

Introduction

In this paper, I will be discussing the semiotics of narratology. My goal is for the reader to understand what a narrative [[30]] is and how the narrative relates to the myth [[29]] ((02, 06)). Furthermore, I will define concepts such as grammar [[18]], image schema [[21]], diachronic [[11]] and synchronic [[60]], hyperreality [[19]], and icon [[20]] (among others) ((03)); some of these will be from a denotative [[09]] perspective, and some from the perspective of a narrative – i.e. how the broad definition can be focused onto the narrative in order to derive meaning from these elements.

To accomplish this, I will first discuss narratology from a “big picture” perspective. This will involve generally defining the term, identifying its core ideas, and naming those who contributed to its conception and development (people like Vladimir Propp, Algirdas Greimas, Tzvetan Todorov, Mikhail Bakhtin and Robert Bathes). I will discuss these progenitors in the briefest of terms so that the reader may begin to accumulate history and building blocks upon which further explorations can be mounted ((03, 04, 07, 09)).

Next, I will discuss the Monomyth ((02)). As will narratology, I will broadly define what the Monomyth is and how it relates to the narrative. I will examine it from a classical standpoint (which will include ideas from Propp), and from a modernist perspective ((05, 06, 11)). I hope to immerse the reader within the semiosphere [[48]] that arises within a narrative and gives context to the vessels of ideas that compose a narrative. By identifying these vessels, I hope to show the reader the langue [[26]] of narratology. When this system has been identified, it will be easier for the reader to draw connections between narratology, language, and semiotics as a whole.

To ground the reader in the real (and to give the reader tangible examples upon which to build their understanding), I will devote a section to the discussion of narrative mediums ((01, 11)). I will show that the semiosphere of different mediums gives rise to unique icons, indices [[23]], and symbols [[58]]. However, this semiosphere also consists of familiar elements, which given meaning by structuralism [[57]].

Once these key concepts have been thoroughly interrogated, I will dive a little further into Propp’s ideas ((07)). Through this, I want to give my reader a deeper sense of what composes a narrative. I want the reader to see that there is a “deep-structure” of narrative, just as there is a deep-structure to language. I also want to dispel the myth that structuralism and storytelling are exclusive.

By exploring Propp’s ideas, I set the stage to dive deeper into the idea of the Actantial Model ((06, 08)). I will expand Propp’s ideas and relate them to Greimas’ ideas of narratology, as well as the semiotic square. Through this, I will show the basic signs of which a narrative is composed create a semiosphere of contrasting meaning – just like every other semiotic system.

After this, I will return once more to the general idea of structuralism and storytelling. I want to show that, by understanding how Sign Theory and Narratology interact ((03, 10)), we can derive metatextual and metalingual [[27]] meanings from narratives. Furthermore, by mastering the structure of a narrative, you can begin to deconstruct it – either for critical analysis, meaning derivation, or to create something entirely new. Identifying the structure so the creator knows which parts to break and why to break them is a key component of deconstruction [[10]].

Finally, I will provide practical uses for narratology ((01, 05 11)). I will show that narratology can be used like any other tool within semiotics – to provide insights into individuals, culture, and long-term trends within society. We can use this to better understand other societies, our own societies, and our own selves.

What Narratology Is

2. **I want to talk about** what Narratology is and its history. **I plan to focus on** the those who contributed to its foundational ideas and those who expanded upon those ideas. **I would like my reader to** have a working knowledge of important people and ideas for later discussion.
 - a. I will write about what is meant by “Narratology.”
 - b. I will write Vladimir Propp.
 - c. I will write about Tzvetan Todorov.
 - d. I will write about Robert Bathes.
 - e. I will write about Algridas Greimas.

