aspects together are also called **narrative situation**. Some critics also talk about narrative perspective or point of view in this context, though these terms do not always distinguish clearly between narrative voice and focalisation.

### 2.5.1. Narrative Voices

Narrative situation is an aspect of discourse, which means that it is part of the analysis that examines HOW a narrative is told. It is characteristic of narrative prose (and narrative poetry) that it is always told by someone, i.e. it is always mediated in some way through a 'voice'. This is not the case in drama or film, where the characters generally speak directly.

When one examines narrative voice, one basically wants to know **who speaks**, or more precisely, who tells the story. The question 'who speaks' is asked of the narrative as a whole. This narrator can, of course, report on other characters' conversation. This does not change the narrative situation; it is still the narrator who speaks.

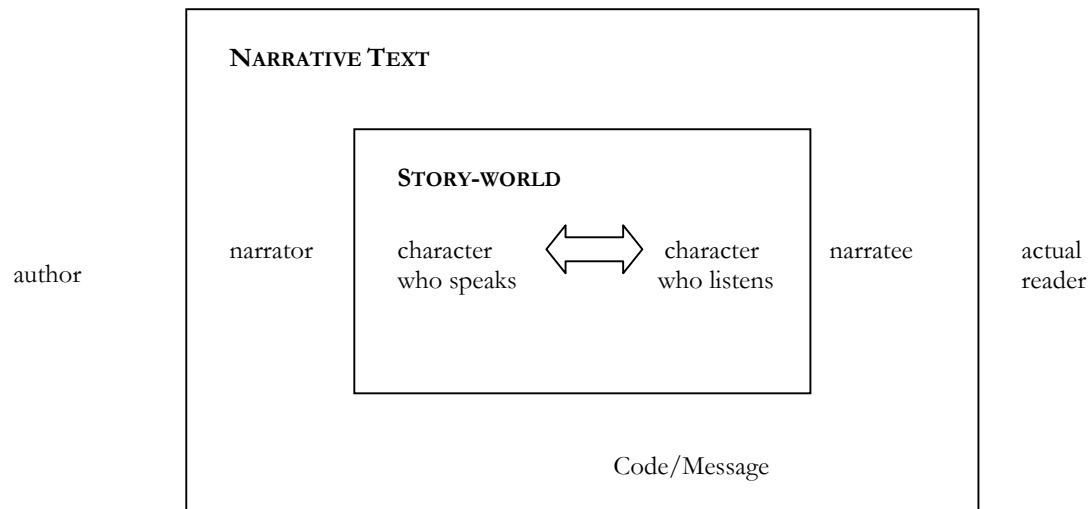
The first distinction that is made, following Genette (1980), is between a narrator who is also a character in the story – a **homodiegetic narrator**, and a narrator who is NOT a character in the story but in a way hovers above it and knows everything about it – a **heterodiegetic narrator**. If the homodiegetic narrator is also the protagonist of the narrative, it is an **autodiegetic narrator**. Franz Stanzel's distinction between **first-person narrative situation** and **authorial narrative situation** roughly corresponds with Genette's terms homodiegetic/heterodiegetic (see Stanzel 1984; Stanzel introduces a third type of narrative situation about which see below: figural narrative situation).

Note by the way that the narrator is NOT the same as the author. Narrators can have opinions that are not the author's. This is especially obvious in the case of homodiegetic narrators; a male author can create a female narrator without necessarily putting his own gender up for question and one author can create different narrators in different books without having to be suspected of a split personality. The necessary separation between author and narrator also holds for heterodiegetic narrators, of course. Even in autobiographical texts the distinction between author and narrator is useful, since the narrating I is always partly a construction and thus not identical with the author.

The communication situation in prose texts thus comprises three levels: A character addresses another character in the narrative; this is narrated by a narrator who sometimes addresses and imaginary or actual "dear reader" or listener in the narrative, the **narratee**; the text has been composed by a real author and is read by an actual reader. Authors and readers are frequently embedded in different historical and cultural contexts.

#### *Key terms:*

- homodiegetic narrator
- heterodiegetic narrator
- autodiegetic narrator
- I-as-witness
- first person narrative situation
- authorial narrative situation
- narratee
- communication situation in prose narrative
- overt narrator
- covert narrator



Compare the types of narrators in the following two examples:

[...] my Mother was convicted of Felony [...] and being found quick with Child, she was respited for about seven Months, in which time having brought me into the World, [...] she [...] obtain'd the Favour of being Transported to the Plantations, and left me about Half a Year old; and in bad Hands you may be sure. This is too near the first Hours of my Life for me to relate any thing of myself, but by hear say; 'tis enough to mention, that as I was born in such an unhappy Place [Newgate prison], I had no Parish to have Recourse to for my Nourishment in my Infancy, nor can I give the least Account how I was kept alive, other, than that as I have been told, some Relation of my Mothers took me away for a while as a Nurse, but at whose Expencc or by whose Direction I know nothing at all of it. (Defoe, *Moll Flanders*)

In the Second Year of his Retirement, the Marchioness brought him a Daughter, and died in Three Days after her Delivery. The Marquis [...] was extremely afflicted at her Death; but Time having produced its usual Effects, his great fondness for the little Arabella intirely engrossed his Attention and made up all the Happiness of his Life. [...] Nature had indeed given her a most charming Face, a Shape easy and delicate, a sweet and insinuating Voice, and an Air so full of Dignity and Grace, as drew the Admiration of all that saw her. [...] From her earliest Youth she had discovered a Fondness for Reading, which extremely delighted the Marquis; he permitted her therefore the Use of his Library, in which, unfortunately for her, were great Stores of Romances; [...]. (Lennox, *Female Quixote*, Bk. I, ch. 1)

In both cases we are told about the birth and childhood of a little girl and in both cases indications are given that there are certain defects in the girl's upbringing. Nonetheless, the scope of the information we receive is quite different. Moll Flanders is a homodiegetic-autodiegetic narrator. She is herself the main character in the story she tells and there is a lot she does not know about herself as a very small child or can only relate from hearsay. In contrast, a well-informed heterodiegetic narrator is able to give us information of considerable detail about Arabella. On the other hand, we gain a personal impression of Moll's character because we hear her own voice. In comparison, the report about Arabella is much more distanced.

One makes a further distinction between an **overt** and a **covert** narrator. In an overt narrator seems to have a distinct personality, someone who makes his or her opinions known, who makes explicit judgments or implicit evaluations for instance when the narrator comment is ironic. In the quotation from *The Female Quixote* we notice for example that the narrator does not approve of romances as reading material ("unfortunately for her", for evaluative use of language see narrative modes: narrator comment). A covert narrator, on the other hand, is hardly noticeable. Compare the following extract from Ernest Hemingway, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*

'The marvellous thing is that it's painless,' he said. 'That's how you know when it starts.'  
 'Is it really?'  
 'Absolutely. I'm awfully sorry about the odour though. That must bother you.'  
 'Don't! Please don't.'  
 Look at them,' he said. 'Now is it sight or is it scent that brings them like that?'

There is quite obviously a (heterodiegetic) narrator here, someone who tells us who is speaking ("he said"). But we learn nothing about the narrator's own position, we do not get an impression of him as a person: It is a covert narrator who concentrates on **showing** rather than **telling**.

### 2.5.2. Focalisation

The narrator is the agency that transmits the events and existents of the narrative verbally. The narrator can recount events from a position outside the story, adopting the **omniscient** point of view of someone who, for some reason, knows everything about the story. However, it is also possible for the narrator to adopt the limited point of view of one character in the story and in consequence to remain ignorant of what happens outside this character's range of perception. This choice of perspective is independent of the question whether or not the narrator is a character in the story (as will become clear below). To express the distinction between narrative voice (who speaks?) and perspective (who sees or perceives?), Genette has introduced the term **focalisation** (Genette 1980: 189-194) in order to avoid confusion with earlier usages of the terms 'point of view' or 'perspective' which is often used to denote narrative voice as well. Genette's terms have been modified by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan whose definitions are presented here.

