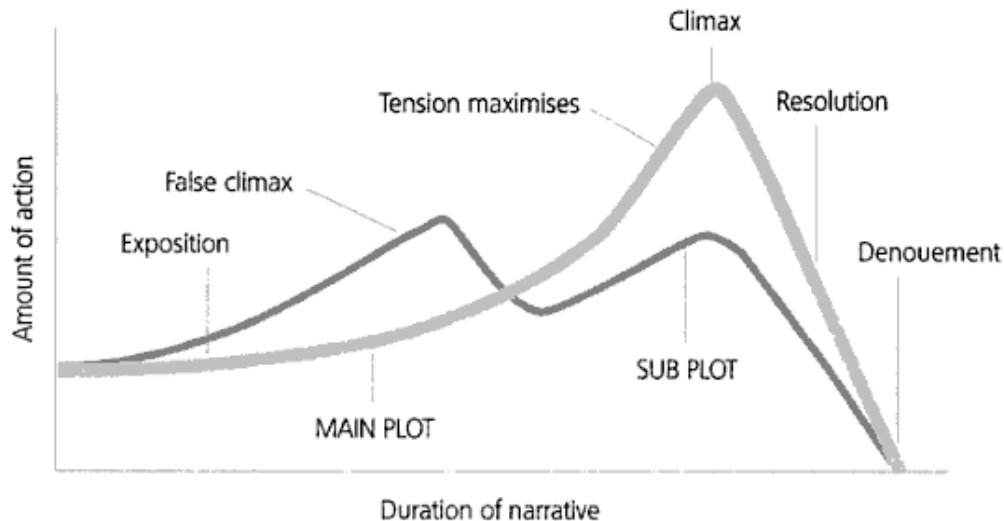


NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

The basic narrative paradigm

The basic progress of a narrative is a linear one, A is the cause of B, which is turn of C etc. This is known as cause-effect chain, where one event causes the next. In the narrative we can identify distinct phases.



- **Exposition:** The exposition introduces the reader to the two basic components that make up the story, that is the principal characters and the space or environment that they occupy (see also Figure 4.2). Every narrative must have an exposition, but it is not necessarily always located at the beginning of the narrative as suggested in Figure 4.1 (Butler 1994:19). In television series, the constant recurring nature of certain characters means that the exposition phase of the narrative is usually very brief, because it is assumed that we, as regular viewers, are already familiar with those characters. The usual technique is to reintroduce the characters as part of the title sequence. If the narrative opens with the action already in progress then we say the narrative is *in media res* (Butler 1994:19). The enigma or problems to be resolved in the narrative are usually stated in the exposition.
- **Climax:** The climax occurs when conflict in the story reaches its peak. While the climax is considered to be the most concentrated moment of the entire narrative, it does not signal the end of that narrative (Butler 1994:21). In television programmes we usually find a number of smaller climaxes, where the plot peaks prior to cutting away for an advertising break. The purpose of these mini-climaxes is not to resolve tension, but rather the opposite: to heighten interest in the narrative so as to ensure that the audience returns to the programme following the break.
- **Resolution:** Following the climax comes the resolution, where the enigmas posed at the beginning of the narrative are resolved.
- **Denouement:** The denouement brings about closure to the narrative by rounding out the story. If a narrative ends without a resolution and denouement then we have an open narrative. Open narratives abound in certain film and television genres, such as the soap opera and the sitcom, since this technique facilitates a continuance of the narrative at a later time, either as a sequel or as a continuing episode.

Roland Barthes's three levels of narrative (structural analysis)

Roland Barthes outlines a structural theory of narrative - inspired by structural linguistics, the Prague School, Russian formalism, and structural anthropology.

He proposes that one should study the structure of narratives, and that, he claims, can only be found in the narratives themselves. He proposes that one looks at how linguistics have done, and study structures beyond the sentence. Narratives, as an example of structures of meaning, can be studied on different levels of description. Terms acquire meaning not in isolation, but in relationship with other terms, on the same level, and on different levels. Narratives are a hierarchy of instances.

Barthes describes three levels: *functions (bottom level)*, *actions (middle level)*, and *narration (top level)*.

Functions are the smallest unit of narrative, something that may not have meaning directly but which acquire meaning in combination with other units, on the same level or on a higher level. Functions can in some cases be shorter than the sentence, even parts of a word. A unit can belong to more than one class. Informants and indices can combine freely. A catalyser implies the existence of a nuclei to which it can connect. Nuclei are bound together by a relation of solidarity. A sequence is a logical succession of nuclei bound together by a relation of solidarity. Sequences can be included in other, larger sequences, still on the 'functional' level.

Actions is the level of characters. Characters in the narrative are classified, not in terms of psychological essences, but according to their participation in actions. Actions often have two sides. For instance 'Giving' has a Donor and a Receiver. Example of actions are desire, communication, struggle.