The Monomyth

3. **I want to talk about** the Monomyth. **I plan to focus on** the elements of the Monomyth, from a classical perspective and a modernist perspective (e.g., contrast the classical language of “hero,” “catabasis,” etc., with more modern applications of what “hero” and “catabasis” represent). **I would like my reader to** understand that stories, like language, have a definite structure (which is consciously and unconsciously followed) composed of common elements, and that the structure and elements can be manipulated (like language), so long as care is taken to understand why the manipulation needs to happen.
 - a. I will write about the classical Monomyth (Campbell).
 - b. I will write about the modern Monomyth (Giglio).
 - c. I will write about linguistic structure.
 - d. I will write about how linguistic structure compares to narrative structure.

How We Tell Stories

4. **I want to talk about** the ways we tell stories. **I plan to focus on** what the narrative that is read, the narrative that is seen, the narrative that is heard, and the narrative that is acted upon. **I would like my reader to** understand the ways in which stories are told so that they can see how the Narratology (and the Monomyth) manifests in all of these mediums.
 - a. I will write about what is read (Novel, Epic Poem, Graphic Novel).
 - b. I will write about what is seen (Movie, Play, Circus).
 - c. I will write about what is heard (Audio Drama, Orchestra, Concept Album)
 - d. I will write about what is acted upon (Video Games, Tabletop RPGs)

Vladimir Propp

5. **I want to talk about** Vladimir Propp's ideas. **I plan to focus on** his own interpretation of a monomythic structure and (most importantly) his idea of abstract character functions. **I would like my reader to** understand Propp's ideas and how they function as the building blocks of meaning for a text.
- I will write about Vladimir Propp's monomythic structure.
 - I will write about his character functions from a denotative viewpoint.
 - I will write about how his character functions relate to narrative structure (connotative).
 - I will write about how narrative structure creates meaning.
 - I will write about the "deep-structure" of narratives.

The Actantial Model

6. **I want to talk about** the actantial model. **I plan to focus on** what an actant is and how it relates to narrative structure. **I would like my reader to** know how these elements combine to create a narrative.
- I will write about what the actantial model is (its elements).
 - I will write about how the actantial model relates to Propp's ideas.
 - I will write about how the actantial model relates to narrative structure.
 - I will write about examples (fiction and non-fiction) to show how actantial models create meaning.

Sign Theory and Narratology

7. **I want to talk about** Sign Theory and compare it to Narratology. **I plan to focus on** the Saussure theory of sign, the Peircean theory of sign, and the semiotic square. **I would like my reader to** be able to draw direct parallels between sign structure and narrative structure.
- I will write about Saussure sign theory.
 - I will write about Peircean sign theory.
 - I will write about Grimes sign theory (semiotic square).
 - I will write about the parallels between narrative structure and sign structure.

The Importance of Narratology

8. **I want to talk about** the cultural significance of Narratology. **I plan to focus on** how narratology relates across culture and how it differs across cultures. **I would like my reader to** be able to see how narratology can give us insight into culture.
- I will write about markedness theory.
 - I will write about synchronic narratology.
 - I will write about diachronic narratology.
 - I will write about culture meanings of various narratives.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed my intentions for the final paper. I have relayed what I hope my reader to understand and learn through my explorations of narratology. I want my reader to understand what narratology is, on the whole. I want my reader to know the Monomyth and the insights we can derive from it. Examining the Monomyth will provide proof that there is an underlying structure to narratives, just as there is an underlying structure to language.

This structure is not isolated by time or place, but extends across thousands of years and across many cultures. This implies that there is an innate desire within humankind to tell particular kinds of stories – just as there is an innate drive to arrange our language system according to universal rules (i.e. Chomsky’s “Universal Grammar”). Furthermore, there is a universal system of “vessels” into which we pour meaning (just as language has “vessels” – e.g. grammar categories such as verbs, nouns, adjectives, etc.). These vessels can be rearranged, toyed with, or broken down completely, so long as the storyteller understands the purpose for their deconstruction. For this reason, understanding structuralism as it relates to narratology, is paramount, and the exploration of structuralism is a further goal of this paper.

Finally, broadly speaking, I express my intent to relate the functions of narratology. It provides insight into ourselves, our own world, and the world of others. We can use this insight as we use any other tool in semiotics.