#### *Key terms:*

- focalisation
- external focaliser
- narrator focaliser
- internal focaliser
- character-focaliser
- figural narrative situation
- narrating I
- experiencing I
- unreliable narrator

An **external focaliser** is a focaliser who is external to the story (Rimmon-Kennan 1983: 74) and who is thus often called **narrator-focaliser** because the focus of perception seems to be that of the narrator. An **internal focaliser** is a, usually limited, focus of perception of a character in the story, and thus also called **character-focaliser**. The distinction is best illustrated by comparing it to the change in camera perspective in the following pictures from the BBC film version of *Oliver Twist* (1982).



At first the camera presents an overall perspective, a point of view that hovers above the scene and the audience is able to see the entire scene all at once. Then the perspective changes and the camera reproduces Oliver's perceptions, the quick passing of surroundings as he is running, even the loss of consciousness when he is knocked out and the screen momentarily goes black. As the camera changes perspective the audience adopts Oliver's point of view and sees and experiences events as he sees and experiences them; Oliver becomes the focaliser. The camera leaves Oliver's point of view (and adopts the point of view of one of the by-standers) in the last picture.

A similar effect can be achieved in a verbal narrative. Consider this extract:

[...] what a variety of smells interwoven in subtlest combination thrilled his nostrils; strong smells of earth, sweet smells of flowers; nameless smells of leaf and bramble; sour smells as they crossed the road; pungent smells as they entered bean-fields. But suddenly down the wind came tearing a smell sharper, stronger, more lacerating than any – a smell that ripped across his brain stirring a thousand instincts, releasing a million memories – the smell of hare, the smell of fox. Off he flashed like a fish drawn in a rush through water further and further. [...] And once at least the call was even more imperious; the hunting horn roused deeper instincts, summoned wilder and stronger emotions that transcended memory and obliterated grass, trees, hare, rabbit, fox in one wild shout of ecstasy. Love blazed her torch in his eyes; he heard the hunting horn of Venus. Before he was well out of his puppyhood, Flush was a father.

This excerpt is from Virginia Woolf's novel *Flush* (ch. 1). The paragraph begins with someone smelling different smells and it seems these smells are perceived of as attractive. In the last sentence it becomes clear that this someone is in fact a young dog; he is the focus of perception, the focaliser. We hear about the smells, the attractions of fox and hare, the flash of passion from the dog's point of view, as one might imagine a dog to experience these things. Obviously, it is not the dog who speaks here. It is a heterodiegetic narrator who tries to reproduce the dog's impressions in an internal focalisation. In the terminology introduced by Stanzel, this combination is called **figural narrative**.

**situation.** Careful: It is not possible to have a 'figural narrator' because in this narrative situation a narrator who is not the character continues to speak!

Focalisation does not have to stay the same throughout a narrative. A change in focaliser often introduces another point of view and thus variety into a narrative. Woolf's narrative of Flush's first amorous adventure for instance continues thus:

Such conduct in a man even, in the year 1842, would have called for some excuse from a biographer; in a woman no excuse could have availed; [...] But the moral code of dogs, whether better or worse, is certainly different from ours, and there was nothing in Flush's conduct in this respect that requires a veil now, or unfitted him for the society of the purest and the chastest in the land then.

This is a **narrator comment** (see ch. 2.6.4.) and the narrator is obviously not a dog but a human being ("the moral code of dogs [...] is [...] different from ours"). This represents a combination of heterodiegetic narrator and external focalisation.

Internal focalisation can be more obvious still when the language abilities and mind style of the focaliser are realistically reproduced. This is a little difficult in the case of a dog but it becomes quite possible for instance in the case of children as focalisers. A famous example is the beginning of James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo. . . .  
His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass; he had a hairy face. [...]  
When you wet the bed, first it is warm then it gets cold. His mother put on the oilsheet. That had the queer smell.  
His mother had a nicer smell than his father. (ch. 1.)

It is quite possible to imagine that this is the perception of a little boy as he might express it to himself: The syntax is very simple, he does not seem to know the word 'glasses' so the expression "through a glass" is used. It is certainly from the little boy's point of view that we hear about the various smells, the story, the bed-wetting. Notice however, that even though the language of a child is here reproduced, the little boy himself is not the narrator ('who speaks?'). It is again a heterodiegetic narrator and an internal focaliser.

The difference to an external focaliser becomes very clear when one compares Anthony Burgess's rewriting of the passage at the beginning of Joyce's *Portrait* as a piece with a homodiegetic narrator and external focaliser; the older protagonist looks back as **narrating I**, the consciousness and knowledge of the first person speaker at the time of narration. The narrating I in this case has achieved a noticeable distance to the immature consciousness of the **experiencing I**, the baby:

My earliest recollections are of my father and my mother bending over my cot and of the difference in personal odour that subsisted between my two parents. My father, certainly, did not have so pleasant an odour as my mother. I remember I would be told infantile stories, altogether

appropriate to my infantile station. One of them, I seem to recall, was concerned with a cow coming down the lane – which lane was never specified – and meeting a child who was called (I am embarrassed, inevitably, to recollect this in maturity) some such name as Baby Tuckoo. I myself, apparently, was to be thought of as Baby Tuckoo. Or was it Cuckoo? It is, of course, so long ago [...] (Burgess 1973: 15)

Even though there is now a homodiegetic narrator, as a result of the external focalisation Burgess's version is noticeably removed from the child's perceptions at the time, and so of course is his linguistic ability.

### 2.5.3. Unreliable Narrators

Not all narrators are equally reliable, that is to say the reader is sometimes led to distrust what a narrator says (see Nünning 1998, also Reliability in Characterisation). There are various reasons for such distrust. Some narrators tell deliberate lies or omit crucial information. In Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* for instance, the homodiegetic narrator simply omits to mention how he himself commits the murder until the end of the book. Of course in this case, the reader does not realise that this narrator is unreliable until the very end. In other cases the narrator simply does not know enough to give an accurate account of what actually happened. A classic example is Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* which is full of uncertainties and contradictions, simply because the narrator never fully understands what is happening. He tries to piece together various bits of information he receives and indulges in a number of speculations, but he is never quite certain. This makes the information the reader receives (seem) unreliable.

### SO WHAT?

There is no limited set of functions that can be assigned to each Type of narrator or focaliser, but an examination of narrative voice and focalisation helps to explain how a certain atmosphere is created and how reader sympathy is directed, since the information given by the narrator is the reader's (only) access to the fictional world that is presented. Especially internal focalisation helps the readers to empathise with the character-focaliser.

Consider the following example: Saki's short story *Sredni Vashtar* is told with Conradin, a ten-year-old boy with a rampant imagination, as focaliser. Conradin lives with an older relative whom he hates. In a tool-shed in the garden Conradin secretly keeps a large polecat-ferret. Over time he elevates this polecat into a god, Sredni Vashtar, who has to be served with complicated rites involving flowers, berries and stolen nutmeg powder. Conradin's constant prayer is 'Do one thing for me, Sredni Vashtar', though the reader is never explicitly told what that is. One day his relative decides to investigate the garden shed because she suspects Conradin of keeping illegal pleasures in there. Conradin watches her from the dining-room window:

Conradin fervently breathed his prayer for the last time. But he knew as he prayed that he did not believe. He knew that the Woman would come out presently with that pursed smile he loathed so well on her

face, and that in an hour or two the gardener would carry away his wonderful god, a god no longer, [...]. He watched the starlings running and flying in little parties across the lawn; he counted them over and over again, with one eye always on the swinging door. [...] And presently his eyes were rewarded: out through that doorway came a long, low, yellow-brown beast, with eyes a-blink at the waning daylight, and dark wet stains around the fur of jaws and throat. [...] And while the maid went to summon her mistress to tea, Conradin fished a toasting-fork out of the sideboard drawer and proceeded to toast himself a piece of bread. And during the toasting of it and the buttering of it with much butter and the slow enjoyment of eating it, Conradin listened to the noises and silences which fell in quick spasms beyond the dining-room door. The loud foolish screaming of the maid, the answering chorus of wondering ejaculations from the kitchen region, the scuttering footsteps and hurried embassies for outside help, and then, after a lull, the scared sobbings and the shuffling tread of who those bore a heavy burden into the house.