The narrational level include narrative communication (author, narrator, and 'reader') and narrative situation ("the set of protocols according to which the narrative is 'consumed'." (p. 58)). Here is included different styles of representation, 'point of view', coded signs of narrative ('once upon a time', etc.).

narration (top level)

narrative communication

narrative situation

actions (middle level)

functions (bottom level)

functions (relate to the same level)

cardinal functions (nuclei) (important for the narrative)

catalysers (complementary)

indices (relate across levels)

indices (relate to character, feeling, atmosphere, philosophy)

informants (identifies, locates in space and time)

Todorov's model of narratives

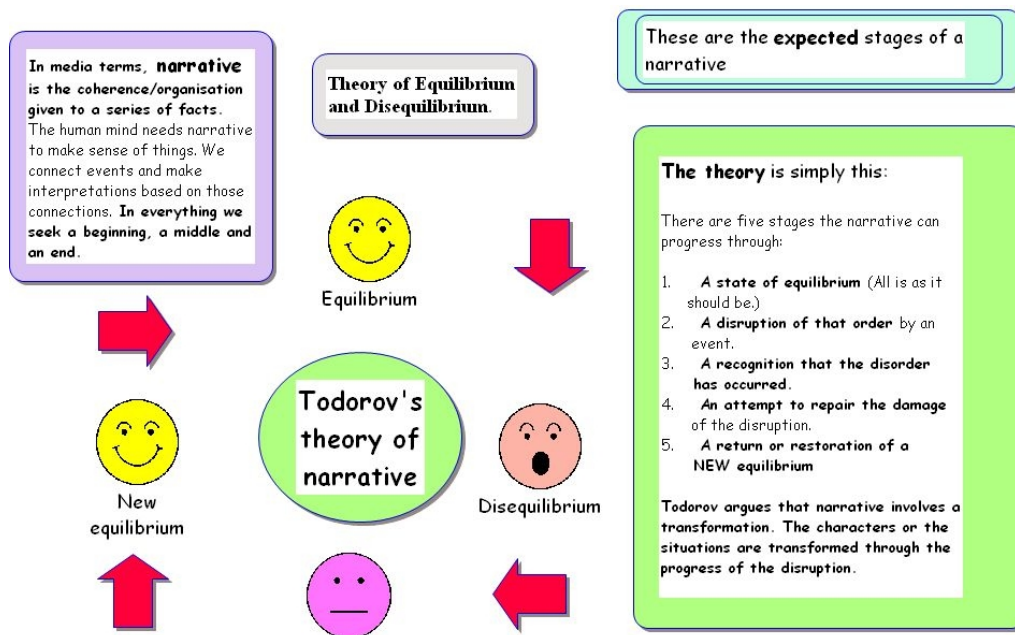
The simplest way of explaining a narrative structure is in terms of Todorov's model. Todorov's model functions on two levels (Fiske 1987:138–139):

- A state of being which is either stable or unstable
- A causal transformation from one state of being to another, via a chain of events.

From these two levels Todorov determines five steps in the linear progression of the narrative (Lacey 2000:29). These steps are:

- a state of equilibrium
- a disruption of that equilibrium by some action
- recognition there has been a disruption
- attempts to restore the equilibrium
- a reinstatement of equilibrium.

The narrative begins with a state of equilibrium or social harmony. This harmony is disrupted by the villain early on in the narrative, which then charts the course of the disequilibrium. Matters are finally resolved when the disequilibrium is returned to equilibrium and the narrative draws to a close. However, the second equilibrium differs from the initial equilibrium, in that the action is usually divergent where the characters begin moving off in differing directions and go their separate ways. This is opposed to the convergent nature of the initial equilibrium where the action brings characters together. This interconnectivity of events at the beginning with those at the end and those in between, provides the narrative with a temporal axis and causal logic (Young 1990:198). This basic elementary framework supports most narratives.



Vladimir Propp's narrative model

The structural approach to narrative analysis was initially used by Vladimir Propp when he analysed hundreds of Russian folk tales in order to find their underlying structure. Attempts before 1928 to classify Russian folk tales were along the lines of fairy tales, animal tales, tales of daily life, and so on. These attempts at classification did not have much success as these categories overlap too much. For instance, an animal tale often makes much the same point as a tale from any other category. Propp searched for some basic content structure underlying the wide variety of themes, actors and settings, which we early referred to as existents.

Propp was able to compile a sequence of thirty-two constant functions in the folk tales he analyzed. He wanted to emphasize that what characters do is more important than who they are. Each function that is present must contribute to the general development of the plot.

0. Initial situation

1st Sphere: Introduction

Steps 1 to 7 introduces the situation and most of the main characters, setting the scene for subsequent adventure.

