

Lecture 8-9

Lecture 8

Structuralism

Structuralism

- ❖ Structuralism in literature appeared in France in the 1960s
- ❖ It continues the work of Russian Formalism in the sense that it does not seek to interpret literature; it seeks rather to investigate its structures.
- ❖ The most common names associated with structuralism are Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, Gerard Genette, and A.J. Greimas.
- ❖ The following lecture looks at one of the most influential contributions of structuralism to the study of literature: Gerard Genette's *Discours du récit* (Paris, 1972), translated into English as *Narrative Discourse* (1980).
- ❖ No other book has been so systematic and so thorough in analyzing the structures of literary discourse and narratology.

❖ Narrative Discourse

- ❖ ❖ Genette analyzes three main aspects of the narrative discourse:
- ❖ Time: Order, Duration, Frequency
- ❖ Mood: Distance (Mimesis vs. Diegesis), Perspective (the question who sees?)
- ❖ Voice: Levels of narration (the question who speaks?)

❖ Narrative Order

- ❖ There are two forms of time in narrative:
- ❖ The time of the story: The time in which the story happens
- ❖ The time of the narrative: The time in which the story is told/narrated
- ❖ "Narrative Order" is the relation between the sequencing of events in the story and their arrangement in the narrative.
- ❖ A narrator may choose to present the events in the order they occurred, that is, chronologically, or he can recount them out of order. Example:
- ❖ detective stories often begin with a murder that has to be solved. The events preceding the crime, along with the investigation that leads to the killer, are presented afterwards.
- ❖ The order in which the events occurred does not match the order in which they are presented in the narrative.

❖ Cultural Decolonization

- ❖ The monopoly of classical reality as the sole subject of written knowledge came to be highlighted, and the exclusion of contemporary reality as a subject of knowledge began to be felt, acknowledged, and resisted.
- ❖ "What sort of nation are we, to speak perpetually with the mouth of another?" said Jacques Peletier (in R. Waswo)
- ❖ Joachim du Bellay says that the Romans' labelling of the French as barbarians "had neither right nor privilege to legitimate thus their nation and to bastardise others." (in Defense)

- ❖ A form of "cultural decolonisation." It was an attack, he says on what was conceived to be a foreign domination, and its implicit concept of culture that assumed it to be the property of the small minority of Latin speakers.
- ❖ A narrator may choose to present the events in the order they occurred, that is, chronologically, or he can recount them out of order.

Example:

detective stories often begin with a murder that has to be solved. The events preceding the crime, along with the investigation that leads to the killer, are presented afterwards.

The order in which the events occurred does not match the order in which they are presented in the narrative.

This mixing of temporal order produces a more gripping and complex plot (suspense).

❖ *Time Zero*

- ❖ The time of the story is, by definition, always chronological:
- ❖ Events as they happen: A - B - C - D - E - F (a chronological order)
- ❖ The time of the narrative is not necessarily chronological:
- ❖ Events as narrated: E - D - A - C - B - F (non-chronological)
- ❖ **Time Zeros:** is the point in time in which the narrator is telling his/her story. This is the narrator's present, the moment in which a narrator is sitting and telling his/her story to an audience or to a reader, etc. Time Zero is the time of the narration

Anachronies

- ❖ ❖ Gennette calls all **irregularities** in the time of narration: Anachronies.
- ❖ Anachronies happen whenever a narrative stops the chronological order in order to bring events or information from the past (of the time zero) or from the future (of the time zero).
- ❖ **Analepsis**: The narrator recounts *after the fact* an event that took place earlier than the moment in which the narrative is stopped.
- ❖ Example (fictitious): I woke up in a good mood this morning. In my mind were memories of my childhood, when I was running in the fields with my friends after school.
- ❖ **2. Prolepsis**: The narrator anticipates events that will occur after the point in time in which the story has stopped.
- ❖ Example (fictitious): How will my travel to Europe affect me? My relationship with my family and friends will never be the same again. This is what will make me later difficult to live with.

Reach and Extent

- ❖ "An anachrony can reach into the past or the future, either more or less far from the "present" moment (that is, from the moment in the story when the narrative was interrupted to make room for the anachrony): this temporal distance we will name the anachrony's reach. The anachrony itself can also cover a duration of story that is more or less long: we will call this its extent" (Gennette, *Narrative Discourse*, 1980, p. 48).

The Function of Anachronies

- ❖ Anachronies can have several functions in a narrative:

- ❖ Analepses often take on an explanatory role, developing a character's psychology by relating events from his past
- ❖ prolepses can arouse the reader's curiosity by partially revealing facts that will surface later.
- ❖ These breaks in chronology may also be used to disrupt the classical novel's linear narrative.

