

## Narrative Analysis<sup>1</sup>

1. Narrative theory allows us to examine what kinds of stories are told on television and how they are told
  - a. Storytelling is probably the central way in which a sense of community is constructed
  - b. Narrative theory, therefore, emerges from disciplines such as anthropology, folklore and literary criticism which look at how a culture represents itself to itself and to others.
2. Narrative theory is a **formalist** theory. This means:
  - a. It is restricted to textual analysis
  - b. It studies the “formal” elements of the text
  - c. It is very limited in scope: it can map or describe a text, but does not tell you how to *interpret* it.
  - d. Therefore, it is often the first step in analysis.
  - e. It is obviously useful for studying narrative genres in television, but also gives us insight into how narrative plays a role in “non-narrative” genres such as the news, documentaries, sports etc.
3. Narrative theory divides narratives into two aspects: **story** and **discourse**. Kozloff adds a third aspect for television: **schedule**.
4. **Story** = “a series of events arranged in chronological order” (Rimmon-Kenan qtd. in Kozloff, 69)
  - a. The story can be subdivided in a number of ways:
    - i. events and existents (characters and settings)
    - ii. kernels and satellites
  - b. Two aspects of story:
    - i. How the story is developed: For example, a standard method is: equilibrium → disruption → climax → resolution → new status quo
    - ii. How the story is patterned
      1. Vladimir Propp (Russian formalist) claimed *all* fairytales fell into a few patterns. (See Appendix)
      2. Kozloff: on TV, genre roles can be seen as taking the place of the types of characters, e.g. “the sitcom father” or “the chief in a police procedural”
      3. There are “rules” of storytelling: how to construct (or, pattern) a story in a way that makes sense to the listeners within that culture. E.g., in mainstream cinema, crimes must be punished, lovers must be united etc.

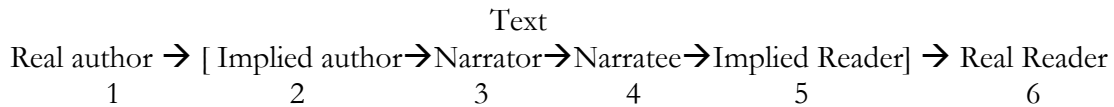
---

<sup>1</sup> Notes summarized from: Kozloff, S. (1992). Narrative theory and television. In R. Allen (Ed.), *Channels of discourse reassembled* (pp. 67-100). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

5. **Discourse** = *how* the story is told. Discourse can be analyzed by looking a number of aspects:

a. **Participants**

i. From literary theory: the idea of 6 participants (Kozloff 77)



ii. But, for television, there is no clear author. Instead, the idea of “television’s narrating agency”: The specificity of television as a medium: it tells its narrative through images not through text. (Kozloff 79)

iii. Television’s “bardic function” which means that, “like a bard, television conveys the culture’s dominant values and self-image.” (Kozloff 81) This function is heightened by TV’s “liveness” which (until the Internet) was unique to TV as a medium.

b. **Narrators**

i. The relationship of the narrator to his/her story and to the story world (diegesis)

ii. There are six different types of relationship according to Kozloff (82-85): in/outside the diegesis; tells the whole story/tells one part of the story; distance in space and time from the story events; degree of distance from story events in terms of irony, self-reflexivity; reliability; and, omniscience.

iii. According to Kozloff: “Identical story events can seem radically different depending upon the narrator’s slant and on the degree of the narrator’s power, remoteness, objectivity, or reliability.” (85)

iv. In television, the network itself can also be seen as a narrator.

c. **Time**

i. there is a distinction between story-time and discourse-time. We can also look at the issue of time in relation to narrative in two ways:

1. Sequence: The order in which events are related.

2. Duration: The amount of time devoted to each event

d. The connection between **discourse and ideology**: how the story is told shapes how we understand and interpret it. For example:

i. Realism: Classical Hollywood Cinema style which discourages questioning, hides the constructed nature of the narrative = narrative as reality

ii. Postmodern/self-reflexive: foregrounds the process of construction & invites viewers to engage actively with the story and question how it’s being told = narrative *as* narrative

6. **Schedule** = the place of the television program within the overall schedule as well as the place of each episode within an ongoing television series or television serial.

a. Television flow: As a result of scheduling and programming practices in the U.S. television industry, programs tend to flow from one to the next. Viewers can also construct their “flow” by channel surfing.

b. Industrial considerations: Television narratives have to accommodate things like commercial breaks, genre conventions, and season finales in constructing both story and discourse.

## Propp's Structure of the Magic Tale<sup>2</sup>

### **I. Introductory sequence**

1. Family member leaves family--the hero is introduced.
2. Interdiction--don't do X
3. Interdiction is violated--hero does X anyway
4. villain--reconnaissance of hero
5. villain gets information about hero
6. villain attempts to deceive hero with trickery
7. Hero submits to trickery -- complicity.

### **II. Body of the story**

8. villain causes harm or injury through villainy; villain carries off a victim, the hero or the desired magical object, which must be retrieved.
- 8a. A member of the hero's family lacks something, or wants something.
9. Lack is made known to the hero.
10. Hero agrees to counteraction
11. Hero leaves home

### **III. Donor sequence (magic agent obtained)**

12. Hero is tested/questioned.
13. Hero reacts.
14. Hero receives a magical agent/object which helps in quest.
15. Transfer to place where the lack is to be found
16. Combat with villain
17. Hero is branded
18. villain is defeated
19. Lack is liquidated--object of the quest is obtained by the hero (the tale often ends here, but may continue to the fourth sphere of action)

### **IV. Hero's return**

20. Hero sets off for home
21. Hero is pursued
22. Rescued from pursuit (tale often ends here, but can continue)
23. Hero arrives home and is not recognized
24. False hero presents claims of true hero
25. Difficult task is set
26. Task is resolved
27. True hero is recognized
28. False hero is unmasked
29. Epiphany of true hero--new appearance/transfiguration
30. villain is punished
31. Marriage and rule of true hero

### **Dramatis Personae**

1. Hero (also the Seeker or Victim)
2. villain
3. Donor (from whom the hero gets some magical object)
4. Magical Helper (the character that helps the hero in the quest)
5. Dispatcher (the character that makes the lack known)
6. False Hero (the character who takes credit for hero's actions)
7. Prince/princess (person the hero marries)
8. Victim (person harmed by the villain if not the hero)

---

<sup>2</sup> Taken from: [http://www.uky.edu/~jrouhie/rae370\\_proppmagic.html](http://www.uky.edu/~jrouhie/rae370_proppmagic.html)