The reader never leaves Conradin's viewpoint. We are not told what actually happens in the garden-shed. With Conradin, we draw certain conclusions and we share first Conradin's despair and later his satisfaction at an event that causes shock and grief to other members of the household. This is achieved because Conradin remains the focaliser throughout; the focalisation aligns reader sympathy with Conradin. If the story had been told with the relative as focaliser, it would have been the story of a woman who tends a sick, difficult child and who meets a tragic end being attacked by a vicious pole-cat. The story, as focalised by her, would have to end, of course, with the moment of her death. Our emotional response to the story would almost certainly have been different than it is when we empathise with Conradin.

An entirely different effect is achieved in William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* when Amelia's farewell from her friends at school is described:

For three days [...] little Laura Martin, the orphan, followed her about, like a little dog. She had to make and receive at least fourteen presents – to make fourteen solemn promises of writing every week: [...] Laura Martin [...] took her friend's hand and said, looking up in her face wistfully, "Amelia, when I write to you I shall call you Mamma." All which details, I have no doubt, Jones, who reads this book at his Club, will pronounce to be excessively foolish, trivial, twaddling, and ultra-sentimental. (Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, ch. 1)

The sentimental potential of this scene of tearful leave-taking is deliberately floated by the narrator's comments. The narrator interrupts the scene itself and remarks on the possible criticism it might incur from one type of reader. With this he forces the (actual) reader to consider the leave-taking scene from a distance, what is more, from the distance of slightly ironic criticism. Thus any empathy with Amelia is undermined through the heterodiegetic narrator and an external focalisation.

## 2.6. Narrative Modes

Closely related to questions of narrative voice and focalisation is the issue of **narrative modes**. Narrative modes are the kinds of utterance through which a narrative is conveyed (see Bonheim 1982). Clearly, these are questions relating to aspects of discourse.

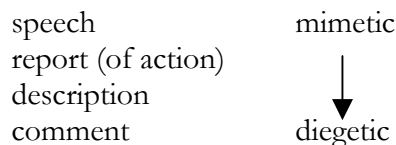
The distinction between narrative modes is as old as literary theory itself; Plato distinguishes between two main types: **mimesis** (the direct presentation of speech and action) and **diegesis** (the verbal representation of events). The distinction was taken up by Aristotle and can – much later – still be found in Henry James' distinction between **showing** and **telling**.

mimesis	showing	direct presentation
diegesis	telling	mediated presentation

*Key terms:*

- narrative modes
- mimesis
- diegesis
- showing
- telling
- direct speech
- indirect (reported) speech
- report
- description of place
- description of time
- description of character
- comment

The most mimetic literary genre is drama (and film), which consists mainly of direct presentation of speech and action, i.e. the audience actually watches people speak and act. In narrative prose (and poetry) one is necessarily limited to verbal representation. Nonetheless, even in narrative prose and poetry degrees of mimesis and diegesis can be differentiated into four main narrative modes (following Bonheim 1982):



Apart from these four narrative modes, there are possibly non-narrative elements in any given narrative which are not strictly speaking part of the narrative itself: such as for instance an interpolated song, poem (for instance in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* or in A.S. Byatt's *Possession*), essay (discussions of the techniques of writing a novel for instance in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*), or chapter mottoes (as in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*). Sometimes these elements give a clue to the narrative's meaning, but sometimes they are simply decorations or digressions and not an integral part of the story itself.

### 2.6.1. Speech

**Direct speech** is the most mimetic narrative mode, since it gives an almost complete illusion of direct, i.e. unmediated, representation.

‘Have the police done anything Godfrey?’

‘Nothing whatever.’

‘It is certain, I suppose, that the three men who laid the trap for you were the same three men who afterwards laid the trap for Mr. Luker?’

‘Humanly speaking, my dear Rachel, there can be no doubt of it.’

‘And not a trace of them has been discovered?’



‘Not a trace.’

(Collins, *Moonstone*, Second Period, First Narrative, ch. 2)

In this excerpt only the quotation marks and the fact that the speakers address each other by name indicate that different people are speaking. Sometimes direct speech is introduced by a reporting phrase, so-called inquit formulas (‘She said’, ‘The hoarse voice answered’, etc.). Direct speech itself is nowadays usually indicated by quotation marks or other forms of punctuation (sometimes by a dash, sometimes merely by the beginning of a new paragraph). Direct speech tends to use present tense as its main tense and uses the first person when the speaker refers to him- or herself, the second person when other participants of the conversation are addressed. The use of sociolect or dialect also serves to indicate spoken language (see also Representation of Consciousness: thought as silent speech, ch. 2.7.).

The element of mediation is more noticeable when speech or thought is rendered indirectly in **indirect** (or **reported**) **speech**.

Original utterance: She said: “I am tired, I am going to bed.”

Indirect speech: She said she was tired and was going to bed.

Indirect speech also uses inquit formulas but no quotation marks. The tense of the original utterance is changed from present into past, from past into past perfect and references to the first person are rendered in the third person. All this can be looked up in any ordinary grammar book.

The effect of indirect speech can easily be perceived as somewhat monotonous and certainly it creates a distance between the utterance and the reader’s perception of it; it is less immediate than direct speech. In the following example we focus less on the young son’s speech than on Moll’s, i.e. the homodiegetic narrator’s, rendering of it.

After some time, the young Gentleman took an Opportunity to tell me that the Kindness he had for me, had got vent in the Family; he did not Charge me with it, he said, for he knew well enough which way it came out; he told me his plain way of Talking had been the Occasion of it, for that he did not make his respect for me so much a Secret as he might have done, and the Reason was that he was at a Point; that if I would consent to have him, he would tell them all openly that he lov’d me, and that he intended to Marry me. (Defoe, *Moll Flanders*)

But indirect speech does not inevitably create monotony. In the following excerpt Charles Dickens uses indirect speech to vary and enliven the narrator’s (heterodiegetic) report when he reproduces Jo the streetsweeps’s (ungrammatical) way of speaking when Jo is asked to give evidence at an inquest:

Name, Jo. Nothing else that he knows on. Don’t know that everybody has two names. Never heerd of sich a think. Don’t know that Jo is short for a longer name. Thinks it long enough for *him*. *He* don’t find fault with it. Spell it? No. *He* can’t spell it. No father, no mother, no friends. Never been to school. What’s home? Knows a broom’s a broom, and knows it’s wicked to tell a lie. Don’t recollect who told him about the broom, or about the lie, but knows both. Can’t exactly say

what'll be done to him arter he's dead if he tells a lie to the gentlemen here, but believes it'll be something wery bad to punish him, and serve him right – and so he'll tell the truth. (Dickens, *Bleak House*, ch. 9)

This passage displays many of the characteristics of direct speech, except the use of the first person pronoun. Thus it technically remains the narrator's voice who speaks about Jo even though he adopts Jo's syntax, vocabulary and pronunciation.

### 2.6.2. Report

**Report** is the mode that informs the reader about events and actions in the story.

Dick Boulton came from the Indian camp to cut up logs for Nick's father. He brought his son Eddy and another Indian named Billy Tabeshaw with him. They came in through the back gate out of the woods, Eddy carrying the long cross-cut saw. (Hemingway, *The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife*)

Report can be identified mainly through its use of action verbs (come, bring, carry in the example above). In practice it is often difficult to clearly separate between report and description. Also, it is very rare that a narrative presents an absolutely neutral report. Reports are frequently mingled with narrator comment.

### 2.6.3. Description

Description is a narrative mode that represents objects in space, that is to say **existents** of the story, things that can be seen, heard or felt in some way. Traditional rhetoric distinguishes between

1. the description of **place**,
2. the description of **time**,
3. the description of **character**.