❖ Narrative Mood: Mimesis vs. Diegesis

- ❖ Traditional criticism studied, under the category of mood, the question whether literature uses *mimesis* (showing) or *diegesis* (telling).
- ❖ Since the function of narrative is not to give an order, express a wish, state a condition, etc., but simply to tell a story and therefore to "report" facts (real or fictive), the indicative is its only mood.
- ❖ In that sense, Genette says, all narrative is necessarily *diegesis* (telling). It can only achieve an illusion of *mimesis* (showing) by making the story real, alive and vivid.
- ❖ No narrative can show or imitate the story it tells. All it can do is tell it in a manner that can try to be detailed, precise, alive, and in that way give more or less the illusion of *mimesis* (showing). Narration (oral or written) is a fact of language and language signifies without imitating.
- ❖ Mimesis, for Genette is only a form of diegesis, showing is only a form of telling.
- ❖ It is more accurate to study the relationship of the narrative to the information it presents under the headings of: Distance and Perspective

❖ Narrative Distance

- ❖ The only imitation (mimesis) possible in literature is the imitation of words, where the exact words uttered can be repeated/reproduced/imitated. Otherwise, ALL narratives are narratives of events and here every narrative chooses to take a certain amount of **distance** from the information it narrates.

- ❖ **Narrative of Events:** Always a *diegesis*, that is, a transcription of the non-verbal into the verbal.

- ✓ *Mimesis*: maximum of information and a minimum of the informer.

Diegesis: a minimum of information and a maximum presence of the informer

Narrative of Words: The only form of mimesis that is possible (Three types):

- ✓ *Narrated speech*: is the most distant and reduced ("I informed my mother of my decision to marry Albertine" [exact uttered speech]).
- ✓ *Transposed speech*: in indirect style ("I told my mother that I absolutely had to marry Albertine" [mixture of uttered and narrated speech]).
- ✓ *Reproduced speech*: The most mimetic form is where the narrator pretends that the character is speaking and not the narrator: "I said to my mother: it is absolutely necessary that I marry Albertine."

❖ Narrative Perspective

- ❖ **Perspective** is the second mode of regulating information.

- ❖ Traditional criticism, says Genette, confuses two different issues (narrative voice and narrative perspective) under the question of "Point of View":
- ❖ Genette argues that a distinction should be made between narrative voice (the question "Who speaks?") and narrative perspective (the question "Who sees?").
- ❖ The one who perceives the events is not necessarily the one who tells the story of those events, and vice versa.

❖ **Focalization: Who Sees?**

- ❖ Genette distinguishes three kinds of focalization:
- ❖ **1. Zero focalization:** The narrator knows more than the characters. He may know the facts about all of the protagonists, as well as their thoughts and gestures. This is the traditional "omniscient narrator".
- ❖ **2. Internal focalization:** The narrator knows as much as the focal character. This character filters the information provided to the reader, and the narrator does not and cannot access or report the thoughts of other characters. Focalization means, primarily, a limitation, a limit on the capacity of the narrator to "see" and "report." If the narrator wants to be seen as reliable, then he/she has to recognize and respect that he cannot be everywhere and know everything.
- ❖ **3. External focalization:** The narrator knows less than the characters. He acts a bit like a camera lens, following the protagonists' actions and gestures from the outside; he is unable to guess their thoughts. Again, there is restriction.

❖ Levels of narration: Who Speaks?

- ❖ Genette systematizes the varieties of narrators according to purely formal criteria:

Their structural position with respect to the story/events and the different narrative/enunciative levels of the work.

The two criteria he uses result in the fourfold characterization of narrators into extradiegetic / intradiegetic on one hand, and homodiegetic / heterodiegetic on the other.

Note: Do not confuse [in fiction] the narrating instance with the instance of writing, the [fictional] narrator [sender] with the [real] author, or the [fictional] recipient [receiver, addressee of the [fictive] narrative with the [real] reader of the work.

- ❖ From the point of view of time, there are four types of narrating:
- ❖ SUBSEQUENT: The classical (most frequent) position of the past-tense narrative.
- ❖ PRIOR: Predictive narrative, generally in the future tense (dreams, prophecies) [this type of narrating is done with less frequency than any other]
- ❖ SIMULTANEOUS: Narrative in the present contemporaneous with the action (this is the simplest form of narrating since the simultaneousness of the story and the narrating eliminates any sort of interference or temporal game).
- ❖ INTERPOLATED: Between the moments of the action (this is the most complex) [e.g., epistolary novels]

- ❖ Homodiegetic Narrator: a story in which the narrator is present in the story he narrates
- ❖ Heterodiegetic Narrator: a story in which the narrator is absent from the story he narrates
- ❖ Extradiegetic Narrative: The narrator is superior, in the sense of being at least one level higher than the story world, and hence has a good or virtually complete knowledge of the story he narrates.
- ❖ Intradiegetic Narrative: the narrator is immersed within the same level as that of the story world, and has limited or incomplete knowledge of the story he narrates.

