

Structuralist Literary Theory

Glossary of Terms

Narratology. The term was firstly used by T. Todorov, who argued for a shift in focus from the surface level of text-based narrative (i.e. concrete discourse as realized in the form of letters, words and sentences) to the general logical and structural properties of narrative. The “scientific” study of literature.

Story and Discourse. The crucial structuralist dichotomy based on the Russian Formalist dichotomy between *fabula* and *sujet*. Story and discourse are explicitly treated as having equal status. Every narrative can be viewed either as story (referring to the chronological order of events, characters and settings) or as *sujet* (referring to the order of presentation of these events). In simple terms, the story is the *what* in a narrative that is depicted, discourse the *how*.

Narrative analysis. French structuralists provide general study of narratives with specific system of the analyses of narratives. Based on the fundamental distinction between *story* and *discourse*, they suggest to analyse plot and characters and also time and aspects of narration. Thus, French structuralists developed a unique system of the analyses of these categories, using concepts such as narrative grammar, character, narrator, time, and their sub-categories.

Myth. The inquiry of myths in the French Structuralist movement considers myths specific modes of signification. Myths are also specifically structured and can be analysed as products of mass bourgeois culture, like advertisements. Myths can be analyzed as stories as well as second order signifying systems.

Actants and actors are categories used for an analysis of stories. Actants represent abstract entities, cores of actions, and their functions within the abstract structures of stories, actors represent concrete characters which can be filled in these abstract clusters.

Artistic structure: A dynamic complex of aesthetically actualized components grouped in a complex hierarchy which in turn is unified by the dominance of one component over others.

Aesthetic function: One of the four functions which operates in artworks and dominates the other functions. The aesthetic function is not a property of an object, is under the control of an individual, and it is stabilized by the collective. The distribution of the aesthetic function in the material world is tied to a particular society.

Subject: A semiotic gate to/from the artwork, an ultimate result of all the semantic energy centered around the communication of two personalities through the medium of an artwork. Personality (an abstract subject) is repeatedly proclaimed the ultimate meaning of a (literary) artwork.

Literary development: Literature represents a specific *developing structure* of which the most important qualities are being *energetic* and *dynamic*. This

structure is placed in the collective consciousness and particular literary artworks are parts of this developing structure. The works' authors, as individuals, guarantee the connection of this specific structure with outer structures: historical, cultural, political etc.