Examples:

Description of place:

On one side of this broad curve in the straight seaboard of the Republic of Costaguana, the last spur of the coast range forms an insignificant cape whose name is Punta Mala. From the middle of the gulf the point of the land itself is not visible at all; but the shoulder of a steep hill at the back can be made out faintly like a shadow on the sky. (Conrad, *Nostromo*, ch. 1),

Description of time:

Five o'clock had hardly struck on the morning of the nineteenth of January [...]. (Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ch. 5)

Description of character:

One of these boxes was occupied [...] by a stern-eyed man of about five-and-forty, who had a bald and glossy forehead, with a good deal of black hair at the sides and back of his head, and large black whiskers. He was buttoned up to the chin in a brown coat; and had a large seal-skin travelling cap, and a great-coat and cloak lying on the seat beside him. (Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, ch. 35)

Obviously, these elements are normally combined:

I have read of men who, when forced by their calling to live for long periods in utter solitude [...] have made it a rule to dress regularly for dinner in order to maintain their self-respect and prevent a relapse into barbarism. It was in some such spirit, with an added touch of self-consciousness, that, at seven o'clock in the evening of 23rd September in a recent year [description of time], I was making my evening toilet in my chambers in Pall Mall [description of place]. I thought the date and the place justified the parallel, [...] I – well, a young man of condition and fashion, who knows the right people, belongs to the right clubs, has a safe, possibly brilliant future in the Foreign Office – may be excused for a sense of complacent martyrdom, when, with his keen appreciation of the social calendar, he is doomed to the outer solitude of London in September [description of person]. (Childers, *The Riddle in the Sands*, ch. 1)

#### 2.6.4. Comment

In the narrative mode of **comment** one notices the mediator (i.e. the narrator) most. In this mode we find evaluations of the story's events and characters, general observations or judgements. Such evaluations can be quite explicit:

In the absence of any precise idea as to what railways were, public opinion in Frick was against them; for the human mind in that grassy corner had not the proverbial tendency to admire the unknown, holding rather that it was likely to be against the poor man, and that suspicion was the only wise attitude with regard to it. (Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ch. 56)

But evaluations can also be made less explicitly. The choice of pejorative diction, a hint of irony or the use of modifiers (such as 'unfortunately') also work as comment. In the following example the narrator of a Dickens novel manages to present Sir Leicester Dedlock as a rather ridiculous man, mainly through irony when describing Sir Leicester's estimate of his own value, which is completely out of proportion, and the mixture of negative and positive characteristics which the narrator gives without any attempt at reconciliation:

Sir Leicester Dedlock is only a baronet, but there is no mightier baronet than he. His family is as old as the hills, and infinitely more respectable. He has a general opinion that the world might get on without hills, but would be done up without Dedlocks. [...] He is a gentleman of strict conscience, disdainful of all littleness and meanness, and ready, on the

shortest notice, to die any death you may please to mention rather than give occasion for the least impeachment of his integrity. He is an honourable, obstinate, truthful, high-spirited, intensely prejudiced, perfectly unreasonable man. (Dickens, *Bleak House*, ch. 2)

#### 2.6.5. Mixed Narrative Modes

In practice, narrative modes are mixed:

Cedric crossed the threshold into the room [report of action]. It was a very large and splendid room, with massive carved furniture in it, and shelves upon shelves of books [description]; [...] On the floor, by the armchair, lay a dog, a huge tawny mastiff with body and limbs almost as big as a lion's [description]; and this great creature rose majestically and slowly, and marched towards the little fellow, with a heavy step [report with comment, 'majestically', 'little fellow']. Then the person in the chair spoke [report and inquit formula]. 'Douglass,' he called, 'come back, sir.' [direct speech and inquit formula]. But there was no more fear in little Lord Fauntleroy's heart than there was unkindness – he had been a brave little fellow all his life [report with comment]. (Burnett, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, ch. 5)

#### 2.6.6. Historical Change in Narrative Modes

Preferences for certain narrative modes change over time. Twentieth-century narratives for instance tend to use less comment, especially moral judgements that claim general validity of the kind so frequently found in earlier narratives. Modern narratives also favour the use of direct speech or direct representation of consciousness. Generally, the tendency since the late nineteenth century, especially since Henry James' emphatic advocacy of the 'showing' mode, has been towards those modes that create the illusion of mimesis and disguise the voice of the narrator.

This does not mean that one type of mode is better and that another is worse. It does indicate that readers have, at different times, different tastes and possibly different expectations and reading habits. A comparison of narrative modes can thus be fruitful when comparing narratives which were written at different times. It is also advisable to bear in mind the changing preferences for different modes when examining narratives from times other than our own.

SO WHAT?

Another use of narrative modes (and consequently one possibly profitable aspect for analysis) is the different effect which the employment of various modes can have on the reader. By way of example consider the following excerpts from *The Moonstone*. In different modes and from changing perspectives the reader is both told and shown something about the characters:

I am not superstitious; I have read a heap of books in my time; I am a scholar in my own way. Though turned seventy, I possess an active

memory, and legs to correspond. You are not to take it, if you please, as the saying of an ignorant man, when I express my opinion that such a book as *Robinson Crusoe* never was written, and never will be written again. I have tried that book for years – generally in combination with a pipe of tobacco – and I have found it my friend in need in all the necessities of this mortal life. When my spirits are bad – *Robinson Crusoe*. When I want advice – *Robinson Crusoe*. In past times when my wife plagued me; in present times when I have had a drop too much – *Robinson Crusoe*. (Collins, *The Moonstone*, First Period, ch. 1)

In this excerpt Gabriel Betteredge, as homodiegetic narrator, gives a description of his relation to the book *Robinson Crusoe* and he reports his past and present habit of turning to that book for comfort and advice in times of trouble. While he comments explicitly on the excellence of the novel, the reader is shown a character who may be described as slightly simple in his unlimited trust in *Robinson Crusoe* – not generally recognised as source of advice and consolation in all kinds of difficulties – but also as rather charming in his eccentricity. The narrator's direct address to the reader ("You are not to take it [...]") establishes a sort of confidential intimacy between the reader and Betteredge which is flattering. Readers of course feel themselves slightly superior because they have a wider scope of advice books, but Betteredge's confidences make him appear rather endearing.

Later in the story Betteredge recommends the powers of *Robinson Crusoe* to the doctor's assistant, Ezra Jennings. Jennings reports the occasion and his own reactions:

To my great surprise Betteredge laid his hand confidentially on my arm, and put this extraordinary question to me:  
'Mr. Jennings, do you happen to be acquainted with *Robinson Crusoe*?'  
I answered that I had read *Robinson Crusoe* when I was a child.  
'Not since then?' inquired Betteredge.  
'Not since then.'  
He fell back a few steps, and looked at me with an expression of compassionate curiosity, tempered by superstitious awe. [...]  
'Sir,' he said gravely, 'there are great allowances to be made for a man who has not read *Robinson Crusoe* since he was a child. I wish you good morning.' (Collins, *The Moonstone*, Second Period, Fourth Narrative)

In this excerpt we see a demonstration of Betteredge's reliance on *Robinson Crusoe*, this time given in mostly direct speech intermingled with some reported speech and narrator comment (the homodiegetic narrator is now Ezra Jennings). The narrator comment clearly directs the reader to consider Betteredge's reliance on *Robinson Crusoe* not as an endearing eccentricity but as very peculiar indeed and not in line with a sensible approach to life ("extraordinary question", "superstitious awe"). Depending on how thoroughly readers empathised with Betteredge in the first section of the book, they will resent Jennings' arrogance and despise him as an unimaginative fellow or they will agree with Jennings' assessment and distance themselves from Betteredge.

## 2.7. Representation of Consciousness

Rather more intricate than representations of speech in direct or indirect mode are representations of thought, which can be conceptualised as a kind of **silent speech** or inner speech (see Bonheim 1982: 53). Obviously, it is possible simply to represent thought, just like speech, using direct or indirect discourse:

“What horrible weather they have here,” he thought. (direct discourse)  
He thought that the weather in these parts was really horrible. (indirect discourse)

But there are other ways of representing thought or consciousness. The advantage that narrative prose has over drama, for instance, is that it can tell the reader about a character’s mental processes and emotions without having that character burst into speech (as in a soliloquy in drama for instance). The reader is allowed to look into a character’s head, though of course in the narrative the character continues to act like most people do and keeps his thoughts to himself. It is worth noting that with the representation of a character’s consciousness in narrative prose a realistic effect is achieved – the reader feels he receives firsthand and inside knowledge of the character – through really rather unrealistic means which has nonetheless become a convention. In reality, of course, we cannot look into other people’s heads; the only thought processes we will ever get to know intimately are our own (Käte Hamburger, 1973, points this out, see also Cohn 1978: 7f).