Lecture 9

Author Criti

1. Roland Barthes: "The Death of the Authorques:"

- ❖ Structuralism usually designates a group of French thinkers who were influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of language
- ❖ They were active in the 1950s and 60s and applied concepts of structural linguistics to the study of social and cultural phenomenon, including literature.
- ❖ Structuralism developed first in Anthropology with Claude Levi-Strauss, then in literary and cultural studies with Roman Jakobson, Roland Barthes, Gerard Genette, then in Psychoanalysis with Jacques Lacan, Intellectual History with Michel Foucault and Marxist Theory with Louis Althusser. These thinkers never formed a school but it was under the

label "Structuralism" that their work circulated in the 1960s and 70s (Jonathan Culler, *Introduction to Literary Theory*)

❖ **Roland Barthes 1915-1980**

- ❖ This presentation will illustrate the work of one of the most prominent figures in French Structuralism, Roland Barthes, on a topic that has attracted a lot of attention: the function of the author in literature.
- ❖ We will focus mostly on his famous article: "The Death of the Author," published in his book *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977): pp. 142-48.

❖ **The Author: A Modern Invention**

- ❖ Barthes reminds the reader in this essay that the idea of the "author" is a modern invention.
- ❖ The author, he says, is a modern figure, a product of our modern society. It emerged with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, when society discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the 'human person.'
- ❖ Literature is tyrannically centred on the author, his life, person, tastes and passions.
- ❖ The explanation of a text is sought in the person who produced it. In ethnographic societies, the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, a relator.

❖ The Function of the Author

- ❖ The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author 'confiding' in us.
- ❖ The author, as a result, reigns supreme in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines, as in the mind of the critics anxious to unite the works and their authors/persons through biographies, diaries and memoirs.
- ❖ Literary criticism, as a result, and literature in general are enslaved to the author. The reader, the critic, the historian all read the text of literature only to try to discover the author, his life, his personality, his biography, psychology etc.
- ❖ The work or the text, itself, goes unread, unanalyzed and unappreciated.

❖ The Death of the Author

- ❖ Barthes proposes that literature and criticism dispose of the the author - hence the metaphor of "the death of the author."
- ❖ Once the Author is removed, he says, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile.
- ❖ The professional critics who claims to be the guardian of the text because he is best placed to understand the author's intentions and to explain the text, loses his position. All readings become equal.

- ❖ Roland Barthes questioned the traditional idea that the meaning of the literary text and the production of the literary text should be traced solely to a single author.
- ❖ Structuralism and Poststructuralism proved that meaning is not fixed by or located in the author's 'intention.'
- ❖ Barthes rejected the idea that literature and criticism should rely on "a single self-determining author, in control of his meanings, who fulfils his intentions and only his intentions" (Terry Eagleton).

From 'Work' to 'Text'

- ❖ According to Roland Barthes, it is language that speaks and not the author who no longer determines meaning. Consequences: We no longer talk about works but texts.

"It is now known that a text is not a line of words realising a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture." Barthes, "The Death of the Author."

"Did he [the author] wish to express himself? he ought at least to know that the inner 'thing' he thinks to 'translate' is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely." (Ibid)

❖ From Author to Reader

- ❖ Barthes wants literature to move away from the idea of the author in order to discover the reader, and more importantly, in order to discover writing. A text is not a message of an author; it is "a multidimensional

space where a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash." A text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, **but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author.**

- ❖ In other words, it is the reader (not the author) that should be the focus of interpretation. The process of signification that a text carries are realized concretely at the moment of reading.

The birth of the reader has a cost: the death of the Author.

❖ From Work to Text

- ❖ The text is plural, "a tissue of quotations," a woven fabric with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages, that signify FAR MORE than any authorial intentions. It is this plurality that needs to be stressed and it can only be stressed by eliminating the function of the author and the tyranny of the author from the reading process.

❖ From Author to Scriptor

- ❖ The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a before and an after.
- ❖ The Author is thought to nourish the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child.
- ❖ In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing,

is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now, at the moment it is read.

❖ The Modern Scriptor

- ❖ The modern scriptor has, as Barthes describes it, the hand cut off from any voice. He is borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin - or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins.
- ❖ Succeeding the Author, the scriptor no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense dictionary from which he draws a writing that can know no halt: life never does more than imitate the book, and the book itself is only a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, indefinitely deferred.

best of luck

Mrs.Engli\$h