- 1. Absentation: Someone goes missing
- 2. Interdiction: Hero is warned
- 3. Violation of interdiction
- 4. Reconnaissance: Villain seeks something
- 5. Delivery: The villain gains information
- 6. Trickery: Villain attempts to deceive victim
- 7. Complicity: Unwitting helping of the enemy

2nd Sphere: The Body of the story

The main story starts here and extends to the departure of the hero on the main quest.

- 8. Villainy and lack: The need is identified
- 9. Mediation: Hero discovers the lack
- 10. Counteraction: Hero chooses positive action
- 11. Departure: Hero leave on mission

3rd Sphere: The Donor Sequence

In the third sphere, the hero goes in search of a method by which the solution may be reached, gaining the magical agent from the Donor. Note that this in itself may be a complete story.

- 12. Testing: Hero is challenged to prove heroic qualities
- 13. Reaction: Hero responds to test
- 14. Acquisition: Hero gains magical item
- 15. Guidance: Hero reaches destination
- 16. Struggle: Hero and villain do battle
- 17. Branding: Hero is branded
- 18. Victory: Villain is defeated
- 19. Resolution: Initial misfortune or lack is resolved

4th Sphere: The Hero's return

In the final (and often optional) phase of the storyline, the hero returns home, hopefully uneventfully and to a hero's welcome, although this may not always be the case.

- 20. Return: Hero sets out for home
- 21. Pursuit: Hero is chased
- 22. Rescue: pursuit ends
- 23. Arrival: Hero arrives unrecognized
- 24. Claim: False hero makes unfounded claims
- 25. Task: Difficult task proposed to the hero
- 26. Solution: Task is resolved
- 27. Recognition: Hero is recognised
- 28. Exposure: False hero is exposed
- 29. Transfiguration: Hero is given a new appearance
- 30. Punishment: Villain is punished
- 31. Wedding: Hero marries and ascends the throne

Propp's dramatis personae categories

Character role	Sphere of Action	Purpose	Function
Hero	Departs on search, reacts to demands of donor	Seeks to restore the equilibrium	10, 13, 31
Donor	Gives or provides the hero with the magic agent	Sends the object, which helps to restore the equilibrium	12, 14
Helper	Moves the hero, makes good a lack, rescues from pursuit, solves difficult tasks, transforms the hero	Aids and moves the action towards resolution	15, 19, 22, 26, 29
Princess	A sought-after person who assigns difficult tasks, brands, exposes, and recognises, with her father, who punishes the false hero	Leads to the climax of the narrative by being threatened by the villain	17, 25, 28, 30, 31
Dispatcher	Sends hero on journey/mission/quest	Sends the subject (hero)	9
Villain	Fights or struggles with the hero	Blocks the action, so complicating the narrative	8, 16, 21
False hero	Unfounded claims to hero's sphere of action	Appears as good, but eventually revealed as bad	10, 13, 24

Claude Lévi-Strauss's narrative model

Claude Lévi-Strauss, considered the father of structuralism, investigated tribal culture by analysing 800 American Indian myths. Lévi-Strauss concluded that a single logic underlies all these myths. The myth is a mechanism that deals with unresolvable contradictions by depending on simple and recognisable meanings within a culture that reinforces and challenges social understanding. These contradictions are expressed in terms of oppositional pairs (Fiske 1987:132). Seemingly different aspects of society, such as art, religion and customs, can all be reduced to oppositional pairs which produce meaning. These codes operate in all cultures, from the primitive to the most sophisticated.

Lévi-Strauss theorised that "when two characters are opposed in a binary structure, their symbolic meaning is virtually forced to be both general and easily accessible because of the simplicity of the difference between them" (Bywater & Sobchack 1989:95). Structuralism relies on binary opposition in order to transfer meanings in the easiest way. We make sense of concepts and ideas by contrasting them with their opposites. Thus in a narrative we would, as an example, automatically contrast *rich* against *poor*. Berger (1997:29–30) explains "If everyone has a great deal of money, *rich* loses its meaning; *rich* means something only in contrast to *poor*." Other examples of binary oppositions are light : dark, virtuous : evil, individual : community. In the *Western*, as an example of a particular film genre, the contradictions between culture and nature are manifested in an indoors : outdoors opposition and can be associated with other oppositions such as law and order : lawlessness; white : Indian; humane : inhumane; cowboy : homesteader, and so on.

Levi-Strauss looked at narrative structure in terms of *binary oppositions*. Binary oppositions are sets of opposite values which reveal the structure of media texts. An example would be GOOD and EVIL - we understand the concept of GOOD as being the opposite of EVIL. Levi -Strauss was not so interested in looking at the order in which events were arranged in the plot. He looked instead for deeper arrangements of themes. For example, if we look at Science Fiction films we can identify a series of binary oppositions which are created by the narrative:

Earth	Space
Good	Evil
Humans	Aliens
Past	Present
Normal	Strange
Known	Unknown