Three major methods of thought representation have been identified, depending on the level of noticeable narrator interference (taking up Cohn’s distinctions):

- **interior monologue**
- **psychonarration**
- **narrated monologue or free indirect discourse**

### 2.7.1. Interior Monologue

**Interior monologue** is the direct presentation of thought as in direct speech. One does not speak of a monologue unless the utterance has a certain length. Interior monologue is thus a longish passage of uninterrupted thought.

Consider an excerpt from Douglas Adams, *The Hitch Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*. The situation is as follows: The spaceship is being attacked by two missiles. Only at the last moment does Arthur turn on the Improbability Drive and the two missiles are turned into a sperm whale and a bowl of petunias. The passage describes the thoughts of the sperm whale who has suddenly come into existence in free space and is trying to come to terms with his identity:

Er, excuse me, who am I?  
Hello?  
Why am I here? What’s my purpose in life?  
What do I mean by who am I?  
Calm down, get a grip now ... oh! this is an interesting sensation, what is it? It’s a sort of ... yawning, tingling sensation in my ... my ... well I

#### Key terms:

- interior monologue
- stream of consciousness
- psychonarration
- narrated monologue / free indirect discourse

suppose I'd better start finding names for things if I want to make any headway [...] so let's call it my stomach.

And hey, what about this whistling roaring sound going past what I'm suddenly going to call my head? Perhaps I can call that ... wind! Is that a good name? It'll do [...] Now – have I built up any coherent picture of things yet?

No.

Never mind, hey, this is really exciting, so much to find out about, so much to look forward to, [...] Hey! What's this thing suddenly coming towards me very fast? Very very fast. So big and flat and round, it needs a big wide sounding name like ... ow ... ound ... round ... ground! That's it! That's a good name – ground!

I wonder if it will be friends with me?

And the rest, after a sudden wet thud, was silence. (ch. 18)

Apart from the last sentence, which is clearly a remark by a heterodiegetic narrator, this passage attempts to recreate what passes through the whale's consciousness apparently without any interference from an agency that tries to put it into well-turned English. The thoughts are presented in the first person, several thoughts run into each other as perceptions of different things crowd into the whale's consciousness, syntax and punctuation are not those of conventional written language, but try to imitate spoken (or thought) language. This technique of presentation is now most commonly called **interior monologue** and it is intended to present a character's thoughts directly, imitating as much as possible the way this character might 'actually' have thought his thoughts.

One of the most famous examples for interior monologue, cited again and again, is James Joyce's last chapter in *Ulysses* (1922). Page after page this section presents Molly Bloom's consciousness to the reader entirely in interior monologue:

[...] if his nose bleeds you'd think it was O tragic and that dying looking one off the south circular when he sprained his foot at the choir party at the sugarloaf Mountain the day I wore that dress Miss Stack bringing him flowers the worst old ones she could find at the bottom of the basket anything at all to get into a mans bedroom with her old maids voice trying to imagine he was dying on account of her to never see thy face again though he looked more like a man with his beard a bit grown in the bed father was the same besides I hate bandaging and dosing when he cut his toe with the razor paring his corns afraid hed get blood poisoning [...]. (Joyce, *Ulysses*, 'Penelope')

Here, in contrast to the sperm whale's last thoughts, there is no punctuation and the current of thought is depicted as associative rather than strictly logical and coherent. The notion that one's thoughts are not in fact orderly and well-formulated but more of a jumbled-up sequence of associations gained currency with a concept developed in psychology, called **stream of consciousness**. This term was coined by William James, the brother of the novelist Henry James (see James 1892). It is important to note, however, that for William James the stream of consciousness was not necessarily verbal but also included other sensual perceptions, especially visual representations. Interior monologue is one narrative technique – necessarily limited to verbal representation – that

tries to reproduce non-orderly and associative patterns of thought. It is also possible to reproduce the stream of consciousness in narrated monologue (see further down). The term stream of consciousness thus refers to the way cognitive processes take place, it is not itself a narrative technique. Unfortunately, many critics use the term to denote a narrative technique, which confuses the issue.

### 2.7.2. Psychonarration

Obviously, interior monologue is a technique that puts a certain amount of strain on the reader. Thus, it is more common (outside avant-garde fiction) to learn about a character's consciousness from the narrator, who takes it upon him- or herself to report the character's thoughts to the reader. In the following passage our previous example of the whale has been rewritten as **psychonarration**:

The little sperm whale, suddenly finding himself in existence and in a place that did not seem entirely congenial to his faculties, was trying very hard to determine his place in life and in the universe, as others under more favourable circumstances had done before him. With increasing urgency he faced questions of his own identity and his relation to his surroundings. Despite his mounting confusion he also felt a growing excitement welling up inside him and irrepressible joy when he thought about the things to come. All this was cut tragically short when he hit the ground with a wet thud and ceased to think or feel at all.

In psychonarration the heterodiegetic narrator remains in the foreground throughout, even adds some general observations not originating in the character ("as others [...] had done before him"). While we certainly learn about the whale's thoughts and feelings, we hear it entirely in the narrator's voice, syntax and vocabulary. We do not hear the voice of the whale as in the rendering above in interior monologue (Compare the previous quotation). The difference in effect is quite marked, the reader remains much more distant from the character's consciousness and the level of mediation continues to be noticeable in the foreground.

### 2.7.3. Narrated Monologue

A third technique for the representation of consciousness is called **narrated monologue** or **free indirect discourse**. This represents, in a way, a mixture between psychonarration and interior monologue. In a narrated monologue the narrator often sets the scene but the character's thoughts are reproduced 'directly' and in a way that one would imagine the character to think, though the narrator continues to talk of the character in the third person. The syntax becomes less formal (incomplete sentences, exclamations etc.) and the character's mind style is reproduced more closely. We hear a 'dual voice' (see Pascal 1977), the voices of the narrator and the characters are momentarily merged. This can create an impression of immediacy but it can also be used to introduce an element of irony, when the reader realises that a character is



misguided without actually being told so by the narrator (see the examples in SO WHAT).

For our example this technique might look something like this (only the first two sentences and the last sentence are direct quotations from Douglas Adams, the rest has been rewritten as narrated monologue):

Against all probability a sperm whale had suddenly been called into existence several miles above the surface of an alien planet. And since this is not a naturally tenable position for a whale, this poor innocent creature had very little time to come to terms with its identity as a whale before it then had to come to terms with not being a whale anymore. **Why was he here? What was his purpose in life? The important thing now was to calm down ... oh! that was an interesting sensation, what was it? It was a sort of ... yawning, tingling sensation in his ... his ... well he supposed he'd better start finding names for things if he wanted to make any headway. Hey! What was that thing suddenly coming towards him so very very fast? Would it be friends with him?** And the rest, after a sudden wet thud, was silence.

While the narrator resurfaces at the beginning and the end of this version, the voice of the whale becomes more dominant in the middle section which is given in narrated monologue (the relevant section is marked bold), though the narrator is still apparent in the use of the third person and past tense.

A classic example for the frequent use of narrated monologue or free indirect discourse is Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. The following passage reproduces Clarissa Dalloway's thoughts and perceptions, reproducing the associative connections of her stream of consciousness, as she is choosing flowers for her party:

And as she began to go with Miss Pym from jar to jar, choosing, nonsense, nonsense, she said to herself, more and more gently, as if this beauty, this scent, this colour, and Miss Pym liking her, trusting her, were a wave which she let flow over her and surmount that hatred, that monster, surmount it all; and it lifted her up and up when – oh! A pistol shot in the street outside! (Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*)

#### 2.7.4. Summary: Representation of Consciousness

This table summarises various possibilities for the representation of thought or consciousness (adapted from Nünning 1996: 223)

Term	German Term	Formal Criteria	Effect
direct discourse / direct thought	direkte Gedankenwiedergabe (analog zu direkter Rede)	quotation marks, inquit formulas (optional, dominating tense is present tense)	mimetic reproduction of actual thought event
interior monologue, (direct thought in longer passages)	innerer Monolog	refers to the character in first person, uses narrative present, syntactical conventions and punctuation partly or completely dispensed with	high degree of immediacy, can reproduce character's stream of consciousness
indirect discourse	indirekte Gedankenwiedergabe (analog zu indirekter Rede)	grammatical structures of reported speech	can create a feeling of distance, but need not, consciousness of character who gives the report interposed
narrated monologue / free indirect discourse	erlebte Rede, freie indirekte Gedankenwiedergabe	narrator refers to the character in third person and narrative past, syntax less formal: uses exclamations, ellipses, etc.	narrator reports character's thoughts but using the character's mind style: 'dual voice', can create immediacy but can also be used to create ironic distance, can reproduce character's stream of consciousness
psychonarration, narrative report of thought	Bewußtseinsbericht, Gedankenbericht	narrator reports and refers to the character in third person, usually uses narrative past, syntax mostly complete and ordered, one hears the narrator's voice	usually summarises thought processes using the narrator's and not the character's syntax and diction; can create distance.

