**NARRATOLOGY**

* term coined by Tzvetan **Todorov** in *Grammaire du Décaméron*, 1969
* But modern narratology begun with the **Russian formalists**; and Bakhtin’s concepts of heteroglossia and dialogism

**NARRATIVE – RECAP**

* Narratives are **stories** that involve a sequence of **related events**.
* The events are in a relationship in a narrative (often **causal**).
* These relationships help **to preserve the unity** of the narrative
* and to enable it to draw **moral conclusions** about the consequences, to read a **message** into the story.

**STORY** & **PLOT distinction**[[1]](#footnote-1)

– The **STORY and DISCOURSE** division is based on structuralist terminology.

– Older tradition differentiates between **STORY AND PLOT** (which **only partially overlap with** the **above terms**.

– **DISCOURSE is a broader term than PLOT**.

– DISCOURSE is sometimes referred to as “**form order**” – as opposed to “**content order**” (see below).

**PLOT**

* Aristotle speaks about plots in his *Poetics*: plot isthe first of the **6 principles** of tragedy and concerns the **arrangement of the incidents** in a ‘mythos’.
* In English, the term was used by E. M. **Forster** (*Aspects of the Novel*, 1927) to distinguish between:

- STORY – **chronological sequence** of events; at least one event must take place

- PLOT – **causal, logical structure** which connects events

* According to Forster, **PLOT** is *HOW* the story is presented. Plot **involves an implicit or explicit INTERPRETATION** of the events/actions of the story.
* That’s why **PLOT** can be considered as part of **DISCOURSE** – though discourse is a **more general** concept.

**PLOT STRUCTURE**

* It often differs from the sequence of events on the story level; it involves the undermining of the chronological order of the story’s events.
* It involves a **logical arrangement** of various **thematic elements** of a text which lead to a **change of the original situation** presented at the outset of the narrative
* **Traditional narratives** employ this **plot structure** (genres such as the **drama of the absurd** and **experimental novel** deliberately undermine LINEAR NARRATIVE/plot STRUCTURES).

**LINEAR NARRATIVE/PLOT STRUCTURE** (based on Aristotle’s scheme of “complication” and “unravelling” and Gustave Freytag’s “pyramid”, both based on the structure of drama):

**exposition** (presentation of original situation) – **complication/**conflict (suspense, leads to>>) – **climax** (turning point)– **resolution/**denouement/revelation

**RISING ACTION FALLING ACTION**

**climax**

**complication/conflict(s)**

**exposition denouement/resolution/revelation**

Montgomery et al. distinguish between

**A.**

**SIMPLE NARRATIVES** and **COMPLEX NARRATIVES**

* SIMPLE narratives – one series of causally connected events
* COMPLEX narratives – two or more simultaneous narratives (a plot and sub-plot)  
  or narratives in a sequence concerning the same character (e.g. episodic genres, such as picaresque n.)

Simple narratives are rare.

**B.**

**NARRATIVE CONTENT** and **NARRATIVE FORM[[2]](#footnote-2)** [story and discourse] as **two basic dimensions** or layers of **narrative**.

* narrative CONTENT – the sum of represented **events** with their participants and circumstances
* narrative FORM – the way those events **represented**

The difference between the two concepts is well apparent on the level of the

**ORDER OF EVENTS**

* In the narrative **form order** this may be different from the narrative **content order**– as the order is **not** necessarily **chronological**.
* The **mismatch between** the **content and form order** is part of the “**AESTHETIC STRATEGY**” of a text – it creates suspense, enhances understanding, creates enigmas and opens up new interpretative possibilities.

The distinction between **narrative content** and **narrative form** corresponds with the concepts of the **FABULA** and **SJUZHET**.

**FABULA & SJUZHET**

* Terms coined by the Russian Formalists (Vladimir Propp and Viktor Shklovsky) in the early 20th century.
* They searched for ways to determine what makes a text ‘literary’, i.e. the extent to which our attention is drawn to its **aesthetic strategies**.
* One important aesthetic strategy is the mismatch between **content order** (***fabula***, similar to STORY) and **form order** (***sjuzhet***; similar to discourse, a term introduced by Todorov)
* On the level of the **sjuzhet**, the material of the story is rearranged and the fabula (story) is ‘**defamiliarized’**, using digressions, omissions, twists etc.
* the **sjuzhet** – **form order** – is most marked where the digressions and omissions, i.e. the **way the story told**,become **more important** than the story itself.
* **Shklovsky** uses **PLOT** as another term for **sjuzhet** (a slightly different concept from the way ‘plot’ is used by Forster, although causality was important for the formalists as well).

**FURTHER POINTS**

The **fabula** & **sjuzhet** distinction may be useful and elucidating but becomes **problematic when applied dogmatically**.

According to Propp and Shklovsky, the mismatch between the two

* helps us see that a text is literary
* will affect the **pace of the narrative**

- **compression** – to speed the narrative up

- **detailing** – to slow it down

* **Fabula** **is the prerequisite** of a sjuzhet (you cannot write a method without having the material to which it can be applied)
* **But** fabula **is revealed in the process** of the narrative (which is structured in a certain way, i.e. dependent on the sjuzhet)
* **The sjuzhet influences the way the fabula is revealed** (constructed by the recipient); the **fabula does not influence the sjuzhet** (the way the fabula is revealed or constructed by the recipient)
* So, on the level of the **creator**, **fabula** (theoretically) **precedes** the sjuzhet; on the level of the **recipient**, **sjuzhet** (empirically) **precedes** the fabula:

**fabula 🡪 sjuzhet 🡪fabula**

* We **use our experience** **to create the fabula(e**) as we experience a narrative; fabulae are part of the reading process and are constantly undermined by the method (sjuzhet)
* **the fabula never appears on the screen/page** (thus we often talk about ‘the story behind the narrative’)

**RECAP:**

**Q: What is the difference between FABULA and STORY // SJUZHET and PLOT?**

* **story** – **sequence of events** as the basis of plot
* **fabula** – the same, but fabula is also about the **process** – the stories we create as we experience a narrative to make sense of it; and that keep being confirmed or undermined by the sjuzhet
* **plot** – about the **causal relationship** between events
* **sjuzhet** – about that and the **method** – the **way story is told** – the method foregrounded –> literary text

1. Based on Lethbridge and Mildorf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Based on Montgomery et al., *Ways of Reading*, 251–60. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)