SO WHAT?

In fact, it seems to make a fairly marked difference to our perception of a character whether we are told about their thought in psychonarration or, say, in narrated monologue. Consider an example from a nineteenth-century novel, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*: One of Dorothea's pet schemes is planning cottages for the improvement of the living conditions of the poor. To her great

disappointment, Mr Casaubon, the man she will marry, is not particularly interested in cottages.

On one – only one – of her favourite themes she was disappointed. Mr Casaubon apparently did not care about building cottages, and diverted the talk to the extremely narrow accommodation which was to be had in the dwellings of the ancient Egyptians, as if to check a too high standard. After he was gone, Dorothea dwelt with some agitation on this indifference of his; and her mind was much exercised with arguments drawn from the varying conditions of climate which modify human needs, and from the admitted wickedness of pagan despots. Should she not urge these arguments on Mr Casaubon when he came again? But further reflection told her that she was presumptuous in demanding his attention to such a subject; [...]. (Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ch. 3)

We receive information about Dorothea's mental agitation both in psychonarration and in narrated monologue. The effect of the different techniques is noteworthy. The reaction to Mr Casaubon is given entirely in the narrator's voice and even though Dorothea is agitated, little attempt is made to transfer this agitation to the reader who, more than likely, is a little puzzled trying to reconstruct the somewhat complicated argument relating to climate and pagan despots. This distance between Dorothea's feelings and the reader's is decreased as the passage switches to narrated monologue. While the psychonarration summarises Dorothea's agitation, the reader is now given an idea of Dorothea's thoughts as they may have occurred in her mind ("Should she not urge these arguments on Mr Casaubon when he came again?"). But this glimpse of her thoughts is only momentary; the narrator returns to summary ("But further reflection ..."). With this change of technique the passage presents to the reader a movement which results in a little climax when Dorothea's agitation is most immediately communicated in her excited question. But then, and parallel to Dorothea's withdrawal into herself as she shrinks from an open discussion with Mr Casaubon, the narrator's voice is dominant again and withdraws the reader from the closer intimacy with Dorothea's consciousness. In this way, the reader is put through an emotional experience that in fact mirrors Dorothea's relation to Mr Casaubon: a slight distance, at first encumbered by academic complications and the feeling that one does not quite understand what these arguments about climate and despots might be, then a brief moment of closeness as Dorothea's excitement is communicated in the dual voice of character/narrator, which is immediately followed by renewed distance. Dorothea herself is drawn towards Mr Casaubon by an awe for his scholarly interests though she finds it slightly difficult to follow them. She goes through a brief period of fervent hope that she might share Casaubon's scholarly elevation, only to find those hopes shattered immediately after her marriage when it becomes clear to her that she will be unable to traverse the emotional distance between herself and her husband.

A rather different effect is achieved when the reader is given Dorothea's reaction to Sir James, who is very much interested in cottages and also in marrying Dorothea, though she despises him a little and thinks of him only as a suitable husband for her sister.

[Sir James] came much oftener than Mr Casaubon and Dorothea ceased to find him disagreeable [...] Certainly these men who had so few spontaneous ideas might be very useful members of society under good feminine direction, if they were fortunate in choosing their sisters-in-law! It is difficult to say whether there was or was not a little wilfulness in her continuing blind to the possibility that another sort of choice was in question in relation to her. (ibid.)

Again there is a switch of technique, this time from narrated monologue (“Certainly these men who had so few spontaneous ideas [...]”) to psychonarration (“It is difficult to say [...]”), giving a more immediate idea of Dorothea’s actual thoughts. The excerpt concludes with a return to pure narrator comment (not psychonarration).

The brief passage written as narrated monologue provides the reader with an insight into Dorothea’s character, her impulsive and sometimes rather obstinate disposition. From the reader’s point of view Dorothea imputes clearly too much influence to a sister-in-law and besides, sisters-in law are not normally chosen, they come as part of the package when the wife is chosen. Dorothea’s obstinate determination to see in Sir James’ attention none but those of a future brother puts an ironic distance between her and the reader, who knows that she is wrong and even obstinate before the narrator comment drives this point home.

## 2.8. Time

There are two aspects of time that deserve particular attention in the analysis of narrative prose: the use of tense and the arrangement and presentation of time sequences in a narrative.

### 2.8.1. Tense in Narrative

To start with tense: Probably most narratives are told in the past tense, the so-called **narrative past** as in this example:

Sir Walter Elliot [...] was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage; there he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one [...]. (Austen, *Persuasion*, ch. 1)

*Key terms:*

- narrative past
- narrative present
- tense switch
- gnomic present

The tense of a narrative is determined by the tense of the full verbs (in this example: took, found). Some narratives are written in the **narrative present**:

The magazine is open on Barbara’s knee, but she does not look at it. She sits with her mouth open, her fur coat kept on, her face staring through the window. The train slides slowly down the platform at Watermouth. When it stops, she picks up her luggage and gets out. (Bradbury, *History Man*, ch. 12)

The verbs that determine narrative tense here are: look, sit, slide, stop, pick up, get out. Very often, the use of the narrative present gives the reader an

impression of immediacy, whereas the use of the narrative past has a more distancing effect. This becomes especially noticeable when there is a **tense switch** from narrative past to narrative present or back. (See the example under SO WHAT?). A tense switch can indicate a change in perspective or time level, as in the following example:

She came out of the arbour almost as if to throw herself in my arms. I hasten to add that I escaped this ordeal and that she didn't even shake hands with me. (James, *Aspern Papers*, ch. 5).

Here the narrative of events in the narrative past is interrupted by a remark made by the narrator at the time of narration in the narrative present: ("I hasten to add [...]").

Even though most narratives are told in the narrative past, they can also be interspersed by statements of general application in the present tense. This use of the present tense is called **gnomic present**. This gnomic present is grammatically speaking no different from the narrative present, but it does not represent a tense switch in the same sense. In narrative present the action of the narrative is given. By contrast, in gnomic present, generic statements are made that claim general validity (Chatman 1978: 82; Stanzel 1984: 108). In both cases it is the narrator who speaks.

When any two young people take it into their heads to marry, they are pretty sure by perseverance to carry their point, be they ever so poor, or ever so imprudent, or ever so little likely to be necessary to each other's ultimate comfort. This may be bad morality to conclude with, but I believe it to be truth; and if such parties succeed, how should a Captain Wentworth and an Anne Elliot, with the advantage of maturity of mind, consciousness of right and one independent fortune between them, fail of bearing down every opposition? [...] Sir Walter made no objection, and Elizabeth did nothing worse than look cold and unconcerned. (Austen, *Persuasion*, ch. 24)

Notice the change of tense from the general observation ("When any two young people take it into their heads [...]") to narrative past in the specific case of the story ("Sir Walter made no objection [...]").

## SO WHAT?

Of the various possibilities for the use of tense, the effects of tense switch are maybe the most interesting. Consider the following excerpt from Peter Ackroyd, *First Light*.

"Where's Jude?" he asked, putting down *New Archaeology* with a sigh. Jude was the name of their small wirehaired terrier.  
"He's asleep in your study. But what do you think?" Kathleen took the article from him, and eagerly looked at it. "What do you think of the theory?" She seemed to lose herself in these vistas of the remote past, as if somehow they could mitigate the life through which she moved every day. [...]

Another Time. In another time. She is a child, a crippled child. She is standing on the shore near Lyme, looking out to sea. Her parents are sitting in a beach-hut behind her, eating their sandwiches, and she turns around to make sure that they are still there. That they have not abandoned her. And then she looks back out to sea, the light from the waves playing upon her face. It is impossible to know what she is thinking. In fact she is thinking of nothing. Kathleen has merged with the sea. (end of ch. 7 and beginning of ch. 8)

Here we are confronted first with a section of narrative action told in the narrative past, giving a glimpse of Kathleen and her husband Mark starting a discussion on an archaeological theory. Kathleen, so the narrator tells us, has a tendency to lose herself in the past. A little further on we come upon Kathleen's memory of her own past, now told in free indirect discourse and in the narrative present. This tense switch gives the reader a perfect demonstration of Kathleen's inclination to feel the past as more real than the present. Memories of things gone are more immediate, more present to Kathleen – and by means of the tense switch also to the reader – than her present life with her husband, which is told in the narrative past.

## 2.8.2. Time Analysis

The analysis of the use of time in a narrative centres around three aspects: order, duration and frequency (Genette 1980: chs 1-3, good summary in Jahn 2002: N5.2). One analyses the relation of story-time to discourse-time from these three angles. To recall, a narrative can be divided into elements of story, relating to questions of WHAT happens, and elements of discourse, relating to questions of HOW it is told (see ch. 2.1.).

**Story-time** is the sequence of events and the length of time that passes in the story. **Discourse-time**, on the other hand, covers the length of time that is taken up by the telling (or reading) of the story and the sequence of events as they are presented in discourse.

*Key terms:*

- story-time
- discourse-time

### 2.8.2.1. Duration

No narrative retells absolutely everything that presumably 'happened' in a story; those events that are considered most important will normally be told in some detail, others will be left out or summarised. This discrepancy between the events of the (assumed) story and the events as rendered by the narrative's discourse is the focus of attention when one considers the aspect of duration.

In the case of a story about a man and his life which lasts 80 years, the duration of story-time would be 80 years. Story-time could also be just one hour, if the story happens to be about a woman who is waiting for a train for an hour and who makes an important discovery in this hour which changes her life.

The duration of discourse-time in the case of the man's 80 years of life is likely (or so one hopes) to be shorter than the 80 years of story-time. In the case of the woman waiting for a train it might easily be longer than one hour, if say, the woman remembers a lot about her past life which takes longer than an hour to narrate.

*Key terms:*

- duration
- scene
- summary / speed-up
- stretch
- ellipsis
- pause

There are five possible relations between story-time and discourse-time: **scene**, **summary**, **stretch**, **ellipsis** and **pause**. All these influence the reader's perception of the speed of a narrative. Notably, many stretches and pauses slow things down considerably, scene and ellipsis give the impression of things happening quickly.

Term	Definition	Example
scene/real-time	story time and discourse time are equal (this is usually the case in dialogue)	-When did you last see her? -On the bridge. -Alone? -No, with a man.
summary/speed-up	story-time is longer than discourse time	So they lived contentedly the next 20 years.
stretch/slow-down	discourse time exceeds story time	She suddenly realised how very much alone she was with her favourable opinion of the young visitor and how much opposition she would have to content with later from her querulous aunt. All this took no more than a split second and there was no hesitation in her movement as she came forward to welcome him.
ellipsis	discourse-time skips to a later part in story time	Ten years later we meet the little girl again, now grown into a handsome woman.
pause	story-time comes to a standstill while discourse time continues	This usually involves a description or narrator comment: Cecilia entered the library with a heavy heart. But before we follow her and enter upon the events which were to follow, let us consider her position in life. Cecilia had grown up an orphan under the care of a retiring uncle very much preoccupied with his studies. As soon as she was able to deal with them, the cares of the household had fallen to her and had curtailed the freedoms of her childhood. This information imparted to the interested reader, let us return to Cecilia on the threshold of the library.

### 2.8.2.2. Order

Events in an assumed story take place in a certain order, for instance a child is born, grows up, marries, leads a contented life, dies. This order of events might be abbreviated as ABCDE.

A narrative can tell about these events chronologically in the order in which they occurred: ABCDE. But it could just as well start with the character's death, then recall the birth, childhood, marriage, married life. The order of discourse would then look like this: EABCD. Discourse could deviate

*Key terms:*

- order
- chronological
- anachronological
- flashforward / prolepsis
- flashback / analepsis

from chronology more radically and present events in orders such as CABED or ACDEB and so on. In such cases events are not told in **chronological** order, they are **anachronological**.

When the chronological order of events is changed in discourse, certain techniques are employed to reveal the whole story nonetheless. The most common of these techniques are **flashforward** (**prolepsis**) and **flashback** (**analepsis**). In a discourse order of BCDAE the section 'A' (the birth in our example) would represent a flashback; in the order AEB CD, the section 'E' (death in our example) would represent a flashforward. A prolepsis is often merely a short remark as in this example:

Ada called to me to let her in; but I said, 'Not now, my dearest. Go away. There's nothing the matter; I will come to you presently.' Ah! It was a long, long time, before my darling girl and I were companions again. (Dickens, *Bleak House*, ch. 31)

### 2.8.2.3. Beginnings and Endings

In the category of order one also considers the question of the beginning and ending of discourse. Strictly speaking, these categories go beyond the concept of order, since they also deal with the information flow in a narrative (see the section on information flow in drama ch. 3.1.1).

The place in the story at which a narrative's discourse begins is the **point of attack**. A narrative that has its point of attack at the beginning of the story is said to begin **ab ovo**. In such cases the narrative usually starts by giving all the necessary background information about character, place and the very first beginning of those events which are later to develop into the plot of the narrative. This preliminary information is usually given by a narrator before any action has properly started; it functions as an exposition. Charles Dickens, for example, often uses ab ovo beginnings:

My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip. I gave Pirrip as my father's family name, on the authority of his tombstone and my sister – Mrs Joe Gargery, who married the blacksmith. [...] Ours was the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles of the sea. My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things, seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening. (Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ch. 1)

Note that an ab ovo beginning does not necessarily imply a beginning with the birth of the protagonist. It always depends on what the story is about. Say, a story is about the protagonist's difficult married life, then the ab ovo beginning would very likely be the wedding, or maybe the moment he fell in love with his future wife. A story about a strange meeting in the forest would have its beginning as the protagonist sets out for the forest and so on. The ab ovo beginning of John Buchan's story about the successful restoration of the monarchy in Evallonia lies in McCunn's rheumatism, contracted when he slips into the river while fishing:

#### Key terms:

- point of attack
- ab ovo
- in medias res
- in ultimas res
- suspense
- open ending
- closed ending



Great events, says the philosophic historian, spring only from great causes, though the immediate occasion may be small; but I think his law must have exceptions. Of the not inconsiderable events which I am about to chronicle, the occasion was trivial, and I find it hard to detect the majestic agency behind them. What world force, for example, ordained that Mr. Dickson McCunn should slip into the Tod's hole in his little salmon river on a bleak night in April; and, without changing his clothes, should thereafter make a tour of inspection of his young lambs? His action was the proximate cause of this tale, but I can see no profounder explanation of it than the inherent perversity of man. (Buchan, *The House of the Four Winds*, ch. 1)

It is often considered a more interesting beginning to start **in medias res**, that is to say, have the point of attack when developments are already well under way, plunge the reader right into the middle of things, and give necessary information about earlier developments in various flashbacks or as part of the events in the story as in the following example:

"I wonder when in the world you're going to do anything, Rudolf?" said my brother's wife.  
 "My dear Rose," I answered, laying down my egg-spoon, "why in the world should I do anything? My position is a comfortable one. I have an income nearly sufficient for my wants (no one's income is ever quite sufficient, you know), I enjoy an enviable social position: I am brother to Lord Burlesdon, and brother-in-law to that charming lady, his countess. Behold, it is enough!"  
 "You are nine-and twenty," she observed, "and you've done nothing but – " (Hope, *Prisoner of Zenda*, ch.1)

Other narratives take their point of attack right to the end of the story, they start **in ultimas res** and then most of the story is gradually revealed in a series of flashbacks, explaining how things had come about.

Such different techniques in the arrangement of order on the discourse level obviously produce different types of **suspense**, one type of suspense created by an interest in **how** things happened, another type created by an interest in **what** will happen next (the distinction is discussed usefully in Pfister 1988: ch. 3.7.4.).

**Endings** fall into two major categories: **open** and **closed**. In closed endings all plot difficulties are resolved into some (preliminary) order: death, marriage, or simply restored peace after disagreements as in the following example:

Ever since that day there has been the old friendly sociability in Cranford society; which I am thankful for, because my dear Miss Matty's love of peace and kindness. We all love Miss Matty, and I somehow think we are all of us better when she is near us. (Gaskell, *Cranford*, end of ch. 16)

In open endings no definite resolutions are offered. It even happens, as in John Fowles' novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and other postmodern fiction, that several different endings are offered for the reader to choose. Though each

one of these may be a closed ending, the effect is that of an open ending, because there does not seem to be one definite conclusion to the events of the story.

#### SO WHAT?

Detective stories present an interesting combination of beginnings; at the same time *ab ovo* and *in ultimas res*, depending on which story one regards as the central one. The story of the crime begins *in ultimas res*, with the discovery of the crime, for instance the body of the victim, and is gradually revealed; the story of the detective and his unravelling of the crime on the other hand begins *ab ovo* and takes its course of investigation until the details of the crime and the criminal have been discovered. While the story of the detective is usually told chronologically, the story of the crime is pieced together gradually, and its chronology is only revealed gradually, in fact, the discovery of the criminal very often hinges on the unravelling of the correct chronology of the crime-story, especially in cases of faked alibis.

#### 2.8.2.4. Frequency

The third element of time analysis relates to the frequency of references which are made at discourse level to any given event on the story level. There are three possibilities:

##### Key terms:

- frequency
- singulative telling
- repetitive telling
- iterative telling

**singulative** an event takes place once and is referred to once ('They married in June 1865 on a beautiful sunny day').

**repetitive** an event takes place once but is referred to repeatedly (This is the case for instance when a character is obsessed by an event and keeps coming back to it or when the same event is told from different narrator perspectives, as for instance in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. An extreme example is the movie *Groundhog Day* where the protagonist has to relive the same day over and over again).

**iterative** an event takes place several times but is referred to only once ('Every day when Frida sat down to her sewing, she asked herself what she had done to deserve this').

#### SO WHAT?

An inventive use of time in a narrative can create startling effects. Let us consider by way of example the novel by Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. This novel tells the story of an unconventional teacher, Miss Brodie, who, with the help of a group of particularly devoted pupils, defies the efforts of the school to get rid of her. Eventually, however, Miss Brodie is betrayed by one of her own girls and loses her post.

The point of attack is when Miss Brodie's devoted pupils, are in their last year at school. In a series of flashbacks the reader learns, more or less chronologically, about Miss Brodie and her pupils from the girls' first year at school through to Miss Brodie's loss of her post and her death.

It is not the frequent flashbacks that are unusual in this narrative but the constant and iterative flashforwards referring the reader again and again to what would happen later, undermining conventional expectations about suspense. There is, for instance, Mary MacGregor, who is the most stupid member of the Brodie set and who is always blamed for anything that goes wrong. Very early on (in chapter two) the reader is told how Mary will die in a hotel fire at the age of 22. Later references to Mary and her life during her school days are frequently coupled with references to Mary's death in the fire (iterative telling) and thus put Mary's misery as the stupid member of the Brodie set in constant relation to her early and horrible death as well as the other girls' guilt after her death for not having been nicer to her. The reader is thus constantly forced to judge each event in relation to future developments. This is unusual in the sense that it is not a perspective that is available to us in reality – we do not know the future. On the other hand, a constant reminder that judgments and behaviour will look different with hindsight is a kind of moral narrator comment, created entirely through the use of discourse time, which might suggest to readers a different view on their own reality.

## 2.9. Types of Prose Fiction

The following definitions are based on Barnet/Berman/Burto 1964, Cuddon 1998, Hawthorn 1986, Fowler 1987.

The **novel** can be defined as an extended work of prose fiction. It derives from the Italian *novella* ("little new thing"), which was a short piece of prose. The novel has become an increasingly popular form of fiction since the early eighteenth century, though prose narratives were written long before then. The term denotes a prose narrative about characters and their actions in what is recognisably everyday life. This differentiates it from its immediate predecessor, the romance, which describes unrealistic adventures of supernatural heroes. The novel has developed various sub-genres:

### Key terms:

- novel
- epistolary novel
- picaresque novel
- historical novel
- gothic novel
- social novel
- bildungsroman
- metafiction
- romance
- short story
- science fiction

In the **epistolary novel** the narrative is conveyed entirely by an exchange of letters. (e.g. Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*.)

A **picaresque novel** is an early form of the novel, some call it a precursor of the novel. It presents the adventures of a lighthearted rascal (*pícaro*=rogue). It is usually episodic in structure, the episodes often arranged as a journey. The narrative focuses on one character who has to deal with tyrannical masters and unlucky fates but who usually manages to escape these miserable situations by using her/his wit. The form of the picaresque narrative emerged in sixteenth-century Spain. Examples are: Cervantes, *Don Quixote*; and in the English tradition: Thomas Nash, *The Unfortunate Traveler*; Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*.

The **historical novel** takes its setting and some of the (chief) characters and events from history. It develops these elements with attention to the known facts and makes the historical events and issues important to the central narrative. (e.g. Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe*; Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*)

The **bildungsroman (novel of education)** is a type of novel originating in Germany which presents the development of a character mostly from childhood to maturity. This process typically contains conflicts and struggles, which are ideally overcome in the end so that the protagonist can become a valid and valuable member of society. Examples are J.W. Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister*; Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*; Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*; James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

The **gothic novel** became very popular from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards. With the aim to evoke chilling terror by exploiting mystery and a variety of horrors, the gothic novel is usually set in desolate landscapes, ruined abbeys, or medieval castles with dungeons, winding staircases and sliding panels. Heroes and heroines find themselves in gloomy atmospheres where they are confronted with supernatural forces, demonic powers and wicked tyrants. Examples are Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*; Ann Radcliffe, *Mysteries of Udolpho*; William Faulkner, *Absalom! Absalom!*

The **social novel**, also called **industrial novel** or **Condition of England novel**, became particularly popular between 1830 and 1850 and is associated with the development of nineteenth-century realism. As its name indicates, the social novel gives a portrait of society, especially of lower parts of society, dealing with and criticising the living conditions created by industrial development or by a particular legal situation (the poor laws for instance). Well-known examples are: Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*; Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*; Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil* and Charles Kingsley, *Alton Locke*.

**Science fiction** is a type of prose narrative of varying length, from short-story to novel. Its topics include quests for other worlds, the influence of alien beings on Earth or alternate realities; they can be utopian, dystopian or set in the past. Common to all types of science fiction is the interest in scientific change and development and concern for social, climatic, geological or ecological change (e.g. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*; H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*; Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*; George Orwell, *1984*; Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*).

**Metafiction** is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. It concentrates on the phenomenological characteristics of fiction, and investigates into the quintessential nature of literary art by reflecting the process of narrating. (e.g. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*; John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*; Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*)

A **romance** is a fictional narrative in prose or verse that represents a chivalric theme or relates improbable adventures of idealised characters in some remote or enchanted setting. It typically deploys monodimensional or static characters who are sharply discriminated as heroes or villains, masters or victims. The protagonist is often solitary and isolated from a social context, the plot emphasises adventure, and is often cast in the form of a quest for an ideal or the pursuit of an enemy. Examples: Anonymous, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; Sir Philip Sidney, *Arcadia*; Percy B. Shelley, *Queen Mab*; Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*.

A **short-story** is a piece of prose fiction marked by relative shortness and density, organised into a plot and with some kind of dénouement at the end. The plot may be comic, tragic, romantic, or satiric. It may be written in the mode of fantasy, realism or naturalism.

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